

Defend auto workers victimised by Maruti Suzuki and Indian authorities

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The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers across India and internationally to come to the defence of the workers at Maruti Suzuki India's car assembly plant in Manesar, a new industrial township in the northern state of Haryana.

Because of their determined struggle against a brutal, cheap-labour work regime that is the norm at factories across India, the Maruti Suzuki workers are the target of a vendetta mounted jointly by India's largest automaker and the Congress Party-led Haryana government.

For the past four months, 149 workers from the Manesar plant, including the entire leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), have been imprisoned on frame-up charges, arising from a company provoked altercation on July 18 that led to the death of a senior manager. The jailed workers have been beaten up and subjected to various forms of torture by Haryana police, including electric shocks, severe leg-stretching, and water-immersion.

The company, with the full support of the state government, has also implemented a purge of its workforce. Five hundred and forty-six permanent workers were effectively fired and replaced with new hires when the company reopened in August, after a month-long lockout, and 2,000 contract workers have been dismissed.

State authorities are working at the company's behest to frame-up militant workers, including MSWU leaders, on murder and other grave criminal charges. The police have themselves admitted that the dragnet arrests they made of workers in late July and early August were based on lists supplied by the company.

This vendetta is the culmination of a joint company-government campaign to smash the independent union the Manesar assembly-plant workers organized last year in opposition to a pro-company stooge union. In the 14 months that preceded the mass arrests of Maruti Suzuki workers, the Haryana state government insisted that the MSWU was illegitimate because the "workers already had a union"; demanded workers sign a company "good conduct bond" designed to facilitate the disciplining and firing of militant workers; repeatedly mobilized police en masse to break worker-actions; and suggested that the MSWU was in cahoots with "terrorists" and other "outsiders" determined to "sabotage" the

state's economy.

Workers across India should demand the immediate and unconditional release of all the jailed Maruti Suzuki workers, the withdrawal of all criminal charges against them, the reinstatement of all sacked permanent and contract workers, and an end to the company-state witch-hunt of the Manesar car assembly workers.

The Haryana Congress government is clearly determined to make an example of the Maruti Suzuki workers so as to intimidate the working class and demonstrate to foreign and domestic capital that it will do everything in its power to ensure that they are supplied with a regimented, cheap-labor workforce.

The Congress, which is also the dominant partner in India's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, is well aware that Indian is a social tinderbox. While the Indian elite boasts of India's economic rise and the emergence of dozens of Indian billionaires, studies show the real wages of Indian workers, already among the lowest in the world, have not increased during the past two decades. Now under the impact of the world economic crisis, the Indian ruling class, like its counterparts around the world, is demanding massive social spending cuts, the further sell-off of state-owned companies, and the gutting of restrictions on layoffs and plant closures. In recent weeks, the UPA has announced a series of "pro-investor" measures, including the opening of the multi-brand retail sector to Wal-Mart and other giant foreign retailers and plans to cut spending by almost \$20 billion in the current fiscal year.

Under these conditions, the Congress Party and big business are determined to stamp out the militant example provided by the Manesar Maruti Suzuki workers, who mounted a months-long struggle last year, involving repeated strikes and factory occupations.

The opposition to the company-government witch-hunt of the Maruti Suzuki workers must be based on the fight to mobilize the working class in industrial and independent political struggle against big business, the Congress Party-led Haryana and UPA governments, and the crisis-ridden capitalist system as a whole.

The claims of the trade unions and the Stalinist parties—the

Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM—that the government and courts can be pressured into interceding on the workers’ behalf are a cruel deception. As the struggle of the Maruti Suzuki workers has itself amply demonstrated, the government, courts and police are all instruments of big business.

The only force that can defend the Maruti Suzuki workers is the working class. The fight to mobilize the working class in the defence of the victimized autoworkers must be linked to the fight to develop a working class counter-offensive against low wages, sweatshop conditions, and contract labour.

Prosecution of this offensive will require building new organizations of struggle and necessitate a political struggle for it will bring workers into headlong conflict with the state and the entire political establishment, from the Congress and the Hindu supremacist BJP through the CPM and CPI and their Left Front, for all these parties are enforcers of India’s cheap labour regime.

Above all, the working class must become an independent political force through the building of a revolutionary workers party committed to the socialist reorganization of economic life, so the satisfaction of social needs, not the enrichment of the few, can be its animating principle.

Like any significant social struggle, the Maruti Suzuki workers is rich in lessons—lessons that must guide the campaign in their defence.

Their struggle has repeatedly demonstrated the potential to become the spearhead for a broader working-class mobilization. To mention only the most important example, thousands of workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial struck in the fall of 2011 in support of the Manesar workers.

If their repeated strikes and occupations did not become the catalyst for a broader working class upsurge in the Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt and beyond, it was because the trade union apparatuses were determined to isolate and suppress it so as not to jeopardize their corporatist relations with the employers and government.

Repeatedly the unions intervened to try to end job action and force the Maruti Suzuki workers to surrender to the company’s demands.

Particularly pernicious has been the role played by the AITUC (All-India Trades Union Congress) and the CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions), respectively the union federations of the CPI and the CPM. Like the Hind Mazdoor Sabha and other union federations, the AITUC and CITU repeatedly counselled the workers to “compromise” and, even as the Haryana government acted as the company’s attorney and police force, urged workers to focus their energies on appealing to it and the Congress Party-led government in New Delhi to come to their aid.

The Stalinist CPI and CPM have for decades functioned as the left flank of the Indian bourgeoisie, insisting that the struggle for socialism is not on the historical agenda and systematically subordinating the working class to the parties of the Indian bourgeoisie. Over the course of the past two decades, the CPI and CPM have repeatedly supported Congress Party-led governments in New Delhi that have ruthlessly pursued the bourgeoisie’s neo-liberal “reforms”, while implementing what they themselves describe as “pro-investor” policies in the states where they have held office—West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura.

On August 31, AITUC and CITU leaders joined with other union officials in convening a meeting to ostensibly organize a campaign in defence of the 546 sacked Maruti Suzuki workers. Predictably this campaign has remained a dead letter, with no systematic agitation conducted, let alone the organization of any industrial action. Instead the Stalinist union leaders are promoting a new alliance they have struck with the union flunkies of the Congress Party and the BJP, that is the two principal parties of the Indian bourgeoisie, and through which they claim that the UPA government can be pressured into adopting “pro-people” policies.

Under the political influence of the Stalinists, the current ad hoc leadership of the MSWU advanced the perspective of protesting and appealing to the Congress Party government when it organized a two-day hunger strike and other protests last month. In a subsequent statement the MSWU promoted the false hope that the local Congress Party state legislator and Youth and Sports Minister, Sukhbir Kataria, would press the Haryana chief minister to assist the victimized worker.

Maruti Suzuki workers and all their supporters should oppose this bankrupt course.

The struggle to defend the victimized Maruti Suzuki workers can and will only go forward if it becomes a genuine class struggle—if it is aimed at mobilizing the working class in industrial and political action and conceived of as an integral part of the struggle to develop a revolutionary workers party, which will rally the rural toilers, by advancing a socialist program to break the economic domination of big business. Only through the establishment of a workers’ and peasants’ government can the capitalist crisis be resolved at the expense of the privileged few and the social and democratic aspirations of India’s workers and toilers be met.



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