

India: Victimized Maruti Suzuki workers continue to protest

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Victimized workers from Maruti Suzuki India's Manesar car assembly staged a rally Sunday, January 27 in the town of Rohtak to demand their reinstatement and the immediate release of 150 workers who have been jailed on frame-up charges. Over a thousand Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) workers and their families attended the rally.

Rohtak, which lies about 77 kilometers from India's capital, New Delhi, is the home town of the state Congress Party Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Hooda has spearheaded the witch-hunt against the MSI workers and their families for the past 8 months and has worked hand-in-glove with the automaker for the past two years to suppress a worker rebellion against a company-stooge union that help enforced a brutal cheap labor work regime. The victimized MSI workers and their supporters have held several previous protests in Rohtak.

Last Sunday's rally was organized by the Provisional Working Committee of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU). It was formed after the entire 12-member executive of the MSWU and 137 other workers were thrown in jail after a manager was killed during a management-provoked altercation at the Manesar plant last July. Many of the jailed workers, including the MSWU leaders, have been brutally tortured while in police custody. (See "India: Jailed Maruti Suzuki workers subjected to torture")

The police have repeatedly threatened and harassed the protesting MSI workers.

On January 24 the police swooped down to arrest Imaan Khan, a leading member of the MSWU provisional working committee, while he was waiting to address a press conference in the town of Gurgaon.

Reacting to this latest arrest, Rajendra Pathak, one of the defence attorneys representing the jailed MSI

workers, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "It is getting too much. Imaan Khan was neither named in the [police] First Information Report (FIR) nor among the 215 charge-sheeted by the police. He was arrested simply for his active involvement in organising defence campaigns for the victimised Maruti Suzuki workers. There may be more and more workers arrested based on company's instruction. [MSI] Chief Operating Officer (Administration) S.Y. Siddiqui is acting like police chief, telling the police who should be arrested. He doesn't believe in negotiations, but in crushing the workers."

The police have previously admitted that the company supplied them with the names of the 215 workers they have chosen to charge-sheet for their alleged involvement in last July's altercation. (Many of these 215—150 of whom are currently in jail, while the remaining 65 remain in hiding—were not even at the plant when the incident occurred.)

As justification for Khan's arrest, police told the local press, without offering a shred of evidence, that he was making plans to incite workers to commit violent acts against the management.

A statement issued by the provisional committee on Jan. 24 noted that Khan's arrest was part of a wider campaign of intimidation and harassment aimed at disrupting a weeklong, state-wide campaign of protests aimed at winning the release of their jailed colleagues and reinstatement of the nearly 2,500 regular and contract workers MSI sacked at the end of the summer.

"Also today morning," said the statement, "one of the teams of the state-wide *jattha* (procession) which started from Rewari yesterday and were starting from Dharuhera today, was also harassed, intimidated and finally forcibly picked up by the police from Bilaspur—all 20 workers' cycles were dumped into

police vehicles and dropped off to a village in Jhajjar. When the workers valiantly resisted these repressive tactics by laying down on the ground and holding on to each other, the police used force to remove” them. They then threatened to subject them to “arrest and torture” if they entered Gurgaon.

On the two preceding days, police had threatened workers with arrest if they dared to continue with their agitation.

Representatives of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-affiliated Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU) and of the United Trade Union Centre (UTUC) of the Stalinist Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) participated in last Sunday’s rally and in the procession that preceded it. The CITU and the All-India Trades Union Congress (AITUC), the trade union arm of the other main Stalinist party in India, the Communist Party of India, have systematically isolated the Maruti Suzuki workers. In 2011, they repeatedly pressured them to surrender to the company’s diktats. Although the Stalinist union federations have a large presence in the industrial belt where the Manesar plant is located, they have opposed organizing industrial action in the MSI workers’ defence and have directed them to place their faith in appeals to the Congress government, its Labour Department and labour commissioner, even while all of these pro-big business institutions have displayed their visceral hostility toward the workers.

When a group of workers went to submit their demands to Chief Minister Hooda during the Jan. 27 Rohtak rally, he not only refused to meet with them. He ordered police to stop them even approaching his home.

With the full support of the Haryana state government, MSI is now seeking to complete the hiring of new employees at its Manesar plant to replace those it purged through the mass firings of late August and September. It has also announced plans to build a new facility in Gujarat, whose BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi has lavished land and tax-breaks on investors, while ruthlessly suppressing workers’ unrest.

The victimized MSI workers have shown great courage and militancy in defying a ruthless corporate-government vendetta. But under the influence of the Stalinists and other unions, the provisional committee is pursuing a protest campaign aimed at pressuring the Congress government and at soliciting nominal pledges of support from the unions—pro-capitalist organisations

that have isolated the Maruti Suzuki workers’ struggle because they fear it could be the catalyst for a broader working class upsurge that would disrupt their corporatist relations with the employers.

As the WSWS explained in a recent statement, “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-labour workforce.”

The statement continued: “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.”



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