

India: Victimized Maruti Suzuki workers file affidavits documenting their torture

Arun Kumar, Kranti Kumara
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Thirteen of the 151 incarcerated Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) workers—including all ten office-bearers in the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union—have filed affidavits in court accusing top officers in the Haryana state police and senior MSI managers of colluding in their torture, assault, and kidnapping, and of threatening to kill them.

The thirteen and the overwhelming majority of the other 138 jailed MSI workers have been languishing in prison for the past seven months on trumped up criminal charges, including murder.

India's largest automaker and the Congress Party government in Haryana have mounted a vendetta against the workers at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar car assembly plant because they rebelled against a company-stooge union and a sweatshop work-regime, mounting a series of militant job actions that threatened to precipitate a wider upsurge of workers in the massive Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt.

Although the workers' affidavits were written in Hindi, their defense attorney, Rajender Pathak, has provided the *World Socialist Web Site* with English translations.

The affidavits paint a harrowing picture of the brutal treatment to which the jailed workers have been subjected, including beatings, immersion in water, food deprivation, and the withholding of medical treatment. The affidavits also demonstrate that the police have functioned at the beck and call of MSI management. Not only did the police base their arrests on lists provided by the company. MSI officials, according to the workers' sworn statements, repeatedly urged the police to beat them up and otherwise abuse them.

"Police," state the workers' affidavits, "got our signatures on the blank papers (i.e. phony confessions) by beating us and using force on us. All of us were put inside a water tank by Police personnel until we were about to lose our consciousness."

One of the affidavits states, "On the first day myself and

my nine colleagues were taken to crime unit Sector 46 Gurgaon. There Mr. S.Y. Sidquee (MSI Chief Operating Officer-Administration) and Mr. A.K. Singh (Department Manager) of our company came and told the Police: they all are big leaders of the union; you should beat them severely and prepare solid proof against them by beating them so that they can never come out of jail."

In inciting the police to attack the workers, Sidquee appealed to their caste prejudices: "Sidquee said to SHO (Police Station House Officer) Rajveer Singh of Crime Unit, Sector 46, Gurgaon in front of my colleagues that Ajmer Singh is Deadh-Chamer (a term of caste abuse) and despite being so has the gall to lock horns with the management of our company. You should give severe beating to this Deadh-Chamer. On this being said Rajveer Singh and his subordinates beat him severely. Subsequently Rajveer Singh told his subordinates that this Deadh-Chamer should be given such a treatment that not only this Deadh-Chamer but his other colleagues shall never dare to form the trade union."

In addition to documenting the abuse and torture to which the jailed workers have been subjected, the affidavits shed important new light on a management-provoked altercation at the Manesar plant last July 18 in which MSI Human Resources officer Abinash Dev was killed.

The company, Haryana state government, and police seized on this altercation and in particular Dev's death to justify the mass arrest of the entire MSWU leadership and more than a hundred other militant workers, and the subsequent dismissal of more than five hundred permanent and close to 2,000 contract workers.

The affidavits note that Dev had actually assisted the Manesar workers in gaining recognition of the MSWU from the Haryana Labour Department. For that reason he came under pressure from MSI management to use his influence with the workers to get them to withdraw their

demand for a wage increase.

“[It was] due to the efforts of the General Manager (HR) of the said company, Mr. Abinеш Dev, in Feb. 2012, the union of workers [MSWU] could be registered,” state the affidavits.

Management subsequently put pressure on Dev “that he should use his influence on the workers’ union so that they should withdraw the said demand notice. But Sh. Abinеш Dev had expressed his unwillingness to do anything in this matter.

“Due to this reason, the relationship between him and other managers got sour. Later on Mr. Abinеш Dev submitted his resignation from the company but top management of the firm would not accept the same, as they feared that by this the anti-worker face of the MSI would be made public.”

The affidavits suggest that during the company-instigated July 18 altercation, the MSI-hired goons targeted Dev as he was viewed by senior management as a thorn in their side.

The affidavits assert “[the] management of the above said company managed to create the violence on 18th July 2012 within the premises of the said company with the help of the bouncers (hired goons) and got Mr. Abinеш Dev murdered. The Police conducted the investigation as per the direction of the above said company and the Govt. of Haryana. Based upon the fraudulent complaint of the above company, the Police and the state government have filed false cases of murder against [the] office bearers [of the MSWU] and ... fellow workers of the said company.” According to the workers’ attorney Rajender Pathak, “The top management killed two birds with one stone by eliminating Mr. Abinеш Dev and the union on July 18, 2012. The violence was planned by [MSI] management ... Bouncers in large numbers were called in to create the violence.”

In their affidavits the workers explain that if they have come forward only now to file sworn statements about their torture and abuse it is because senior police officials threatened to kill them if they make any attempt to expose the police brutality.

One of the workers, Suresh, says in his affidavit, that the police warned him, “If you go for any legal action against us, the police have so many means to eliminate you by stating that you were trying to escape from our custody.”

He continues, “after getting assurance from my counsel [Rajender Pathak] that the police cannot do anything during judicial custody, I could muster the courage to

send this complaint to you [i.e. the court].”

Currently a total of thirteen separate complaints of police misconduct, including collusion with MSI management, and a separate contempt of court petition have been filed in the courts. Prior to their being filed in a Haryana court on March 5, the complaints were submitted to the Gurgaon Commissioner of Police last month. However, as Pathak explained to the WWS, “no action was taken by the police till date since one of their own IPS (Indian Police Service) Officers [among other police] and along with many MSI management personnel were named as accused in all 13 complaints.”

The Congress Party government in Haryana and the Indian state are determined to crush the Manesar Maruti Suzuki workers so as to intimidate the entire working class and demonstrate to domestic and international big business that they will do whatever is required to suppress opposition to the sweatshop conditions that exist in India’s new globally-connected auto and other industries. This class war assault is being facilitated by the trade union apparatuses, including the Stalinists of the Communist Party of India (CPI)-affiliated AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress) and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM)-affiliated CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions). They have isolated the jailed and victimized MSI workers, refusing to organize any industrial action in their defence, and urged them to appeal to the Congress Party government and its labour officials even while these have been viciously persecuting the workers.

Workers in India and around the world must demand the immediate release and dropping of all charges against the Maruti Suzuki workers. The struggle against their victimization must be tied to a fight to mobilize the working class as a whole against sweatshop conditions and contract labour and for the development of an independent political movement of the working class against the capitalist profit system.



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