

India: Frame-up trial of Maruti Suzuki auto workers continues

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One hundred forty-seven Maruti Suzuki workers who face a long list of frame-up charges, including murder, as the result of a conspiracy between the automaker, the Congress Party Haryana state government, and the police, are to appear for their next court hearing Friday, December 20.

The victimized workers were employed by Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. (MSI) at its Manesar car assembly plant, located in a huge industrial belt in the northern state of Haryana, and were in the forefront of a militant struggle against a brutal work regime and the use of poorly-paid contract workers.

The workers are all being charged for the killing of an MSI human resources manager in July 2012 during a management provoked altercation. Imprisoned since August-September 2012, they were subjected to brutal torture by the police at the behest and in the presence of company officials. (See: "India: Jailed Maruti Suzuki workers subjected to torture")

Twelve of the workers comprising the entire leadership of the MSWU, an independent union formed in opposition to the previous company-supported stooge union, have been especially singled out by the prosecution for exemplary punishment. They have all been charged with premeditated murder, while the other 135 have been charged with being accessory to murder. All of the workers also face a long list of other charges, including attempted murder, rioting, "improper assembly," and trespassing.

To date there has been no impartial inquiry into the death of the manager killed in July 2012. Instead the Congress Party state government seized on the altercation to persecute the workers and try to smash the MSWU. In addition to arresting almost 150 workers on the basis of lists of names supplied by the MSI management, the government supported the automaker in purging its workforce. In September 2012, more than 500 permanent workers and 2000 contract employees were fired.

Since the entire MSWU leadership is in jail, other workers have formed a provisional committee of the MSWU to sustain their struggle.

The courts have already shown their utter hostility to the

workers, refusing to inquire into their torture, and denying them bail, thereby condemning their families to extreme poverty.

The Haryana Congress Party government, police and courts are determined to exact exemplary retribution on these workers, whose only crime was to fight for their rights, so as to intimidate the entire working class. This is being done in order to assure the companies active in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt, many of them foreign-owned transnationals, that the government and state will do everything in their power to make workers submit to the brutal conditions and low wages the companies depend upon to extract their profits. The Manesar MSI plant workers are, for example, under relentless pressure to produce one car every 45 seconds.

The extreme hardship facing the workers was described in harrowing detail by Mahaveer, a provisional committee member of the MSWU, who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* recently by telephone.

When asked to describe the condition of the jailed workers he said: "The current situation is pretty bad. Initially in 2012 when they were put in jail the police did third degree torture on the workers, but there has been no torture more recently. However the administration tortures the workers mentally by keeping them in jail and not allowing them out even for a short time on important family issues such as the funeral of a close dead relative and so on. If someone gets sick, proper medical care is not given and it is extremely rare to get a short term bail even for medical treatment. A few months ago, a worker got tuberculosis in jail and then he was bailed out for 6 months for treatment. These 6 months are close to over and he will be put in jail again."

In the meantime, the brutal work regime inside the Manesar car plant continues unabated, with police in large numbers present to constantly intimidate the workers. "The repression of the plant workers is severe for the ones who are now working at the plant," explained Mahaveer. "There is a 24-hour police presence in the factory. These workers are kept intimidated and told not to raise their voice or they

will be put in jail and dismissed. Their family members have also been threatened by the police.”

In addition the management has tried to break up worker militancy by transferring workers it considers as “trouble-makers” to car plants in other states.

“The workers associated with previous struggles are shifted out to various other states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar for six months in order to isolate them. Meanwhile,” said Mahaveer, “new workers have been hired.”

The witch hunt of the Maruti Suzuki workers is being abetted by the Stalinist parliamentary parties, the CPI(M) (Communist Party of India – Marxist) and the CPI (Communist Party of India), and their trade union apparatuses. Despite having a large presence in the Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt, the CITU and the AITUC, respectively the trade union arms of the CPI(M) and the CPI, have not lifted a finger to mobilize workers not only in support of their beleaguered colleagues at MSI but against the slave-labor conditions prevalent in this whole area.

Mahaveer criticized these reactionary trade union apparatuses for their toothless and empty verbal support: “The CITU and AITUC have huge branches in Haryana including nearby cities, Gurgaon and Kaithal. But so far apart from the empty promises of support they have not helped either by financial support or in manpower. They have raised demands regarding inflation and so on, but not raised any demands for the victimized Maruti Suzuki workers at all. A local chapter of CITU in Kaithal once led some small rally where one of the demands was to free the Maruti Suzuki workers but that was it, no financial or manpower support.”

While critical of the Stalinist unions, the MSWU under their political influence and that of various Maoist and pseudo-left groups has focused its energies on making appeals to the Congress government and the courts—that is appeals to the capitalist politicians and state institutions that have been instrumental in their victimization. This false perspective has led the MSI workers into a political cul-de-sac despite the bravery and tenaciousness displayed by them and their families.

This was apparent on Oct. 27 when very few people turned up for a march to the state Industries Minister’s house called by the provisional committee of the MSWU. Mahaveer however explained away the fizzling of the Oct. 27 action, attributing it to the actions of the police, thus indicating that the provisional committee of the MSWU is yet to draw larger political lessons from the government-state-company collusion and the indifference of the Stalinist parties and unions, which have supported the ruling class’ drive to make India a cheap-labour producer for world capitalism, to

their plight.

“The October 27 protest,” said Mahaveer, “was to protest against the lathi (baton) charge and slapping of false cases against the workers from an earlier protest incident. This was to demand that the false cases be withdrawn. We had planned a huge protest by family members and friends of the workers and also some trade union supporters but the police and the local administration clamped down with repressive law Section 144 before the protest date. As a result, we could not hold the protest as originally planned.”

When asked as to how they planned to carry forward their struggle, Mahaveer replied: “The MSWU have various activities planned including a ‘padyatra’ (walking procession) across different cities and villages of Haryana to raise awareness and fight against injustice of the workers. We are having frequent rallies and protest marches in different Haryana cities. We will soon try to have rallies in different cities in India too. We will march to Delhi to demand justice from the (Congress Party-led) central government.”

As the WSWWS has repeatedly explained, the only way forward for the Maruti Suzuki workers is to base their struggle on the industrial and independent political mobilization of the working class in India and internationally. The fight against the frame-up and in defence of the purged workers must be linked to the development of a working-class counter-offensive against contract labor, speed-up, and sweatshop conditions across India and animated by the recognition that the rights of the working class can only be secured through a political struggle for workers’ power and against the entire profit-system.



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