Family of murdered Indian mine worker speak out

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The World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) visited Neyveli, a town in the southern state of Tamil Nadu where 31-year-old Rajkumar was shot dead by a paramilitary security guard on Monday, March 17. Rajkumar was a worker at the state-owned NLC (Neyveli Lignite Corporation) mine. (See "Indian security forces gun down coal mine worker*").*

WSWS reporters spoke to the victim's family and also visited the NLC hospital to speak with severely injured workers who were beaten by rampaging police for protesting the cold-blooded murder of their fellow worker.

Rajkumar, 31-year-old mine worker who was murdered March 17 at the Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) coal mine, is survived by his 26-year-old wife Amala Lucia Rani and two infant children, two-year-old Wins Franklin and eight-month-old Olivia.

Eight members of Rajkumar's joint family live under the same roof in the Mantarakkuppam colony in Neyveli. The victim's father, Marimuthu, worked for NLC for 38 years and died in the devastation caused by the severe "Thane" cyclone that hit this area in late 2011. Neither the company nor the state offered any compensation to the family, Rajkumar's 55-year-old old mother, Indira Devi complained.

Rajkumar's 40-year old brother Balakumar is a contract worker at NLC. After having worked for the state-owned company for 20 years he is in the process of becoming a permanent worker. A younger brother and two younger sisters also live in the ramshackle dwelling barely able to accommodate all of them.

Rajkumar's distraught mother Indira Devi worried about the family's future, telling the WSWS, "Raja [short for Rajkumar] was managing the entire family of eight. I am worried about my daughter-in-law because she has lost her husband at her young age with two children. We pay land tax and electricity tariff for this small residence to the NLC. That amounts to Rs.800 (US $ 12.90). There is no one to look after my daughter and my family."

Commenting on the incident where her son was killed she added, "He went to a second mine to collect some money from his friend who was working inside another NLC premise. The paramilitary security guards posted at the gates stopped Raja despite the fact he had shown his identity card. Following an argument one of the security guards pulled out his rifle and shot Raja three times in his head. Raja died on the spot with blood oozing profusely from his head."

Describing their living conditions, she continued, "Although my son was working in an Indian government-owned company, the house we live in here is abysmal. Every time it rains the roof leaks badly. We were eking out life with the wages of our two sons, which put together amounts to Rs.12,000 (US $193.54) per month. Now after Raja's death eight of us will face immense difficulties trying to live on the wages of only one son."

Indira scoffed at the demand by some unions for a compensation package of Rs.2 million (about $33,000) and a permanent job for a member of their family at NLC. She said, "We have no confidence in that because we never received any compensation for the accidental death of my husband."

At this point a neighbor interjected, "We didn't get compensation for the damage inflicted by Thane storm. These trade unions are useless and are also responsible for our plight. It was because of the unions' indifference we are living in this appalling condition. We were visited by a member of the CITU (the Stalinist Communist Party of India, Marxist-affiliated union). They did that for their political benefit not to take care of the interests of workers."

WSWS reporters also spoke with injured NLC workers who were admitted to the NLC hospital after the police savagely attacked the spontaneous protests that erupted after Rajkumar's murder.

Sixty-year-old Pattusamy, a permanent worker at the NLC, told the WSWS, "I have never seen such an incident in my 25 years of service. The police brutally attacked not only workers but ordinary people who were not at all involved or connected with the incident. Even some senior officials of NLC were attacked. The police carried out an indiscriminate baton charge at whoever was in the vicinity. The entire area

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was stained with blood."

Then waving his hand he continued, "Look at these injured permanent and contract workers in this ward! See how badly they have been beaten and how they are lying there with bloody injuries. Many workers admitted in this ward were either going to work or coming out of work at the time when Rajkumar was killed."

A 32-year-old NLC worker named Selvakumar commented bitterly, "We are already impoverished. We are workers, earning a meager Rs.6,000 (US$96.77) per month. In this situation we were shocked by the brutal shooting to death of our brother worker. Henceforth it seems that the NLC management will resort to this type of attack on workers whenever we raise demands for a wage hike or about working conditions. I have been working as a contract worker for 15 years. My father also worked as a contract worker for 25 years without any benefits. He died nine months ago. After he retired he only got a pittance from his retirement savings (Provident Fund)."

He continued, "I come from a village near Virudachalam. My father had to abandon agriculture and migrated to Neyveli with the dream of finding permanent employment in the public sector NLC. But all he got was poor wages. Now I am in a similar situation. Despite being a so-called member of society [a first step towards permanent employment] there is no benefit at all. Existing members of the 'society' who have 25 to 30 years of service will reach their retirement without any job benefits. I believe I will be in the same situation."

Selvakumar added, "I have two children and though it is difficult to look after children on my meager wages, I still send them to English medium school so they will have a future. Unlike regular workers who can send their children to English medium schools for free, we struggle to pay the monthly fees of Rs.300 (US$4.83), which is huge sum for us."

Fifty-year-old Nawab, a permanent NLC worker who has been working for 16 years, told the WSWS, "When there are so many issues confronting workers like wage hikes, regularization of contract workers and so on, I am aggrieved by the brutal killing of Rajkumar and the subsequent attack by the police. The attacks were carried out not only by the CISF (paramilitary Central Industrial Security Force) but also by the state police force. This reveals the hostility of both the central and state governments towards the workers."

He continued, "The trade unions are seeking to divert the workers without confronting or even making a comment about the very governments that are responsible for our situation. They are merely demanding punishment for the CISF personnel responsible and for a regular job at NLC for a member of the victim's family. These unions are all affiliated with the party that is ruling Tamil Nadu at present or with the party that was in power previously. Likewise, the Communist parties have alliances with these parties and hence are complicit in their anti-worker policies."

In contrast to the anger of the NLC workers, officials from the Stalinist trade union and Tamil communalist party provided an alibi for the police and blamed the workers themselves for the violence.

Jayaraman, a leader of the Stalinist CITU trade union active at the NLC, tried to conceal the class character of the murder and the role of the government by pointing to the ethnic background of many of the CISF security guards who come from north India. Jayaraman described CISF security men recruited from Tamil Nadu as "our men." The present CISF must be dissolved, he said, adding, "We demand the formation of NLC security force as it was before when it was staffed by our men. They know the good and bad things. The CISF personnel who shot dead the worker must be half mental."

The CITU leader then tried to blame the family members and relatives of the victim for the eruption of police violence because "they started pelting the CISF with stones."

Bose, a spokesman for the Tamil communal 'Naam Thamilar Katchi' (We Tamil Party), also sought to blame workers and defend the state police force. When asked for his party's attitude to the week's events, Bose told the WSWS, "In this incident the CISF shooting was wrong. But the state police force was deployed there peacefully. It was due to some workers resorting to pelting stones that this violence occurred. The police had to attack to bring the situation under control," he declared.

"However, we too have raised the demands like all other parties for appropriate compensation for affected workers and punishment for the CISF personnel who shot the worker. But after this there is no need for protests or struggles and workers should return to work peacefully. This is our party's stand."

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