

Join the fight to free the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers!

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), strongly denounces the life sentences imposed on 13 Maruti Suzuki auto workers in India and the three-to-five years' imprisonment of another 18 workers by an Indian court on March 18.

The SEP calls on workers in Sri Lanka, India and internationally to come forward to defeat this frame-up. We fully support the campaign launched by the ICFI to demand these workers' immediate release. We urge all working people and youth to sign the online petition launched by the *World Socialist Web Site* for their defence, and to fight for the widest possible support for this campaign.

These brutal sentences are a travesty of justice. Not a single charge has been proved. The only "crime" of these workers was to fight the horrendous conditions at their factory near Delhi.

They have been falsely convicted for the death of Awanish Kumar Dev, a human resources manager at the Japanese-owned Maruti Suzuki car assembly plant in Manesar, Haryana. Dev unfortunately died four and half years ago in a fire that erupted on the factory floor during an altercation consciously provoked by the plant management.

The prosecution's case was such a sham that even Gurgaon District Court Judge R.P. Goyal, in his judgment, conceded that the police colluded with the company management and fabricated evidence. However, repeatedly mangling the law, the judge shifted the burden of proof from the prosecution onto the workers: his conviction of 13 workers on murder charges was based on their "failure" to prove their innocence.

The fatal fire was an outcome of a joint vendetta carried out by the company, the Haryana state government and its police, with the help of hired thugs, to prevent the spread of the militancy among the overwhelmingly young Manesar workers. These workers had showed a powerful determination to fight against the slave-labour conditions required by the company in order to produce a car every 44 seconds.

Having understood the international significance of the Maruti Suzuki workers' struggle, the SEP and the WSWs, intervened at the very beginning, in July–August 2012. We have published a series of articles exposing the Suzuki

corporation's provocations and the anti-working class policies of Indian ruling elite, which begs for foreign investment. Some of these articles were translated into Hindi, the language spoken by most Maruti Suzuki workers, and circulated among them. Those interventions, based on a political perspective for defending workers' rights against the treacherous abandonment of these workers by the trade union bureaucracies and Stalinist communist parties, will never be erased from the memories of workers in Haryana's Gurgaon industrial area and internationally.

The police arrested 148 militant workers, including the entire leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), established in 2012 as a result of a protracted struggle by Manesar workers for basic rights. At the company's initiative, they were arrested as "suspects" in the human resources manager's death. Now these MSWU leaders have been subjected to life sentences, a form of cruel torture, to try to break the determination of workers at Maruti Suzuki and elsewhere.

A clear example of the close interest of the Indian capitalist class in this witch-hunt was a report in the *Hindu* on July 25, 2012. It quoted Azim Premji, chairman of Wipro, a giant Indian IT company, who now has assets of \$US16.5 billion, according to *Forbes* in 2016. He demanded that the government "act ruthlessly" against the Maruti Suzuki workers, adding that the issue at stake was "sensitive and represents social unrest, which is building up within the country and among the trade unions."

The court verdict against the workers has clearly demonstrated that the Congress party, which held power during that period, and the current ruling party, the Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, represent these interests of the capitalist class.

The entire judicial process that subjected the Indian auto workers to these draconian sentences exposes the judiciary's repressive role as a defender of capitalist private property and profits. The complete acquittal of 117 workers on March 10 made it clear that the evidence was fabricated by factory management and the police. The court expressed no concern that the acquitted workers were jailed and persecuted for four and half years. So much for the "independence of the judiciary" in India, much promoted by so-called liberal thinkers, petty-

bourgeois groups and pseudo-lefts.

This attack by the Indian ruling class on workers based on discredited evidence aims to issue a menacing warning to millions of Indian workers who are becoming increasingly militant. It also demonstrates that the Indian elite is prepared to ruthlessly use the police-state methods required by local and foreign investors to exploit this huge working class.

The assault comes under conditions in which reactionary protectionist policies are being pursued by the fascistic Donald Trump administration in the US and attacks on welfare and democratic rights are mounting in Britain following the Brexit vote to leave the European Union. Amid a protracted crisis of the world economy, the Indian ruling class, as well as other bankrupt bourgeois rulers in Asia, is waging an anti-worker offensive, desperate to attract foreign investment.

Despite all the obstructions and disorientation produced by trade union bureaucracies and political parties, including the two main pro-bourgeois Stalinist communist parties, Indian workers have demonstrated their readiness to come onto the streets in their millions against the pro-market reforms carried out by the Modi government. The BJP-led coalition is attempting to change labour laws to facilitate “hire and fire” policies and factory closures at the will of employers. It has introduced new laws to expropriate peasants’ land for big business projects, speed up privatisations and slash even the existing meagre subsidies and social spending.

Modi’s government is terrified by workers’ struggles against its attacks, including a one-day strike by tens of millions of workers throughout the country last September and a strike by about one million bank workers on February 28.

Overjoyed by the sentences imposed on the Maruti Suzuki workers, Vikas Pahwa, a lawyer for the company, told the *Indian Express* the court “sent a strong signal to labour workers and union members that they cannot take the law in their hands.” Baying for workers’ blood, he said the company would “challenge the judgment in the HC [High Court]” on the “inadequacy of the sentence against the convicts” and the court’s acquittal of the 117 other workers.

This demonstrates the Japanese automaker’s ambition, assisted by the political establishment, including the government, courts and police, to ensure there will no challenge from workers to the extraction of super-profits through harsh working conditions.

The attack on the Maruti Suzuki workers is not a specific Indian phenomenon. That fact has been demonstrated clearly by the continuous assault by big business and its lackeys on workers’ struggles in the region and around the world.

In January, the Bangladesh government and employers in the country’s garment industry collaborated in sacking thousands of workers and filing court cases against hundreds of them. This followed a strike in the Ashulia industrial district, near Dhaka, demanding higher wages and other allowances from mid-December.

It was likewise in May 2011, when workers in Sri Lanka’s Katunayaka Free Trade Zone—where slave-labour conditions also prevail—protested a pension bill introduced by the then government of President Mahinda Rajapakse. The police deployed by the government killed one worker and injured 200 by firing live ammunition, and hundreds were arrested.

Dozens of similar examples could be cited, demonstrating how the major corporations, and the governments and institutions that represent their interests, act against any challenge to their profit calculations.

A very striking issue in relation to the attack on the Maruti Suzuki workers, and on workers in other countries, is the treacherous role of the trade unions and pro-capitalist “left” parties. They facilitate, on behalf of the capitalist class, the use of repressive laws to crack down on workers’ resistance.

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, worked to discourage the Maruti Suzuki workers throughout their campaign. Now its only comment on the harsh sentences is that it is “distressed and anguished.” In contrast to this response, thousands of workers have already expressed their anger and opposition through protests and demonstrations against the frame-up verdict. But neither of the Stalinist parliamentary parties—the CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI), which act as appendages to the Indian bourgeoisie—have breathed a word against the conviction and sentencing of the workers.

To fight for the freedom of the Maruti Suzuki workers and against the anti-democratic attacks and austerity measures of the capitalist class, including the Modi government, Indian workers and workers in all countries, need a revolutionary leadership and perspective. The Maruti Suzuki workers and their colleagues in Gurgaon must unite with their class brothers and sisters throughout India, South Asia and internationally. That unity can be achieved only by building the ICFI and its sections, the Socialist Equality Parties, which are armed with an international socialist program.

Join the campaign to defeat the witch-hunt against Maruti Suzuki workers!

Build the revolutionary party of the working class!



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