

“The 13 workers are political prisoners”

South Asian filmmakers Rahul Roy and Prasanna Vithanage back campaign to free Maruti Suzuki workers

Our reporters
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Prominent Indian and Sri Lankan film directors, Rahul Roy and Prasanna Vithanage, have declared their support for the campaign to free 13 Maruti Suzuki workers who were condemned to life imprisonment. An international campaign and online petition drive have been launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS).

The workers were convicted by an Indian court on March 10 on trumped-up murder charges following a years-long vendetta by the police and judicial authorities against militant workers at the Maruti Suzuki factory in Manesar, near Delhi. The railroading of these workers, who include the entire 12-member executive of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), has been carried out with the full backing of the Congress Party and the ruling Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Eighteen other workers, also victims of this cruel frame-up, have been sentenced for three to five years on lesser charges.

Rahul Roy is the director of *The Factory*, a 132-minute documentary film on the protracted struggle of the Maruti Suzuki workers against the Japan-based multinational car giant and the company controlled union. The film reveals the brutal conditions Indian autoworkers face, including the hated contract labor system, and is a damning exposure of the crude frame-up by company and state officials and the courts. The film also sensitively provides a voice to the genuinely heroic workers and their families who are the targets of the persecution.

Roy's ~~other~~ films *Four* include *Majma*, *The City Beautiful* and *Till We meet Again*. His films, including *The Factory*, have been screened at many international festivals and won awards.

Enthusiastic about the ICFI campaign to release the convicted workers, Roy earlier wrote to our correspondent, “I have signed the petition [of the ICFI] and forwarded it on Facebook too. Thank you for sending the links. I will spread the word.”

Below we publish Roy's statement:

The 13 workers convicted by a court in India of murder and imprisoned for life are political prisoners. Their crime being, setting up of a union after a successful struggle that lasted almost a year, bringing in new ideas of union activism to the Manesar industrial belt like occupying the factory, forging a unity between contract and permanent workers and foregrounding the demand of regularization of contract workers, creating a leadership chain that went down to the last worker in the plant and thereby being in a position to constantly challenge and control the production process. These are the crimes that make them prisoners of a system that now knows only one way of dealing with workers, criminalizing each and every attempt through solidarity to reclaim the right to be human in a production apparatus that sees them as nothing but extensions of machines. Their fight is our fight and it is a political fight to decriminalize the organising of workers.

In Solidarity,
Rahul Roy

Prasanna Vithanage in his statement declared, “This

is a frame-up. I oppose this injustice.”

Vithanage is the director of award winning films, including *Death on a Full Moon Day (Purahanda Kaluwara)* [1997] and *August Sun (Ira Madiyama)* [2003] and *With You, Without You (Oba Nathuwa, Oba Ekka)*, [2013] that dealt with Sri Lankan government’s 30-year civil war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

In a statement to the WSWS Vithanage said:

This is a frame-up. I oppose this injustice and fully support the campaign led by ICFI for the release of the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers. My heart goes with their families who have suffered for long years.

I am a regular reader of the WSWS and through it I have followed the developments of the Gurgaon-Manesar Maruti Suzuki workers’ struggle from the days of July-August 2012. I also have collaborated with Rahul Roy, the film maker who produced the documentary “The Factory” in India. We all appreciated the principled fight waged by the WSWS in defending the fundamental rights of the Suzuki workers against the despicable witch-hunt of the company, carried out with the tacit support of the Haryana state government that unleashed police violence to brutally suppress the workers.

This is a reactionary phenomenon we can see today in every capitalist country and I wholeheartedly agree with the position of the ICFI that the need of the hour is to build the internationalist unity of the working class to defeat this repressive force on a global scale.

Prasanna Vithanage

The ICFI and the WSWS urge workers, young people and all supporters of basic democratic rights to demand the release of the framed workers and make their case known as widely as possible. Sign and circulate the petition to demand their immediate freedom.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact