

Indian auto workers demand release of Maruti Suzuki workers

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Workers from global auto corporations operating in the Sriperambadur and Oragadam Special Economic Zones (SEZs) near Chennai, the Tamil Nadu state capital, declared their class solidarity this week with the imprisoned Maruti Suzuki workers.

The workers denounced the monstrous frame up of 31 workers from the Maruti Suzuki car assembly plant in Manesar and signed the online petition initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to mobilise the international working class to free them.

The Gurgaon district court in the north Indian state of Haryana has sentenced 13 Maruti Suzuki workers to life imprisonment on bogus murder charges and imposed heavy prison terms on another 18 workers convicted of lesser charges.

The ICFI has denounced the convictions and sentences as a frame-up by the company, the police and the judiciary with the full complicity of India's main political parties—the ruling Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) and the Congress Party. The jailed workers are innocent. Their only “crime” was to fight against the slave-labour conditions at the plant.

The ICFI's campaign to free the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers has won important support internationally and among workers at several auto plants in the Chennai area and the Indian Railway-owned Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in the city.

Like Maruti Suzuki, auto workers at Hyundai, Ford, Toyota, Bosch, Rico, Nissan, Pricol and Tata have been involved in a series of bitter strikes in India to demand higher pay, permanency for contract workers and decent working conditions.

The overwhelming majority of auto workers in India are from rural areas and employed on short-term contracts—about 80 percent at Maruti Suzuki, 75 percent

at Ford India and 82 percent at Hyundai—under harsh and highly-exploitative conditions and for poverty-level wages. Serious work accidents are commonplace.

The recent horrific death in an industrial accident of Thiyagarajan Mahalingam, a 29-year-old junior engineer at the Renault Nissan plant in the Oragadam Special Economic Zone is another indication of the dangerous working conditions in Indian factories.

ICFI supporters in India recently spoke with a number of Renault Nissan workers about the ICFI's campaign to free Maruti Suzuki workers.

Krishnakumar, 19, an apprentice craftsman from an agricultural family, condemned the jailing of the Maruti Suzuki workers. “They were punished for their legitimate struggle,” he said.

“While the company, police and the judiciary have colluded against these workers, lots of concessions have been granted to companies. They are provided land, electricity and water at cheap rates but the government refuses to provide loans or subsidies to the farmers. None of the political parties and governments works for the interests of people.

“I think the Maruti Suzuki workers will only be released in a determined struggle by an international party like yours to mobilise the strength of the international working class.”

Muthukumar, an engineering graduate and also from an agricultural family, expressed his solidarity with the ICFI campaign. “Workers of the world must unite to free those workers. The workers at our company come from several Indian states and we should think of them as our class brothers. Without international unity they cannot win their rights.”

Muthukumar said the unions were useless and had become the agents of the companies and the capitalist government.

“None of the unions fight against the wage disparity between regular and contract workers,” he said. “Instead of uniting us, the unions try to divide us as regular and contract workers. As you have mentioned, a new international party must be built.”

Rajakumar from Banrutti district said: “Not many people know about the verdict against 13 Maruti Suzuki workers because none of the other parties talk about this attack. All the other parties defend the interests of the investors. Your international organisation is the only party that fights for the release of these workers. I appreciate this and I support the campaign.”

Referring to his background, Rajakumar said: “My father is an agricultural worker. The Modi government has done nothing for the farmers. Subsidies are not provided and thus the conditions are created for farmers to commit suicide.”

Arun Kumar, a contract worker from Salem district, said: “The international unity of the working class is essential to fight attacks like this and win their rights. I hate the CPM and CPI [the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India, the main Stalinist parties]. They organise struggles for the sake of their names but not for the winning of workers’ rights. As you suggest, the working class needs an international party.”

Dinesh, a Hyundai permanent worker, said: “Although I knew about the Maruti Suzuki workers’ problems no other party or the unions are conducting a campaign like yours. I support your international fight to free those victimised workers. To defeat the attacks of the global companies, even one like Hyundai, can only be successful through the struggle of a world party. I support your party and it must be strengthened. That is my wish.”



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