

Australian workers and youth speak out against Maruti Suzuki frame-up

Our reporters
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Over the past days, Australian workers, students and young people have voiced their support for the campaign launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in defence of the framed-up Maruti Suzuki car workers in Haryana, India.

Many have expressed hostility to the sentencing last month of 13 of the workers to life imprisonment, and of 18 others to prison terms of between three and five years. The prosecution, which was based on bogus evidence, was in response to a series of struggles waged by the Maruti Suzuki workers including strikes, factory occupations and protests in 2011–12, against the dire conditions they faced.

Many of those who spoke with Socialist Equality Party campaigners signed the ICFI's online petition demanding the immediate release of the victimised workers and the repudiation of the fraudulent charges against them.

Carol, a retired child-care worker from Newcastle, a working-class regional centre in New South Wales, said that the frame-up was “disgusting”. She added: “It is against the entire international standards for human rights. Workers don't have anything these days. It's scary, and something is really going to happen because workers are sick and tired of the way things are going. Maybe even a revolution. Something's got to give.”

Carol pointed to the international offensive of the corporate elite, and the mounting social crisis afflicting workers in every country. “It's not just in India, it's here as well,” she said.

“Houses are so ridiculously expensive that young people can't afford to live anywhere. I've got nine grandkids. None of them have a future. My son and his girlfriend recently bought a unit, but they aren't even happy about it, they are just always struggling. The capitalist system has nothing to offer us, workers need

an organisation,’ she added.

Carol, whose husband worked on the wharves, noted the complicity of the unions in the destruction of jobs and working conditions in the aftermath of the 1998 Patrick Stevedores dispute. “My husband marched in every protest through to the Patrick wharf's dispute,” she said.

“It just got to the point where he couldn't do it anymore. He said it broke him. He looks at all the young wharfies and they have lost everything. The amount of people getting killed, nobody cares when a worker got killed at the Barangaroo construction site last month. It's happening at building sites across the country and it's not front page news when workers are killed. The unions and the Labor Party haven't done a thing for workers.”

David, who is completing a PhD in physics, commented on the complicity of the pro-company union in the attacks on the Maruti Suzuki workers. “It's clear these guys were not properly defended,” he said. “The union should have stood up and defended them. Obviously some sort of corruption is going on. They are being paid off by the company.”

“I'm not surprised Suzuki set up a company in India and is taking advantage of the poor employment laws. The way the company has acted is ruthless. It's like they have no concern for their employees at all, their only concern is to make money.”

“The workers should know there is support for them in Australia. They have been screwed by their company and by the government. I think Indian workers should oppose this attack on the workers. I wouldn't want to see other people go through the same thing for standing up for their rights.”

Leonie, a western Sydney hospital worker, said, “What is happening to the Maruti Suzuki workers

affects every worker. It starts off in one area and it gradually works its way around.

“Indian workers get a pittance in pay and now because they didn’t agree with the company they are threatened with a death sentence and then put in prison for life on trumped-up charges. It’s outrageous.” She noted that a “reason why the company wanted to get rid of them was because they set up an independent union. The company is afraid it will attract other workers.”

Leonie pointed to the global operations of the major corporations: “The government should look at these big companies as they’re a law unto themselves. The government needs to step in to take care of the workers. They aren’t, probably because of payback. Big companies have a habit of buying their way in.”

Commenting on her own working conditions, Leonie said, “I work in a hospital and am very underpaid for the work we have to do. They don’t hire more people because it costs money.”

Maaz, a 23-year-old student and part-time worker originally from Pakistan, said, “It’s not fair what is happening to these workers. We need some sort of international action against this. If everyone joins together and raises their voice, it could change things.”

Asked about working conditions in South Asia, Maaz said, “People don’t get rewarded for the amount of effort they put in. Pay is never equal to the amount of time or work they carry out. People are always being forced to work harder just to make enough money to meet their basic needs. Labour is very cheap. I have seen child labour, forced labour and unjust labour.

“I’ve heard of similar cases in Pakistan. The power company there sacked experienced staff because their pay rates were higher and the company didn’t want to pay them more money. So they brought in new guys and paid them less money. It wasn’t fair. Political parties everywhere are pro-business. None of them does anything for ordinary people, they all have ulterior motives.”

Jenny, a Chinese-born orthoptist in Sydney, said: “I think it is very unfair. Those people are from the working class. They can’t speak for themselves. There is no evidence to show they were responsible for the situation. The government supports the company to make sure investors stay there. I think they need the people from all over the world to stand up for them and speak for them”

“This is a product of globalisation,” Jenny said. “If anything happens to workers in any corner of the world we can look out for them. It is not just this country and next time the other country. It is kind of like we need one big international union.”

“We need to support all different levels of workers, as it could happen to workers in any industry. For instance, there is a lot of depression among nurses and doctors in public hospitals here. I used to work there but not anymore.”

Vincent, a commerce student at a university in Sydney, commented: “The companies just want to get more profit for themselves. They don’t care that they are destroying people.

“I’m Chinese and so I know about how a lot of companies or factories that just pay really low salaries for the workers. They just care about the profits they can earn. They don’t care about the others, the workers. We need to do something to change these things.”



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