

India: Stalinist-led unions call token protest against frame up of Maruti Suzuki workers

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The trade union federations affiliated to India's twin Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—are calling for demonstrations throughout the country Wednesday, April 5 as “a mark of solidarity with the Maruti Suzuki workers” and to demand their “unconditional release.”

The CPM and CPI and their respective labour federations, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), have systematically isolated the Maruti Suzuki workers. Under conditions where they have been the target of a joint company-state vendetta aimed at intimidating the entire working class and stamping out any challenge to poverty wages, contract labour, and sweatshop working conditions, the Stalinists have up until now done nothing to publicize the Maruti Suzuki workers' plight, let alone mounted any campaign to mobilize the working class in their defense.

If the CITU and AITUC, almost five years after the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers was initiated and the company purged its Manesar, Haryana car assembly plant of 2,300 militant workers, feel compelled to organize a token day of protests, it is because they recognize that there is immense anger within the working class at the class justice meted out by India's courts.

In a legal travesty, the courts condemned 13 workers to life-in-prison last month on trumped up murder charges. Twelve of the 13 were elected leaders of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), which workers at the Manesar plant established in 2011-12 in bitter struggle against a government-supported, company stooge-union.

Over the course of the past month workers in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt, a huge auto-making

and manufacturing center on the outskirts of Delhi, have repeatedly defied a government ban on gatherings of more than five people to show their support for the Maruti Suzuki workers.

The Stalinists' aim in calling the April 5 protests is to contain and defuse this anger. By feigning support for the victimized Maruti Suzuki workers, they seek to shore up their tattered credibility, the better to keep the working class under their political control and tie it, as they have done for decades, to the parties of the Indian bourgeoisie. The Stalinist union leaders are determined to prevent working-class opposition to the company-state frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers from becoming the impetus for the mobilization of the industrial and independent political strength of the working class.

Three further points underscore the essentially fraudulent character of the Stalinist union federations' opposition to the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers.

First, they have chosen to mount their protest on Wednesday April 5, rather than April 4, the day that the MSWU designated as an “All-India and international day of protest” in support of the jailed Maruti Suzuki workers.

The CITU and AITUC have provided no explanation for this. But undoubtedly it is because they didn't want to in anyway associate their action with the MSWU's call, since rescinded, for April 4 to be a day of job action, including protest strikes.

Second, and even more revealingly, the Stalinists are mounting their April 5 protests in conjunction with various other labour federations that are aligned with openly pro-big business parties. Most important of these is the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), which since its formation in 1947 has been

the union affiliate of the Congress Party.

Not only was the Congress Party until very recently the Indian bourgeoisie's principal party of government; it has played a leading role in the vendetta against the Maruti Suzuki workers, without so much as a peep of opposition from the INTUC.

The frame-up was initiated when the Congress Party led both the national and Haryana state governments. The Haryana Congress government worked hand-in-glove with Maruti Suzuki in trying to crush the rebellion against the company-controlled union. It insisted that the MSWU was illegitimate because the "workers already had a union"; demanded workers sign a company "good conduct bond" designed to facilitate the disciplining and firing of militant workers; repeatedly mobilized police en masse to break worker actions; and suggested that the MSWU was in cahoots with "terrorists" and other "outsiders" determined to "sabotage" the state's economy.

Then, in the aftermath of a July 18, 2012 company provoked altercation and fire, the Haryana Congress government set the police upon the workers. It presided over mass arrests and the indictment of 150 workers, including the entire MSWU leadership, on frame-up charges. The Congress state government also fully supported Maruti Suzuki's workforce purge and deployed hundreds of police inside the factory when it reopened with a largely new workforce.

Third, whilst the CITU and AITUC are claiming to be organizing opposition to the frame up of the Maruti Suzuki workers, their parent political parties continue to maintain radio silence about it.

Neither the CPM nor the CPI has condemned the March 10 conviction of the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers or their March 18 sentencing to life-terms in the living hell that is India's penal system. Their websites are entirely silent about the Maruti Suzuki frame-up. The same is true of *People's Democracy*, the CPM's English-language weekly. It has published three issues since March 10 and has seen fit to say not a single word about the Maruti Suzuki workers.

Yet prosecutors, judges, and politicians have repeatedly declared, including in the trial's final stages, that the Maruti Suzuki workers have to be savagely punished so as to restore investor confidence and ensure the success of Indian Prime Minister's Modi's "Make in India" scheme, which aims to make India the

cheap-labour capital of the world.

No doubt, the CPM and CPI leaders calculate that any criticism of the Maruti Suzuki frame-up would disrupt their cozy relations within the Indian political establishment. These include their efforts to renew a political alliance, in the name of defending secularism against the Hindu supremacist BJP, with the Congress Party.

The deafening silence of the Stalinist political leaders underscores the utterly cynical and politically fraudulent character of the CITU-AITUC led April 5 protests. The Stalinist unions have absolutely no intention of taking any serious action in support of the Maruti Suzuki workers and will shut down any protests just as soon as they are confident that they have defused and dampened the spirit of militancy and class solidarity among Indian workers.



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