Workers across India condemn Maruti Suzuki frame-up

Our correspondents
7 April 2017

Workers participated in protests throughout India on April 4 and 5 to oppose the frame-up of the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers condemned to life imprisonment on trumped-up murder charges. A judge in the northern state of Haryana handed down the brutal sentences on March 18 after a years-long company-state vendetta aimed at crushing militant labor struggles at the car assembly plant near Delhi and intimidating the working class as a whole. Another four workers were sentenced to five years in prison on lesser charges.

An estimated 500 members and supporters of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) protested at Kamla Nehru Park in Gurgaon on Tuesday to demand the release of their imprisoned comrades. The MSWU won recognition at the factory in 2012, after workers rebelled against a corporate- and government-sanctioned puppet union and fought to unify permanent workers with brutally exploited contract laborers. Twelve of the 13 workers now condemned to prison for life were leaders of the MSWU.

Protesters delivered a statement to the deputy commissioner of Gurgaon demanding the reversal of Judge Rajinder Pal Goyal's March 10 conviction of the framed-up workers. It also called for the immediate reinstatement of the 117 workers Judge Goyal was forced to clear of all charges due to the transparent character of the concocted evidence against them.

"The workers who have been convicted are being framed," Rajesh Karl, a MSWU member at the rally told the *Hindustan Times*. "The management fabricated the evidence. We will fight against this injustice and will take this battle to different parts of the world as well," he said.

The MSWU called for an all-India protest and an international day of solidarity for April 4. Workers from different factories and their supporters reportedly protested in 15 Indian states and at 30 locations, including in Panipat, Kaithal, Gohana, Fatehabad, Faridabad, Kurukshetra and Ambala in Haryana, the national capital Delhi, and Mumbai, India's second largest city. Protests were also held in Patna, Sasaram and Rohtas in the state of Bihar; Kolkata and Siliguri in West Bengal; Chennai and Madurai in Tamil Nadu; Bangalore in Karnataka; Bhubaneswar in Odisha; and Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

The Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka held a public meeting in Colombo Tuesday evening to demand the release of the Maruti Suzuki workers. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* have initiated an international campaign and an online petition to demand their immediate freedom. SEP speakers outlined the need to mobilize the working class in South Asia and throughout the world to win the freedom of these courageous workers. The major obstacle to the mobilization of the working class in India, they said, was the treacherous role of the Stalinist parties and their affiliated unions, which isolated the Maruti Suzuki workers for years while encouraging illusions that they would receive justice through the capitalist courts.

There is widespread sympathy for the framed-up workers. This week's protests in India, however, were just a pale reflection of the potential support that could be mobilized to demand their freedom. This is due to deliberate suppression of opposition by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and their respective trade union federations—the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

The Stalinist parties, which have millions of supporters, have remained silent on the conviction and sentencing of these workers, as has the AITUC. As for the CITU, it issued a perfunctory press release after the March 18 sentencing. With mounting support for the Maruti Suzuki workers, the Stalinist unions decided to call token protests, while doing nothing to seriously mobilize

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working-class support.

In a still unexplained action, the unions called their protest for Wednesday, April 5, rather than Tuesday, April 4, the day the MSWU called for solidarity actions. It is likely they did not want to be associated with the MSWU's initial call—later rescinded—for solidarity strikes and other job actions.

The Stalinists called their protests in conjunction with various other labor federations, including the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the union affiliate of the Congress Party, the chief political party of the ruling class since India became independent in 1947. This is a slap in the face to Maruti Suzuki workers. It was the then-Congress-led Haryana government that spearheaded the witch hunt and persecution of these workers.

The Stalinist parties and their union affiliates fear the rebelliousness of the working class expressed by the Maruti Suzuki workers, whose defiant strikes, plant occupations and mass struggles inspired workers throughout the giant auto and manufacturing belt of Manesar-Gurgaon. These struggles pose a direct threat to the Stalinists, which have been a party to the Indian elite's efforts to attract foreign capital by offering up Indian workers as a cheap and docile labor force.

The mobilization of the working class behind the Maruti Suzuki workers also cuts across the political maneuvers the Stalinists are carrying out within the political establishment, including their efforts to revive a political alliance with the Congress Party, which broke apart nine years ago.

On Wednesday, CPM General Secretary, Sitaram Yechury, held an hour-long meeting with Congress Vice-President and de facto party leader Rahul Gandhi at the party's parliamentary offices in Delhi. The next day, CPI and CPM leaders met to discuss the CPI's call for the Stalinist parties to strike a formal alliance with the Congress Party and other "democratic, secular" parties to oppose Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) elections.

In other words, the Stalinist parties are sacrificing the Maruti Suzuki workers to their sordid political maneuvers with the same capitalist party, which led the witch hunt against these courageous workers and which over the past quarter century has done most of the heavy lifting in the push to make India a cheap-labor haven for international capital and forge a "global strategic partnership" with US imperialism.

This is what is behind the relatively small demonstrations across the country Wednesday. For example, in Chennai, the country's fourth most populous cities, with nearly 8 million residents, the CPM-affiliated CITU did not even bother to hold a demonstration or protest rally, although the CPM claims that its Tamil Nadu state unit is its fourth largest.

A Maoist affiliated union, the New Democratic Labor Front (NDLF), did organize a rally of 30 people, mostly union officials, on Tuesday in Kancheepuram, 70 kilometers from Chennai. While one of NDLF speakers denounced the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers as a "joint conspiracy by the company, police and judiciary," he was deliberately silent on the role of the Congress Party in that conspiracy.

The fact remains, however, that it was the then-Congress-led Haryana state government that deployed its police to suppress Maruti Suzuki workers on behalf of the Japan-based corporation, while it created the foul atmosphere for the judicial frame-up by claiming the workers' struggle had been "instigated by terrorists" and "outsiders" to undermine economic growth in Haryana.

The freedom of the Maruti Suzuki workers requires the widest mobilization of the working class throughout India, Asia and the entire world. This is only possible in a struggle against the Stalinist and other pseudo-left parties that seek to subordinate the working class to the capitalist political parties waging a class war against workers in every single country.

The fight for the freedom of the Maruti Suzuki workers is a component part of the struggle to unite the working class around the world against exploitation by the global corporations and the austerity, authoritarian and militarist policies pursued by capitalist political parties of every stripe. Only the international working class can put an end to this injustice and win the freedom of these class-war prisoners.

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