

India: ICFI supporters protest to demand release of Maruti Suzuki workers

Our correspondents
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Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) demonstrated on April 17 in Sriperumbudur, a major auto manufacturing hub about 40 kilometres from Chennai, capital of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The protest, held at the Sriperumbudur bus terminal, demanded the immediate release of framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers.

Thirteen workers from the Maruti Suzuki car assembly plant at Manesar in the northern Indian state of Haryana have been sentenced to life imprisonment on bogus murder charges. Another 18 workers from the same factory were given three- to five-year prison terms on lesser charges.

ICFI supporters demonstrated for more than an hour at the bus terminal, attracting the attention and interest of hundreds of workers from various factories in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the area. Indian state intelligence personnel video-recorded the event and demanded the names of the participants. Protest organisers refused to provide any names.

Protestors held a banner reading, “Free the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers!” in English and Tamil and carried a range of placards, including “Unite to defeat the witch hunt against the Maruti Suzuki workers,” “Forge the international unity of the working class” and “Fight for international socialism against imperialist war plans.” They chanted slogans calling for the immediate release of the Maruti Suzuki workers.

Arun Kumar from the ICFI supporters group made a brief speech exposing the monstrous frame-up by the auto corporation and state authorities who were determined to crush the Maruti Suzuki workers’ opposition to their sweatshop conditions.

Kumar referred to the ICFI’s online petition, protests, public meetings and the numerous articles on the *World Socialist Web Site* exposing the frame-up—the collusion

between the company and police, fabricated evidence, coached testimony, and judicial decisions that shifted the burden of proof from the prosecution to the workers. The verdict against the Maruti Suzuki workers, he said, was an attempt to intimidate all Indian workers and to reassure Suzuki and other investors that Indian authorities would try to crush all working-class resistance.

In the days leading up to the bus terminal demonstration, ICFI supporters distributed thousands of copies of the ICFI statement “Free the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers!” and spoke with workers in Sriperumbudur, Oragadam and other nearby SEZs. Many global auto and electronics corporations and auto parts companies operate in these SEZs. ICFI campaigners discussed the Maruti Suzuki frame-up with workers and youth.

Thamarai, 20, an Apollo Tyres worker, said he supported the protest. “Like the Maruti Suzuki workers, we were also recently involved in a struggle for a wage rise and the right to form a union,” he said. “We demanded a 12,000-rupee monthly salary. Currently workers with a diploma only get 8,500 rupees per month.

“Company management initially agreed to our demand to form a union but later changed its mind and said no. They offered to pay an extra 2,000 rupees for workers with two years’ experience but workers rejected management’s offer and wanted to form a union because they thought that they could get more concessions.”

Thamarai said workers from other companies in the Oragadam SEZ were attempting to establish unions to fight for their basic demands. He added: “Your international party is good and important for workers to fight against globally-operating companies.”

Jeeva, 22, a Renault Nissan worker and an engineering graduate from a Pondicherry farming family, denounced the life sentences imposed on the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers. “This reveals that courts deliver judgments that favour corporate management,” he said.

“The communist parties, CPM and CPI, [the main Stalinist parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India] only keep their parties for publicity. They formed a union for regular [permanent] workers at the Hyundai auto plant but never raised their voices about the rights of contract workers, trainees and apprentices in the company.

“Since 2009, the company has been dismissing trainees after they complete three years. All these workers—about 20,000—were sent home without being made permanent. I think this is how Maruti Suzuki operates. I’m in favour of your party functioning as a bridge to unite workers of all countries.”

Vijay, who has an engineering diploma and works for Saint-Gobain Glass India, said: “I only found about the life sentence given to the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers from you. These workers fought against the contract labour system. We face similar conditions at Saint-Gobain and at many of the companies in Sriperumbudur and Oragadam. I receive 12,000 rupees per month but many workers get less than this. Back in my village my father is a tailor and only earns 3,000 rupees per month and my mother works in farming and gets a pittance.”



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