

May Day 2017

Defend the 13 framed-up Indian Maruti Suzuki workers

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This speech was delivered by Keith Jones, National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Canada, to the 2017 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30.

On May Day 2017, the International Committee of the Fourth International calls for redoubled efforts, by workers in India and around the world, to win the immediate release and exoneration of the 13 Maruti Suzuki India workers who have been framed up and sentenced to life in prison.

They are victims of ruthless class justice. Workers at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar car assembly plant in northern India, these 13 men, have been condemned to spend the rest of their lives in the living hell that is an Indian prison, as the result of a ruling class conspiracy. This conspiracy unites the Japanese-owned transnational Suzuki Motor Corporation, the police, courts and both of the Indian bourgeoisie's principal parties, the Congress Party and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party.

The workers' only crime was to have challenged the brutal sweatshop conditions—poverty wages, speed up, precarious contract-labour jobs—that prevail across India, including in its new globally-integrated manufacturing sector.

Twelve of the 13 were leaders of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union. Workers at the Manesar plant established the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union through a series of militant strikes in 2011–12, and in bitter struggle against a government-recognized, company-backed, stooge union that connived in their exploitation.

The pretext for the frame-up of the 13, the arrest and imprisonment for three years of close to 150 other

workers, and a government-supported purge of the Manesar workforce, in which the company fired and replaced 2,300 workers, was a company-provoked altercation on July 18, 2012. In the midst of this altercation, a fire mysteriously erupted that killed the one company manager sympathetic to the workers.

Since 2012, the *World Socialist Web Site* has published numerous articles exposing the state vendetta against the Maruti Suzuki workers, and will continue to do so. Here, it should just be said that their prosecution and trial were a sham from beginning to end. A company lawyer acted as prosecution co-counsel. The court refused to allow any worker witnesses to the events of July 18, 2012 to testify, claiming that they would be biased. The presiding judge systematically shifted the burden of proof from the state to the workers, and with the explicit backing of India's Supreme Court, he refused to allow the defense to call back key prosecution witnesses for further questioning, although a lower court had ruled that this would negate the workers' right to a fair trial.

The defense lawyers demonstrated that the police had illegally colluded with the company, arresting workers on the basis of company-supplied lists, and repeatedly fabricated evidence. Faced with this irrefutable evidence of police criminality, the judge had to fully exonerate 117 of the arrested workers. But he did so only to try to salvage the frame-up against its principal targets—the leaders of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union.

The Indian ruling elite is determined to inflict exemplary punishment on the Maruti Suzuki workers so as to intimidate the working class and demonstrate to foreign investors that they can be counted on to

ruthlessly suppress all worker resistance to brutal exploitation.

This has been spelled out, repeatedly and blatantly, by government ministers, prosecutors and the courts themselves.

In explaining why he had urged the 13 workers to be sentenced to death by hanging at their March 17 sentencing hearing, special prosecutor Anurag Hooda declared: "Our industrial growth has dipped, FDI [Foreign Direct Investment] has dried up. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is calling for 'Make in India,' but such incidents are a stain on our image."

There is enormous sympathy for the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers in India, and wherever working people are apprised of the case, around the world.

But the unions and the Stalinist parliamentary parties have systematically isolated the Maruti Suzuki workers, while urging them to put their faith in worthless appeals to the capitalist parties and courts that are persecuting them. For weeks, *People's Democracy*, the English-language newspaper of the principal Stalinist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), failed to print even a word about the conviction and brutal sentences meted out to the Maruti Suzuki workers.

The union and Stalinists leaders are adamantly opposed to mobilizing the working class in defense of the Maruti Suzuki workers, because they are terrified of their rebellious spirit and, above all, because they support and, indeed, have played a pivotal role in implementing, the Indian ruling elite's drive to make India a cheap-labour haven for world capital.

The International Committee of the Fourth International urges workers, young people and all those who defend democratic rights, to come to the defense of the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers.

In mounting this international campaign to defend the Maruti Suzuki workers, the ICFI is renewing and reinvigorating the tradition of international workers' defense, whose roots are bound up with the origins of May Day itself, in the campaign against the 1880s frame-up of the Haymarket martyrs of the fight for the eight-hour day.

The freedom of the Maruti Suzuki workers can and will only be won based on the mobilization of the class strength of the international working class.

The Maruti Suzuki workers have come under vicious and unrelenting attack because they have challenged

the class strategy of the Indian bourgeoisie, which aims to supplant China as the world's principal cheap-labour hub. But their struggle also threatened the strategy of the global transnationals, like Suzuki, which scour the world for the cheapest labour costs, so as to maximize profits and shareholder returns.

The Maruti Suzuki workers are representative of the hundreds of millions of new workers that capitalist globalization has created in India, China, and across Asia, Africa and Latin America. These workers are not just objects of exploitation, but a mighty social force and a powerful ally of workers in the advanced capitalist countries. Workers in North America, Europe and Japan must reject the economic nationalism and chauvinism promoted by Trump, Le Pen and the trade unions, and join forces with the workers of Asia, Latin America and Africa in the struggle for decent, secure jobs and social rights, and against imperialist war, one of whose principal aims is the re-enslavement of the masses in the historically oppressed countries.

In challenging sweatshop exploitation, the Maruti Suzuki workers were striking a blow not only for workers in India but for workers around the world. Their defense is a vital first step in forging the international unity of the working class that is needed to fight global capital—that is, in making the objective unity of the international working class a conscious political strategy.

I urge everyone listening today to sign the ICFI online petition, "Free the Maruti Suzuki Workers!"; to circulate it; to make the facts of the Maruti Suzuki case known to workers and young people around the world; to explain how this frame-up epitomizes contemporary global class relations, and how the defense of these workers can and must become an important means for advancing the struggle for the fighting unity of the working class against capitalist exploitation and war.



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