

# Sri Lankan workers and students oppose Maruti Suzuki frame-up

Our reporters  
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) supporters in Sri Lanka are continuing the struggle to free the imprisoned Maruti Suzuki workers in India.

Over the past week campaigners won support at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and Colombo University as well as from workers near the Colombo Port. Hundreds of *World Socialist Web Site* articles were distributed, appealing for workers everywhere to support the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) fight to secure the release of the victimised workers.

In March, 13 Maruti Suzuki workers were sentenced to life imprisonment. This included the entire 12-member committee of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), an independent trade union established by workers at the Japanese automaker's assembly plant in Manesar, northern India. The mostly young workers are now condemned to rot in the living hell of Indian prisons for the rest of their lives. Another 18 employees also received heavy jail terms.

Madhuka and Dilan, second-year art students from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, denounced the imprisonment of the Indian autoworkers. "Sri Lankan workers and youth are also fighting to defend their rights, but instead of fulfilling their demands, the government is hell bent on crushing them," they said. "The victimisation of the Maruti Suzuki workers by the Indian government is the worst example of this sort of attack. It is very clear that this is the situation prevailing internationally and so workers need to organise internationally."

Dilan agreed with SEP/IYSSE campaigners' insistence that these attacks could not be separated from the imperialist drive to war. "It's true that the imperialist powers are going for a war," he said. "We

saw the missile attack on Syria and the bombardment in Afghanistan. The US is using its military power to intimidate other countries. We oppose this war and I think workers have the power to stop this if they unite."

Management faculty students Thilana and Suranjith supported the ICFI's political fight for the release of the Maruti-Suzuki workers. "Whoever is in power, this is how they treat workers and youth who raise demands for better conditions," Thilana said. "The rulers are not doing this out of individual malice but because of the crisis of this economic system."

SEP/IYSSE campaigners explained that governments all over the world are dedicated to providing the cheapest labour in their countries in order to attract foreign investment. In India, this was exemplified by the Modi government's "Make in India" program.

"Yes, this is true," Suranjith responded. "The Sri Lankan government also claims it is building up the national economy by increasing production within the country. But what has really happened is that workers have been forced into unlivable conditions in order to maximise the profits of the investors."

Aruna, an arts undergraduate, spoke about the conditions of workers in India. "The Indian government has opened up the country for investors from all around the world and because of the high unemployment, companies can hire workers and pay low wages.

"I've seen more poverty in India than Sri Lanka, but the Maruti Suzuki workers' fight indicates that Indian workers are not going to tolerate these conditions anymore. I'm against exploitation, and the victimisation of workers who fight it, and support your campaign to free the Maruti Suzuki workers."

Aruna supported the ICFI's fight for an international anti-war movement. "None of the so-called left organisations, including the Inter University Student

Federation (IUSF) which is in the leadership of university students in Sri Lanka, says anything about socialism and never speak about the danger of war. I'll listen to the online May Day Rally and follow the WSWs.”

Colombo port workers vehemently denounced the Maruti Suzuki frame-up. Sri Lankan port workers face the destruction of jobs and living conditions if the government's proposed privatisation program is implemented. Port workers protesting the plans of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe have been brutally attacked and injured by the police in recent months.

One port worker said he had only heard about the frame-up and jailing of the Maruti Suzuki workers through the SEP and IYSSE. “No media outlets are giving any publicity to issues like this,” he said, “but they know it is the intention of our [Sri Lankan] rulers as well and that if workers becoming aware of this it will be a threat to the government.”

Referring to the situation at Colombo port, he said management and the government had deceived workers about their privatisation plans. “The previous government handed over certain port services to Chinese companies. The current government is now going to lease the rest of it to private companies from other countries.” He added that the already precarious living conditions of the workers would go from bad to worse.

A Colombo port boatyard worker drew a parallel between the attack on the Maruti Suzuki workers and the Sri Lankan government's plan to appoint war criminal and former army chief Sarath Fonseka to head a special defense unit to “maintain order” in the country.

“More and more people are taking to the streets to protect their rights. The government is considering bringing in Sarath Fonseka to crack down on these protests and control people with terror,” he said.

Commenting on the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration's claims that it would bring “good governance” to Sri Lanka, the boatyard worker added: “The former Rajapakse government attacked workers viciously, openly cracking down on protests and abducting leading workers in the night with white vans. Now this government has launched even more brutal attacks on workers and students. Is this the ‘good

governance’ they promised?”

Many port workers promised to sign the ICFI's online petition demanding the unconditional release of the imprisoned Maruti Suzuki workers and also expressed their interest in the ICFI's online May Day rally.



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