

Five years since company-provoked incident used to frame up Maruti Suzuki workers

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Tuesday marked the fifth anniversary of the management-provoked incident at the Maruti Suzuki Manesar auto factory outside of Delhi, India that was used as the pretext for the mass prosecution and frame-up of workers.

On July 18, 2012 management fired a Maruti Suzuki worker—Jaya Lal—who objected to workers being forced to labor through their tea break and the abuse by a manager who slandered him for his poverty and background as a dalit, that is, a descendant of the “Untouchable” caste.

The company unleashed bouncers (thugs) against workers who came to their co-worker’s defense. A fire of undetermined origin then erupted and Avineesh Dev, the only manager sympathetic to the workers, died of asphyxiation.

Following the altercation, 148 workers were arrested and 31 ultimately convicted on March 10, 2017, including 13 sentenced to serve life terms in the hellish Indian prison system. The brutal attack on Indian autoworkers involved the collaboration of Maruti Suzuki executives, the police, and the highest levels of the Indian state.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* have launched a worldwide campaign to defend these heroic workers. We encourage workers, students and all those who defend democratic rights to sign the petition demanding the immediate release of the Maruti Suzuki workers.

The Stalinist-dominated All India Trades Union Congress marked the anniversary with a small demonstration, attended by workers from Maruti Suzuki, Honda Motors and Hero Motocorp. The workers gathered at the Rajiv Chowk Delhi metro station. The workers marched from the station to

nearby government offices where they delivered a petition.

The token character of the protest underscores once again the treacherous role of the Indian Stalinists. Since the onset of the state persecution, the Stalinist unions have worked to isolate the Maruti Suzuki workers and suppress opposition to the attack, or, where that has been impossible, divert the anger of workers into futile appeals to the corrupt Indian courts.

The spinelessness of the Indian Stalinists has encouraged further state attacks. Last month, more than 400 workers were arrested after police charged and beat workers and their families for protesting in front of the Aisin Automotive components factory in Haryana. Those workers face low wages and brutal conditions like their counterparts at the nearby Maruti Suzuki plant.

The aim of the assault on Maruti Suzuki workers is to crush all opposition to the sweatshop conditions that prevail in India’s industrial belt, home to massive transnational corporations such as Japanese-based Suzuki Motors.

The judge in the case rejected out of hand the workers’ version of events, claiming that they made up the story about being attacked by the security thugs. The judge also excluded all testimony from workers who witnessed the July 18, 2012 events, but were not implicated by the prosecution in any wrongdoing. In contrast, the judge gave free rein to management officials to give their version of the story, without any challenges from worker eyewitnesses.

Twelve of the 13 men sentenced to life prison terms were leaders of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU). A series of militant strikes at the plant had forced management to recognize the MSWU in March 2012. The union, built in opposition to a management-

dominated stooge union, won widespread support for its opposition to the hated contract labor system. In the aftermath of the company-staged provocation, thousands of workers—both permanent and contract—were fired, scores detained by police and held without bail for years and the MSWU essentially smashed.

The growth of militancy among Maruti Suzuki workers is symptomatic of the radicalization of Indian workers, drawn from the impoverished Indian countryside to feed the insatiable demand of global big business for cheap, highly exploited labor. The Manesar factory had been a center of opposition in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt with a wave of strikes, plant occupations and other militant actions, which came to a head in 2011.

The biographies of the Maruti Suzuki workers serving life prison terms further underscores the brutal character of the frame-up. Most are married and come from poor farming families with few resources. In many cases the arrest of their chief breadwinner has created severe hardships for children and other relatives.

For example, MSWU President Ram Maher Singh is in his early 30s and is from the village of Guliana in the Kaithan District. He has a wife, aged 30, two sons, 7 and 9 years old. They eke out a living on a mere four acres of land that they farm.

Ajmer Singh was the MSWU legal adviser. He is from Samanputti village in the Rohtak District. He has a 27-year-old wife and two children, ages 6 and 8. His father is 55 and his mother is 50.

Singh has two unmarried brothers and two married sisters. His brothers, who had to quit school because of Ajmer's jailing, now make pottery out of mud to support their family.

Framed-up Maruti Suzuki worker Jaya Lal has no land, coming from a very poor family in Baikhal village, Jaund District. His wife is 28 and they have one son, age 5-1/2 years old. His father and mother are still living and he has one brother, age 35. His family was totally dependent on Jaya Lal's income.

Another jailed worker, Ram Vilas, has a 25-year-old wife and 7-year-old son. In addition, he has a father, age 66, and a mother, 48. His only brother is a 20-year-old student. He is from Gamdy Village in the Sonapat district and his family has no land and are very poor.

MSWU Chief Patron Sandeep Bhillo age 31, is not married. He is from Dihola village in the Jaund District. While in jail, one of his sisters committed suicide. His father, Sube Singh, is 55, his mother 50.

In waging a struggle against the sweatshop conditions, the Maruti Suzuki workers struck a blow, not only against the Japanese owned multi-national and the Indian authority's efforts to make the country the center of cheap labor for the world, but for workers in the more advanced capitalist countries who are also being subjected to relentless attacks on their jobs and living standards.

In opposition to the national poison being spread by the trade unions and capitalist parties throughout the world, the campaign to defend the Maruti Suzuki workers is aimed at unifying the international working class in a common struggle against the attacks of the globally organized corporations. We urge readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to support the campaign to defend the Maruti Suzuki workers and make their cause widely known.



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