

Indian authorities intensify vendetta against framed-up Maruti-Suzuki workers

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Victimized Maruti Suzuki India workers have informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that later this week government lawyers, acting on orders from Haryana's advocate-general, will urge a High Court to sentence 13 of their fellow workers to death by hanging.

The 13 were convicted on frame-up murder charges last March and sentenced to life in prison. But this has not satisfied India's ruling elite or the owners of the Japanese-based transnational Suzuki. They are baying for the workers' blood, with the aim of intimidating workers across India.

Twelve of the 13 are executive members of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), which workers at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar, Haryana car assembly plant established in 2011-12 in bitter struggle against management and a government-recognized, company-stooge union.

Government lawyers are also reportedly seeking to overturn the acquittals of 117 other Maruti Suzuki workers on various grave charges, including rioting and assault.

The Maruti Suzuki workers have been the target of a legal vendetta, involving the police, prosecution, judiciary and both of the Indian ruling class' principal parties. The frame-up was initiated, and an associated purge of 2,300 workers at the Manesar plant implemented, in the summer of 2012, when the Congress Party formed the government in Haryana and led India's national government. It has continued seamlessly under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) governments that replaced them in 2014.

The sole "crime" of the 13 workers threatened with execution, 18 other workers who were convicted alongside them on lesser charges last March, and the 117 workers whose acquittal the authorities are vindictively appealing, is to have rebelled against poverty wages, precarious employment, and a brutal work regime.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously provided a

detailed, five-part exposure of the frame-up, as part of our efforts to mobilize workers in India and around the world to win the immediate release, and vacating of all charges against, the Maruti Suzuki workers. (see: "The frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers—Part 1: A travesty of justice")

On July 18, 2012, management provoked an altercation with the workers. In the ensuing melee, a fire mysteriously erupted that led to the death by asphyxiation of the one manager sympathetic to the workers, Avineesh Dev. For more than a year prior to this, police on orders of the Haryana Congress Party government, had repeatedly been deployed to suppress worker protests at the plant, which had emerged as a center of worker resistance in the giant Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt that lies on the outskirts of Indian's capital, Delhi.

Without even the pretense of an investigation, the police, working hand-in-glove with management, blamed the workers for the altercation and fire and launched dragnet arrests of scores of workers using lists of "suspects" supplied by the company.

Some of the arrested workers were subjected to abuse and torture to try to coerce them into making "confessions."

The subsequent trial of 148 of the workers was a travesty of justice.

None of the Maruti Suzuki workers who were at the plant on July 18, 2012 but not charged testified—an omission the presiding judge justified with the claim that they would have given false testimony, either because they were sympathetic to, or intimidated by, the MSWU.

The fire was the crux of the prosecution's murder case. Yet it could not establish where, when, or how the fire started. The authorities did claim to have found a matchbox, which supposedly escaped detection during the initial investigation of the fire and inexplicably survived unscathed in an area destroyed by the blaze. But nothing

tied this matchbox to any of the workers.

As with other crucial pieces of evidence, police failed to carry out the most rudimentary forensic tests on this matchbox.

The prosecution changed basic elements of its narrative of the case, including what weapons workers supposedly used in their alleged attack on company managers.

Defence lawyers showed that the police had arrested 89 workers based on lists supplied by a Maruti Suzuki official who wasn't even employed at the Manesar plant and then fabricated evidence, finding four "witnesses" to implicate the workers, because they feared their illegal collusion might be exposed. Several police also submitted bogus Medicolegal Certificates (MLCs) as "proof" of their claim the workers had attacked them when they intervened in the July 18, 2012 melee.

So patently illegal were the police's actions, the judge was forced to exonerate the 89 along with 29 other workers that no prosecution witness identified or correctly identified.

But the judge did so, with the aim of "saving" the most essential part of the frame-up—the murder charges against the MSWU leaders.

In finding them guilty, he repeatedly shifted the burden of proof from the prosecution onto the workers and willfully ignored that the entire case against the workers had been assembled by the same police who had fabricated evidence and led by the same police inspector who had colluded with Maruti Suzuki management and admitted under cross-examination his MLC was fraudulent.

While the trial was in progress, politicians and prosecutors repeatedly connected it with the need to reassure investors that Indian authorities can be counted on to suppress worker unrest. In urging that the 13 workers be sentenced to die, rather than condemned to life in prison, 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."

Employers in the Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt and across India now routinely cite the fate of the Maruti Suzuki workers when faced with demands for better wages and working conditions and threats of industrial action.

Prime Minister Modi and Indian Finance Arun Jaitley, meanwhile, have repeatedly met with Maruti Suzuki officials, including Suzuki Chairman Osamu Suzuki, in

the 11 months since the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers were sentenced to life in prison.

They view Suzuki as a flagship in their efforts to make India a global cheap labour manufacturing chain hub. Modi has repeatedly boasted that Indian labour costs are far below those in China. Indeed, industrial wages in India are now at least four times lower than in China.

It is these conditions of brutal exploitation that India's venal ruling elite is seeking to uphold through its vendetta against the Maruti Suzuki workers.

If Indian authorities now feel so emboldened as to seek the death penalty for the MSWU leaders and the overturning of the acquittal of the 117, it is because the trade unions and the twin Stalinist parliamentary parties, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), have completely abandoned the Maruti Suzuki workers.

For weeks, the Stalinists failed to even report the frame-up convictions of the 13 workers on their websites or in their newspapers and after they did, they quickly resumed their silence.

They will not lift a finger to mobilize the working class in support of the Maruti Suzuki workers, because to do so would jeopardize their cozy relations with the political establishment.

When asked about the role of India's major labour federations, like the Stalinist-led CITU and AITUC, Abhiram and Jitender—the members of the Provisional Committee of the MSWU who informed the WSWS about the state's renewed efforts to impose the death penalty on the 13—said, "They are doing nothing for us. Not before or after the convictions. They are completely finished here. The trade unions are only after dues. Workers want an alternative."

Workers in India and around the world must come to the defense of the Maruti Suzuki workers. In challenging sweatshop exploitation, they were striking a blow for workers not just in India, but around the world. Their defence is a vital first step in forging the international unity of the working class that is needed to fight global capital.



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