

A travesty of justice that must not stand!

One year since India's courts condemned framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers to jail for life

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For the thirteen Maruti Suzuki India workers imprisoned for life on frame-up murder charges, this weekend is a bitter anniversary.

March 18 will mark exactly one year since they were condemned to spend the rest of their lives in the living hell that is an Indian prison. The sentencing was the culmination of five years of legal proceedings that were a travesty of justice from start to finish.

The thirteen's only "crime" is to have rebelled against the sweatshop conditions that prevail in India's new, globally connected auto industry. They include all twelve members of the Working Committee (or executive) of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU).

Workers at Maruti Suzuki's car assembly plant in Manesar, Haryana had established the MSWU in 2011-12 in a militant struggle, punctuated by walkouts and sit-down strikes, against the Japanese-owned transnational and a government-recognized, pro-company union.

The Maruti Suzuki workers' challenge to poverty wages, precarious contract jobs and brutal working conditions became a focal point for worker opposition across the giant Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt, which lies on the outskirts of India's capital, Delhi.

That is precisely why Maruti Suzuki, India's business elite, and their police, courts, and political hirelings were determined to stamp out the MSWU and victimize and persecute the Manesar workers.

They seized on a company-provoked plant-floor altercation on July 18, 2012, and a mysterious fire that erupted in the middle of it and resulted in the death by asphyxiation of a company manager, to mount a vendetta against the Maruti Suzuki workers.

Without any proper investigation and illegally colluding with Maruti Suzuki management, as even the court was forced to concede, police targeted hundreds of workers for

arrest. Meanwhile, the Congress Party-led state government assisted Maruti Suzuki in purging and replacing 2,400 permanent and temporary workers, virtually the entire Manesar assembly plant workforce.

Ultimately, Indian authorities charged 148 workers with murder, assault and other grave crimes and vindictively ignored Indian legal norms in denying any of them bail for years.

Indian political leaders and state officials made no secret that an example needed to be made of the Maruti Suzuki workers to reassure investors and intimidate workers across India.

"Foreign investors are likely not to invest money in India out of fear of labor unrest," said the Haryana High Court in May 2013 in justifying its rejection of the workers' initial bail application.

At a March 2017 sentence hearing for the 13 workers, special prosecutor Anurag Hooda argued that they should be given the most extreme punishment of all—death by hanging—declaring, "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."

The International Committee of the Fourth International and *World Socialist Web Site* responded to the savage life sentences meted out to the Maruti Suzuki workers by immediately initiating a campaign to mobilize the international working class in their defense.

A statement dated March 20, 2017, "Free the Maruti Suzuki workers!" explained, "Their convictions are the outcome of a monstrous frame-up mounted by the Suzuki Corporation, the police and judicial authorities, with the full complicity of India's principal political parties—the Congress Party and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)" (see: "Free the framed-up Maruti Suzuki

workers!”).

As a crucial element in mobilizing support for the Maruti Suzuki workers worldwide, the WSWs published an exhaustive five-part exposure of the frame-up based on the trial transcript (see: “The frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers—Part 1: A travesty of justice”).

The prosecution’s case was filled with holes and inconsistencies. Defense lawyers were able to demonstrate that police had failed to carry out the most rudimentary forensic tests on what they claimed were vital pieces of evidence and had fabricated evidence against the accused.

The trial judge, Judge Goyal, was patently biased against the workers. He repeatedly shifted the burden of proof from the prosecution to the workers.

He justified the exclusion of any testimony from Maruti Suzuki workers who were at the plant on July 18, 2012 but not charged, with the claim that they would have invariably 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 it 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.

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

Defense lawyers showed police had found “false witnesses,” in an attempt to cover up the fact that they had illegally arrested 89 workers, and forged bogus Medicolegal Certificates (MLCs) as “proof” of their claim the workers had attacked them when they intervened in the July 18, 2012 melee.

The police’s actions were so patently illegal, Judge Goyal was forced to exonerate the 89 along with 29 other workers that no prosecution witness identified or correctly identified.

But he did so with the aim of “saving” the most essential part of the frame-up—the murder charges against the MSWU leaders.

In any instance where the defense could not irrefutably prove police illegality, he insisted their evidence be accepted as gospel truth. Thus Judge Goyal argued in his judgment that the fact that the lead inspector in the case had illegally colluded with Maruti Suzuki management and admitted under cross-examination his MLC was fraudulent did not otherwise impinge on his credibility or that of the police investigation as a whole.

There is widespread sympathy and support for the Maruti Suzuki workers in the Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt and

across India. Last March 18, tens of thousands of workers responded to the sentencing of the 13, along with eighteen others to prison terms of up to five years, by downing tools.

But the major trade union federations, including the Stalinist-led CITU and AITUC, and the Stalinist parliamentary parties have systematically isolated the Maruti Suzuki workers, both before and since the frame-up convictions.

For weeks, *People’s Democracy*, the English-language weekly of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) failed to even report the convictions and savage sentences imposed on the MSWU leaders. Nor is there any mention of the Maruti Suzuki workers in the more than 50-page political resolution the CPM has prepared for its upcoming party congress; yet it is common knowledge that employers across India routinely point to their fate in seeking to cow worker opposition.

The Stalinists, who have supported the Indian elite in its drive to make India a cheap-labor haven, both fear the militant example of the Maruti Suzuki workers and that any association with them will disrupt their efforts to subordinate the growing working-class opposition to India’s authoritarian, arch-communist BJP government to the Congress and other rightwing bourgeois parties.

The shunning of the Maruti Suzuki workers by the trade unions and ostensible left parties is emboldening the state. The BJP-led state government in Haryana has served notice that it intends to appeal the acquittal of the 117 workers and petition the High Court to overturn the life-sentences against the 13 and instead order them to be hanged.

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 defense 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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