Indian auto workers speak out in defence of Assange and Manning

Our correspondents
24 July 2019

Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are campaigning in Chennai, the capital of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and in Kolkata, the West Bengal state capital, in defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning. The Trotskyist group has announced rallies in the two cities in September, as part of the Global Defence Campaign launched by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

ICFI campaigners recently spoke with workers from auto plants in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. The area, known as the "Detroit of Asia," employs tens of thousands of auto workers.

A number of workers drew a connection between the persecution of Assange and Manning and last month's move by Tamil Nadu's ruling AIADMK party to classify all auto component industries in Sriperumbudur as "public utility services," thereby illegalising all industrial action (see also: "Tamil Nadu government bans strikes in auto component industries").

Azar, a trainee at Hyundai, supported the campaign to secure Assange's freedom and spoke about the Tamil Nadu government's strike ban. "Strike action is the only way workers can fight for their rights," he said, and called for the abolition of contract employment and the establishment of permanent jobs. Contract and casual employment is widespread throughout India and used to drive down wages and increase exploitation.

Venkatesh, 23, also from Hyundai, denounced the rise of imperialist militarism. Another world war would be "a catastrophe," he said, and "destroy entire countries and people." He added: "Assange was right to expose US war crimes but your party is the only one that is talking about this issue. The media has deliberately covered up Assange's exposures."

Vignesh, who works at Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering, denounced Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pro-business policies: "Modi defends big companies and is indifferent to the plight of workers and farmers," he said.

The Tamil Nadu state government, he continued, "also looks after the interests of big companies. That's why it recently invoked the Public Utility law to stop workers going on strike."

Venkatesh, a 23-year-old contract employee at GKN industries, said: "I'd previously heard about Julian Assange and WikiLeaks through the media but I've only learnt about the danger he is now facing through you. It's obvious that he has stood firmly for the truth. All the major powers are determined to keep him in jail and kill him."

Venkatesh condemned the state government's laws banning strikes and voiced his disgust over the anti-worker nature of the unions: "The trade unions have done nothing to oppose this law. They are no longer with workers.

"I welcome the socialist and internationalist policies that you fight for and can see how your web site has alerted people to the situation facing the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers who were sentenced to life imprisonment. This is an issue facing the global working class. I understand the need for international unity of workers."

Pandian, 28, from Clastek Engineering, enthusiastically supported the international campaign to defend Assange and Manning. He denounced Washington's war crimes and said: "Assange did not commit any crime. All he did was tell the truth to the people and he should be released."

Prathap, a Renault Nissan worker, endorsed the ICFI's campaign. "I know well that Assange leaked massive pieces of information and that information constituted a danger for the US and other world powers," he said. "That's why they're out to frame him up and kill him."

Ashok, a Hyundai worker, like many Indian workers, knew nothing about the US-led persecution of Assange.

© World Socialist Web Site

“This is the first time I’ve heard about Julian Assange but because he’s being imprisoned and tormented by the authorities for exposing war crimes, he must be defended,” he said.

After some discussion Ashok said he endorsed the ICFI’s campaign to mobilise the international working class to demand Assange’s freedom and to oppose the imperialist drive toward another world war. “We have no faith in any party,” he added. “Workers need a new party to fight for their own government.”

Mohamed, 28, who works at Hyundai Mobis, voiced his support for the international campaign to free Assange and denounced the bogus US-led anti-terrorist campaign. “The world believed that America has been fighting against terrorism and that virtually all Muslims support terrorist acts,” he said. “Assange has helped reveal the truth—that the real terrorist is US imperialism.”

Mohamed condemned the communalist policies of Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party government and violent attacks on Muslims by right-wing Hindu thugs. He pointed out that when Modi was chief minister of Gujarat, over 2,000 Muslims were killed in sectarian murders in 2002. “Nevertheless, after he became the prime minister every country welcomed him,” he said.

Referring to the trade unions, he said: “We’ve seen before our own eyes how the trade unions isolated striking Yamaha and Royal Enfield workers from other working-class struggles. This meant that company managements could victimise militant workers by suspending and transferring them to other places.

“I understand the significance of the globalisation of production and what happened to the struggles by Nokia, Foxconn and other workers. In the globalised era trade unions are like expired medicine. I welcome socialist internationalism and the need for workers to unite globally, and really appreciate your international website, the WSWS.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site