

Maoist union leaders continue to isolate Motherson autoworkers' strike in India

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An indefinite strike by over 500 Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering (MATE) workers, now reaching its third month, is being isolated by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), to which the workers' newly-formed union is affiliated.

The AICCTU leaders refuse to call out the 1,500 contract workers and trainees attached to the Motherson plant, located at Sriperumbudur, 40 kilometres from Chennai, the capital of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. This is allowing “business as usual” by the company, which is also hiring new temporary workers from other states.

Emboldened by the AICCTU's isolation, MATE management is intensifying its witch hunt of striking workers and has now suspended 44 workers since the strike began on August 26.

The AICCTU is controlled by the Maoist Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist-Liberation (CPI-ML-Liberation). Its refusal to mobilise the Motherson contract workers and trainees, let alone to appeal to other autoworkers in the Sriperumbudur industrial zone and elsewhere in India in support of the striking permanent workers, is in line with MATE's attempts to divide the workers.

MATE permanent workers formed their own union—the Chengai Anna Mavatta Jana Nayaga Thozhilalar Sangam—to fight for a wage rise and to put an end to the harsh working conditions and denigrating verbal abuse of workers by the management. The new union sought affiliation to AICCTU not to be railroaded into facing further attacks and management victimisation.

As part of a worsening global slowdown in the auto industry, the Indian auto companies face a crisis. According to Society of Indian Automobile

Manufacturers (SIAM) data for September, passenger vehicle sales fell by 23.69 percent and commercial vehicle sales plunged by 62.11 percent.

Maruti Suzuki India, the country's largest car maker, has been forced to lower its prices on some models in a desperate attempt to boost sales. For two days, it shut down production simultaneously for the first time at its Gurugram and Manesar plants in the northern Indian state of Haryana.

The deepening slump has seen auto makers and parts makers cut production and lay off workers. Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) president Ram Venkataramani told the media: “If the trend continues, an estimated 1 million people could be laid-off.”

Motherson management is trying to impose the burden of the industry's growing crisis on workers by subjecting them to sweatshop labour conditions.

The AICCTU is attempting to end the strike by dropping all the main demands on which the strike was launched, if the management agrees to take no action against striking workers. The MATE management, however, is not only adamant and arrogant in telling the striking workers to return to work without gaining any conditions. It also flatly rejects the AICCTU's now one and only demand—to reinstate the victimised workers. It insists on conducting inquiries into all suspended workers.

The AICCTU is directing the striking workers not to appeal to auto workers across India and internationally but to the Tamil Nadu state government, led by the right-wing AIADMK. In order to let off the strikers' steam, it is also calling on them to stage futile protests like hunger strikes. The lesser number of workers participating in a hunger strike called by AICCTU on October 18 in Kancheepuram, district capital, points to

the growing no confidence among striking workers in such hollow and diversionary protests.

Addressing workers at the October 18 hunger strike and also during an earlier protest rally at Sriperumbudur on September 13, AICCTU national president S. Kumarasamy made demagogic criticisms of the Modi-led Indian government and AIADMK-led state government. He also accused the Indian courts and the Labour Commissioner of taking the side of the capitalists and being indifferent to the plight of the workers. He thundered that they should not be trusted. Yet in the next breath he announced protests and demonstrations directed at appealing to the very same authorities.

The AICCTU's policies flow from the reactionary politics of the Maoist CPI-ML-Liberation. The CPI-ML-Liberation is in an alliance with the two main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—that formed an electoral alliance led by the big business DMK in the recent Indian parliamentary elections. The CPM and CPI received 100 million rupees and 150 million rupees respectively from the regional communalist DMK for their political support.

All three Stalinist parties—CPM, CPI and CPI-ML-Liberation—were ready to support a government led by the Congress Party, long the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government, in the 2019 national elections.

The further rightward shift of the CPI-ML-Liberation and AICCTU into Tamil nationalism was revealed in the slogans chanted at the end of recent hunger strike. Giving up radical sounding slogans like “victory to AICCTU” and “Inquilab Jindabad” (long live the revolution), AICCTU leaders chanted the common slogan of the Tamil Nadu-based regionalist parties—“Velka Thamizh” (victory to Tamils). Through those slogans, the AICCTU leaders are working to divide workers along reactionary ethno-communal lines and to line up with Tamil Nadu regionalist capitalist parties.

AICCTU leaders are hailing the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the union federation of Stalinist CPM, as “fighters” for workers rights. CITU has a long record of betrayals of strikes, including last December's struggle of Yamaha auto workers. CITU signed a pay deal with Yamaha management, pledging

“industrial peace” and preventing sit-down strikes.

AICCTU leaders organised a deceptive “show of solidarity” by CITU-affiliated unions at the Motherson plant in Bidadi in the neighbouring state of Karnataka. The CITU-linked union officials visited the Motherson strikers on October 4, where they donated 5,000 rupees to their strike fund and just declared verbal “support.” But they oppose mobilising Karnataka Motherson workers in any industrial action to support the striking Sriperumbudur workers.

The MATE offensive against militant workers again shows the necessity to organise united struggles of all workers on common demands and to build rank and file committees against the treachery of the AICCTU and CITU and other unions in isolating workers' struggles.

WSWS supporters have distributed copies of recent WSWS articles on the Motherson strike at the company's other plants in the Chennai area. They also met sections of contract workers at the Sriperumbudur plant and discussed the political issues raised by the strike and the significance of alternative socialist program advocated by the WSWS. Contract workers, while declaring their backing for the strike, complained that the union had not appealed to them for support. Despite their vulnerable job situation, they welcomed the WSWS's call for united struggles of all workers for decent wages and working conditions, and an end to the contract labour system.



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