

Maoist union leaders isolate striking Motherson autoworkers in India

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Maoist union leaders are continuing to isolate the three-month-old strike by over 500 permanent workers at the Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering (MATE) plant in Sriperumbudur, 40 kilometers from Chennai, the capital of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Refusing to mobilize the 1,500 contract workers and trainees working in the same factory, let alone appeal for support more broadly from workers in the Sriperumbudur and nearby Oragadam industrial areas and elsewhere in India, the union leaders are directing the Motherson workers to make futile appeals to the anti-working-class All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) state government.

The workers have been on strike since August 26 to demand recognition of their newly formed union, Chengai Anna Mavatta Jananayaga Thozhilalar Sangam (CAMJTZ), a wage rise and an end to harsh working conditions and verbal abuse. The CAMJTZ is affiliated with the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), the trade union wing of the Maoist Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist-Liberation (CPI-ML-Liberation).

The AICCTU leaders' isolation of the Motherson strikers has strengthened the hands of MATE management in its repressive measures against strikers and its use of contract workers and trainees to maintain production. Management has thus far suspended 44 strikers.

S. Kumaraswamy, the national president of the AICCTU until last month, has played a key role in isolating the Motherson workers and diverting their struggle behind protests and appeals to the AIADMK government. He has worked to spread illusions among the workers that the government can be pressured to act in their favor.

Last month, Kumaraswamy carried out an undeclared and unexplained split from both the AICCTU and the CPI-ML-Liberation party and formed a new union federation called the Left Trade Union Center (LTUC). The splinter group led by him is now calling itself the "Communist Party."

A co-author of this article phoned the AICCTU head office in New Delhi and inquired about the split. An AICCTU spokesman, Raiv Dimri, admitted that Kumaraswamy left the AICCTU and CPI-ML-Liberation last month. But he failed to explain on what political grounds the former leader had left and said the party might discuss the issue at its upcoming congress in March of 2020. He added that S.M. Banerjee had been nominated as the new national president of the AICCTU and the union had so informed other unions and the Labor Department.

The Motherson workers, however, were not informed of the split.

On November 28, the new LTUC, led by Kumaraswamy, organized a protest march of striking Motherson workers to the Secretariat in Chennai, the state government headquarters, to appeal for the AIADMK government to "intervene to resolve the Motherson workers' strike issues." The union demanded that the state government take action against Motherson management and take over the company. As in the previous protests of Motherson workers organized by the Maoist union leaders, the AIADMK government unleashed its police force against the workers. Some 200 workers were arrested and released later the same evening.

On November 18, in a clear attempt to divert Motherson workers behind a reactionary Tamil nationalist campaign, the LTUC and several associated organizations—the Democratic Advocates Union

(DAU), the Democratic Youth for People (DYP) and the Democratic Students for People (DSP)--along with the MATE permanent workers union, the CAMJTS, organized a march in Chennai from Rajarathnam stadium in Egmore to Chintadripet junction, behind the slogan "Rise up Tamil." They directed the Motherson strikers to take part in this Tamil nationalist agitation.

The LTUC and its allies exploited the genuine anger among workers, youths and other oppressed masses in Tamil Nadu over the chauvinist policies of the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) central government, including plans for the imposition of the Hindi language.

While denouncing the BJP government's Hindi-Hindu communalist policies, the slogans raised and speeches made by leaders of the November 18 protest were similar to speeches by officials of Tamil Nadu-based regionalist parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). They employed slogans such as "Rise up Tamil," "We will go into battle to defend Tamil Nadu interests," "Defend the Tamil language," "Victory to Tamil, Long live Tamil," "Up with Tamil and down with dictatorship and repression," "Give preference to Tamil Nadu people in providing jobs."

These slogans, particularly the last one, serve to divide workers in Tamil Nadu from their class brothers and sisters elsewhere in India.

In his address to the meeting, Kumaraswamy, hailing the Tamil nationalist campaign as the model for Motherson workers, said, "After seeing this rally, the striking Motherson workers are prepared to take up an even more militant struggle."

Some 200 MATE workers participated in the November 18 protest, under the impression that it had been organised by the Maoist union leaders to fight for issues raised by their strike. But they were disappointed. When *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to several MATE workers, they said they had been told that a big event had been organised to highlight their problems. "But when we came here, it turned out to be something else."

The reactionary role of Kumaraswamy and his newly formed LTUC flows from the thoroughly bourgeois politics of the Maoist CPI-ML-Liberation. At the end of a hunger strike of Motherson strikers organised by the AICCTU on October 18 in Kancheepuram, union leaders raised the slogan "Velka Thamil" (Victory to

the Tamils).

The CPI-ML-Liberation is in an alliance with the two main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India, or CPI—which contested the recent general elections in alliance with the big business Tamil regional party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). In line with its Stalinist mentors of the CPM and CPI, the CPI-ML-Liberation was prepared to support a government led by the Congress Party, until recently the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government.

Motherson workers must break politically and organisationally not only from the Maoist CPI-ML-Liberation and its AICCTU, and but also from Kumaraswamy and his LTUC. The workers must build their own independent action committees to take their struggle into their own hands.

They must call out the contract workers and trainees at the plant and turn to other workers in the Sriperumbudur and Oragadam industrial areas and elsewhere in India for support for their struggle. That effort must be developed into a common struggle of workers for decent wages and working conditions against slave labour conditions and the contract labour system, and against the austerity measures being carried out by the BJP government at the centre and all governments at the state level. Such a struggle must be based upon the program and perspective of international socialism to establish the class unity of all workers.



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