

India: Maoist union betrays 140-day Motherson auto parts workers' strike

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In a complete betrayal of its membership, the Maoist-controlled Left Trade Union Centre (LTUC) early last month signed a sellout agreement with Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering (MATE) management and ordered workers to end their 140-day strike at the company's Sriperumbudur plant in Tamil Nadu.

Over 300 workers in the MATE plant, which is located about 40 kilometres from Chennai, the state capital, walked out on August 26 last year to demand a wage rise, an end to brutal working conditions and recognition of their newly-formed trade union—the Chengai Anna Mavatta Jana Nayaga Thozhilalar Sangam (CAMJTS).

None of the strikers' demands were granted in the LTUC's return-to-work deal and none of the 79 workers who were victimised during the walkout, including 51 permanent employees and 28 trainees, have been reinstated.

The union, in fact, has totally abandoned the 28 trainees and will allow MATE management to conduct "disciplinary inquiries" into the 51 permanent workers. The outcome of these investigations will be submitted to an assistant labour commissioner, who will make a final ruling.

Having ended all industrial action, the remaining workers now face increased management intimidation, including the transfer of workers from their previous positions and a ban on the use of mobile phones.

CAMJTS—the Motherson workers union—was initially affiliated to 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).

Last November, AICCTU National President S. Kumaraswamy split from the party and the AICCTU,

reportedly without any explanation, and formed the LTUC. The party splinter group, known as the "Communist Party" and led by Kumaraswamy, has linked the CAMJTS to the LTUC.

The LTUC and AICCTU bureaucracies played the same treacherous role during the MATE dispute, isolating the strikers and refusing to mobilise any genuine working-class support. In October, the AICCTU told MATE that they would drop workers' main demands if management agreed to take no action against the strikers.

Despite the union back-stabbing, the MATE auto parts strikers heroically continued their action in defiance of state repression, company intimidation and enormous economic hardships.

MATE, which is the polymer division of Motherson Sumi Systems Ltd, was established in 1986 as a joint venture between Samvardhana Motherson Group and Japan-based Sumitomo Wiring Systems. Along with its Indian plants, the giant company operates in 42 countries and employs over 135,000 workers. In 2018 it had a turnover of \$US11.7 billion.

The company's Sriperumbudur plant has over 1,500 workers but only about 560 are permanent. The remaining 1,000 workers are either contract or trainee employees.

The AICCTU and LTUC refused to mobilise the hundreds of contract workers and trainees at the plant in support of the strikers, let alone appeal for backing more broadly from other Motherson group employees in Sriperumbudur, Oragadam or anywhere else in India.

The unions isolated the strikers, diverting them into futile appeals to various authorities, including government labour officials and the anti-working-class All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)-led Tamil Nadu state government.

This strengthened the hands of MATE management, which stepped up its repressive measures against strikers and used the contract workers and trainees to maintain production. Management suspended dozens of striking permanent employees and terminated trainees. It also sent out a “charge sheet” or “show cause notice” to the striking workers.

The split from the AICCTU and formation of the LTUC constituted a further shift to the right by the Maoist-Stalinists organisations. The LTUC aligned itself with the chauvinist “Velka Thamil” (Rise up Tamil) campaigns led by the various Tamil nationalist organisations. The Maoist union leaders, in a calculated effort to split the Motherson auto parts workers from their fellow workers across India, directed the strikers to participate in the Tamil nationalist agitations.

The reactionary policies of the AICCTU and LTUC flow from the nationalist pro-capitalist program of the CPI-ML-Liberation, which is also in an alliance with the two main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI). These formations established an electoral alliance led by the big-business Dravida Munnethra Kazhagam (DMK) in the recent Indian parliamentary elections. The Maoist group also established an electoral bloc with the Congress Party in Bihar state and pledged to help it form an alternative government.

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

The respective union federations of these competing Stalinist parties, which defend capitalism and auto industry profits, were hostile to any independent mobilisation working-class support behind the Motherson workers’ 140-day strike. The corporate media and publications controlled by the Stalinist parties imposed a virtual media blackout on the Motherson workers’ ongoing industrial action.

By contrast, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), published articles on the issues rising from the strike, exposing the treacherous policies of AICCTU and LTUC, and elaborating a socialist and international program on which Motherson workers could advance their struggle.

Indian supporters of the International Committee of

the Fourth International (ICFI) circulated this material amongst the strikers and spoke with them in defiance of the desperate efforts of Maoist AICCTU and LTUC officials to stop these discussions. One Maoist official attempted to justify the union’s refusal to call on contract workers to join the strike by falsely claiming that it was illegal.

ICFI supporters explained to MATE workers that permanent and contract workers at the Maruti Suzuki car assembly plant at Manesar in the north Indian state of Haryana took united industrial action in 2011 against sweatshop conditions. They also pointed out over that 10,000 contract workers held several indefinite strikes to demand a pay rise and permanent jobs at Neyveli Lignite Corporation in Neyveli, 350 kilometres from Chennai, the Tamil Nadu capital.

From the outset the WSWS has explained that the MATE auto parts workers’ strike is part of the growing resurgence of workers-class struggles internationally.

The central lesson of the MATE workers’ strike and its betrayal by the unions is that the struggle for permanent jobs, decent wages, improved working conditions and basic democratic rights can only be advanced by challenging the capitalist system and all its political agencies.

This requires a complete break from all Stalinist-Maoist controlled, pro-capitalist unions and for workers to establish genuinely independent rank-and-file committees that fight to mobilise autoworkers in unified action throughout India and around the world on a socialist and internationalist program.



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