

India: Motherson's "inquiry" rubber stamps sacking of strikers

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An internal investigation by Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering (MATE) in India has endorsed its dismissal of militant workers involved in last year's 140-day strike over wages, conditions and union recognition at the company's Sriperumbudur plant in Tamil Nadu.

On July 20, Motherson management sent notices to the 51 permanent workers it sacked during the dispute, informing them that an internal company inquiry had confirmed the "charges" against them. The letter gave the victimised workers one week to reply to the inquiry's bogus findings.

Motherson's witch-hunt of these workers was directly facilitated by the betrayal of the protracted strike by the Maoist-controlled Left Trade Union Centre (LTUC). Having isolated the strike for more than four months, the LTUC directed the strikers back to work on January 13 without any of their demands being granted or the reinstatement of the sacked workers. The union rubber-stamped the company "investigation," claiming that if the 51 permanent workers were not reinstated there would be a legal challenge.

MATE, which was established in 1986 as a joint venture between Samvardhana Motherson Group and Japan-based Sumitomo Wiring Systems, has facilities in 42 countries, employing a total of over 135,000 workers. In 2018, the giant corporation had a turnover of \$US11.7 billion.

Along with its Sriperumbudur plant, MATE operates two other factories in Tamil Nadu and has a total of 11 facilities across India, including in the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Haryana and Gujarat.

MATE's Sriperumbudur facility has over 1,500 workers but only a third are permanent, with the remainder either contract or trainee employees. In

defiance of management pressure and intimidation, 300 of the plant's total 568-strong permanent workforce began an indefinite strike on August 26 last year. The strikers demanded a wage rise, better working conditions and recognition of the Chengai Anna Mavatta Jana Nayaga Thozhilalar Sangam (CAMJTS) union.

The newly-formed union was initially linked to the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), the union wing of the Maoist Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist-Liberation (CPI-ML-Liberation). Towards the end of the strike, however, and following an unexplained factional split in the AICCTU, the CAMJTS affiliated with the LTUC, a regional breakaway.

Under the MATE-LTUC return-to-work deal, management's "disciplinary inquiries" would be submitted to an assistant labour commissioner for a final ruling. This was ignored by management, whose July 20 letters by-passed the assistant labour commissioner. Thus far, neither the assistant labour commissioner nor the LTUC has raised a word of protest against MATE management's arbitrary violation of the agreement.

The deafening silence of the LTUC is no surprise but a continuation of the role it played, along with the AICCU, throughout the Sriperumbudur dispute. Both union coalitions isolated the strikers, refusing to mobilise the hundreds of contract workers and trainees at the plant, and made no appeal to other Motherson group employees in Tamil Nadu or anywhere else in India.

Instead, the unions directed the strikers into harmless and futile appeals to the anti-working class Tamil Nadu state government and various government labour officials. The AICCTU and LTUC bureaucracies both

told MATE management they would end the strike and drop all demands if the company agreed to take no action against the strikers.

The AICCTU factional split and formation of the LTUC was another manifestation of the right-wing Tamil regionalist orientation of all the Maoist-Stalinist organisations in Tamil Nadu. 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 autoparts workers from their fellow workers across India, directed the strikers to participate in Tamil nationalist demonstrations and protests.

The reactionary policies of the AICCTU and LTUC flow from the nationalist and pro-capitalist program of the CPI-ML-Liberation, which is electorally aligned with the two main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

In the 2019 Indian parliamentary elections, these organisations joined an electoral bloc led by the big-business Dravida Munnethra Kazhagam (DMK). In Bihar state, the CPI-ML-Liberation aligned itself with the pro-capitalist Congress Party and pledged to help it form an alternative government.

Throughout the Motherson strike the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) published articles exposing the treacherous policies of the AICCTU and the LTUC and elaborating a socialist and international program through which Motherson workers could advance their struggle.

Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) distributed and discussed this material with the strikers in defiance of the desperate attempts to block them by AICCTU and LTUC officials.

MATE management’s bogus inquiries and its ongoing attempts to intimidate the victimised strikers vindicate the warnings made by the WSWS.

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 internationally.

Some of the victimised strikers, who do not want to be named due to fear of reprisals, have contacted the WSWS since receiving MATE management’s July 20 letter, explaining that they have lost faith in the LTUC.

These workers, who had turned to the WSWS for guidance during the dispute, said that the union had not contacted them about MATE’s letters. They also explained that they now realise why LTUC officials were so hostile to the WSWS and why they told strikers not to talk to WSWS reporters.



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