

Indian Toyota workers continue strike in defiance of company-government repression

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Over 3,000 Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) workers in the southern Indian city of Bangalore are continuing their strike, now nearly three months long, against speed-up and management harassment. The workers are continuing to defy a back-to-work order issued by the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Karnataka state government on November 18.

The courageous workers are also facing mounting pressure to call off the strike from the BJP's opposition parties, including Congress and Janata Dal (Secular), and the deliberate isolation of their struggle by the Joint Committee of Trade Unions (JCTU). The JCTU is aligned with the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the union federations affiliated to two main Stalinist parliamentary parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI) respectively.

The workers have rejected the TKM's demands to increase production by 20 percent to boost the company's global competitiveness and profits.

The BJP-led state government is working closely with the company to find some type of compromise to push striking workers back into the factory. Meanwhile, the TKM management is peddling lies to demoralize and divide the striking workers and push them back under the company's back-breaking conditions. TKM claims over 1,000 unionized workers have broken ranks and returned to work.

In discussions with the *World Socialist Web Site*, striking Toyota workers have refuted these claims. "TKM management is using all sorts of dirty tricks to push the striking workers back to work. The claim that 1,000 striking workers have returned to work is an outright lie. There have been only a few hundred." He added, "So far, management has victimized 71 striking workers. By declaring the strike illegal, the TKM cut our salary for eight days. Unable to cope with the brutal working

conditions over 1,000 workers have left in the last two-and-a-half years."

TKM has a total workforce of 6,500, of which 3,460 are unionized and work on the assembly line. The remaining employees include supervisors and office staff, many of whom are required to work on the assembly line under Toyota's *Genchi Genbutsu* ('Go and See for Yourself') philosophy, which is employed specially to break strikes. Two TKM-owned car assembly plants are located in Bidadi, about 50 kilometers from Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), the capital of the southern Indian state of Karnataka.

The workers began a sit-in strike on November 9, demanding the reinstatement of suspended TKM Employees Union (TKMEU) leader Umesh Gowda Alur. He was victimized for bringing to management workers' grievances over unbearable workloads. In an attempt to break the strike, the management imposed a lockout the following day.

Three days after the strike, the management suspended 39 workers for alleged "acts of misconduct," even though the facility was closed at the time. Since the state government's issuing of a back-to-work order on November 18, TKM has suspended another 25 workers and terminated another five, bringing the total number of victimized workers to 71. Although the union indicated its readiness to comply with the state government's back-to-work order, the strikers rejected its terms and continue to defy it.

The leaders of opposition parties, including the Indian National Congress, until recently the preferred party of the Indian capitalist ruling class, and Janata Dal (Secular), are intervening to find a way to end the Toyota strike. Both parties are committed to maintaining India as a cheap labor platform for transnational corporations.

Representatives from the two opposition parties have repeatedly shown up at the protest sites of Toyota workers

in Bidadi, Ramanagara district, claiming to support workers. Given the record of those parties—including the role of Congress in the frameup and jailing of the Maruti Suzuki workers in Manesar, Haryana—we warn Toyota workers their intervention is not to defend workers but to end the struggle and shore up the interests of big business investors.

The former Karnataka Chief Minister and current opposition leader in the state assembly, HD Kumaraswamy of the Janata Dal (Secular), was cited in various social media reports on December 20 saying, “The solution does not appear to be in sight though the strike by the employees of Toyota Kirloskar’s Bidadi plant is completing two months. The differences between the workers and management, issues related to middle managers and the government’s apathy, may also be the reasons for such a situation. But there is a dire need to put an end to the impasse in the interest of the state’s industrial development.”

Kumaraswamy’s visit to the workers’ protest site on January 7 was aimed at breaking “the impasse in the interest of the state’s industrial development,” maintaining sweatshop conditions in the factories in order to attract investment from foreign and local capitalists.

Typical of an Indian capitalist politician, Kumaraswamy has also peddled communalism in an effort to divide workers who are conducting one of the most important struggles in India, which has global significance for autoworkers and broader sections of the working class. After claiming he had intervened in meetings with Toyota management “in a bid to resolve the workers’ crisis,” he added, “Through such meetings, it appears clear that the managers who stand in between the management and the workers are trying to create confusion as well as problems. It is important to note that these managerial personnel are not from either this region or the state,” he claimed, as if the exploitation of workers would be any less if the managers were from the same area.

The fact of the matter is every country and every region is divided fundamentally into two classes, the ruling exploiting capitalist class and the oppressed and exploited working class, regardless of color, religion, race and language. But Kumaraswamy wants to pit striking Toyota workers in Karnataka against their class brothers and sisters throughout India and internationally, which would only lead to defeat.

Siddaramaiah, another former chief minister and state Congress leader, also raised “concern” about the ongoing Toyota worker’s strike. In a letter to Karnataka Chief

Minister BS Yediyurappa, he said, “Workers are protesting in an empty space in front of the company’s plant. Even though the protest has entered the 40th day, there is no sight of a resolution.” The only “resolution” he is seeking is the end of the strike so production at the Toyota plant can be resumed and investors reassured.

The Congress and JD (S) politicians share the same fear with the ruling BJP that the ongoing strike by Toyota workers could serve as a catalyst for far broader sections of the working class to mount strikes and other class actions against slave labor conditions, raising the prospect for a unified struggle of workers against all the capitalist parties.

In India, most of the trade union federations are directly affiliated with political parties that have themselves played a crucial role in the imposition of pro-market policies and capitalist restructuring over the past three decades. This is true of the Congress Party-affiliated Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC); the Labor Progressive Federation (LPF), which is the union front of the Tamil Nadu-regionalist DMK; and of the Stalinist CITU and AITUC.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, every Indian government, beginning with Congress, has pursued policies aimed at making India a haven for global capital and expanding India’s ties with US imperialism.

Toyota India workers must make their struggle the spearhead of a battle to unify workers across the country and worldwide against the common enemy: the global capitalist system, which drives workers around the world into a race to the bottom in terms of wages and conditions. The formation of new organizations of struggle, including rank-and-file factory committees independent of the pro-capitalist trade unions, must be combined with a political struggle for workers power and socialism. Indian workers must repudiate all the parties of the bourgeoisie, their Stalinist accomplices, and their communalist, caste-ist, regionalist and nationalist politics, and base their struggles on the program of socialist internationalism, rallying behind them tens of millions of rebellious farmers and the oppressed.



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