

Maruti Suzuki worker jailed for life on frame-up charges dies due to authorities' negligence—a victim of ruling class justice

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The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) was recently informed of the death of Jiyalal—one of 13 workers at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar car assembly plant who an Indian court sentenced to life imprisonment in March 2017 on frame-up murder charges.

Indian authorities are directly responsible for the death of the worker-militant Jiyalal at just 35 years of age, because they refused to provide him with proper medical care even after he was diagnosed with cancer.

Jiyalal and the 12 others were found guilty of the death from smoke inhalation of Awanish Kumar Dev, a human resources manager who died in a mysterious fire that erupted inside the auto plant during a management-instigated altercation on July 18, 2012.

They are victims of a legal vendetta mounted by the police, courts, and India's two principal parties, the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), at the behest of Maruti Suzuki, India's largest automaker. Their sole "crime" was to have been in the leadership of a militant struggle against a brutal work regimen, poverty wages, and precarious contract-labour jobs that became a pole of worker opposition in the giant Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt on Delhi's outskirts.

Jiyalal and the 12 others were convicted at a sham trial, at which the prosecution presented fabricated evidence, the police perjured themselves and the judge deliberately mangled the law to shift the burden of proof onto the accused. The WSWS has written extensively on the Maruti Suzuki workers struggle for the past decade and in conjunction with the International Committee of the Fourth International has mounted a worldwide campaign to secure their immediate and unconditional release.

Jiyalal was singled out and named the "main accused" at the trial of the 13. This is because it was his arbitrary disciplining by a Maruti Suzuki manager that sparked the July 18, 2012 sit-down protest by his fellow workers that the company ordered its security guard goons to brutally attack.

The incident began when Jiyalal rightly insisted that a supervisor who had interrupted his 7-minute tea break to give him his "daily feedback" on meeting production targets, do so during company time. For this the supervisor hurled vile caste-abuse at Jiyalal, belittling him because he was a Dalit (descendant of "untouchables"), then suspended him.

Jiyalal died on the evening of June 4 from spinal cancer at his home in Dhakal, a Haryana village located about 200 km

northwest of Manesar. Because of the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities have temporarily released some prisoners, including the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers.

Jiyalal's illness went undetected for much of the past decade during which he was subjected to almost continuous incarceration, beginning from the third week of July 2012 when he was first rounded up by the police and thrown in jail. Along with around 150 other Maruti Suzuki workers who were caught up in the police dragnet, he was brutally beaten and tortured while in police custody.

After the March 2017 court verdict, Jiyalal was shipped off to prison to serve his life sentence along with the 12 others. He was the only one of the 13 who wasn't a member of the 12-member executive of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), which the Manesar workers had established during the course of a bitter year-long struggle in 2011-12 against a government-supported, pro-company union.

Even after medical personnel in prison detected Jiyalal's cancer, the prison authorities callously refused him proper treatment, merely supplying him with painkillers to relieve his back pain.

After much effort by Jiyalal, his family and his supporters, detailed tests were performed at a medical institute in the city of Rohtak. But the medical report was not provided to his family, as the institute's staff, no doubt acting under official orders, insisted it could be released only to Jiyalal, who had been returned to prison, or to the prison authorities.

Despite Jiyalal's life-threatening illness, the high court in Haryana repeatedly denied his application for temporary release (bail) to get treatment for his illness. By the time he started receiving the necessary treatment, the cancer had progressed to the fatal stage 4.

Even during his excruciating final year at home, the police would routinely appear and threaten his parents, telling them that they could still haul Jiyalal back to prison. Jiyalal's father was so worn down from all of the tragedies he had witnessed and suffered throughout his life, especially the monumental trials of his innocent, beloved eldest son, that he himself passed away several months ago.

Jiyalal leaves behind his mother, younger sister and brother, wife and two young sons aged just 2 and 9 years old.

This young worker hailed from a small village in northern

Haryana comprised of around 1,500 families and about 8000 inhabitants, according to the 2011 census. Like most of his co-workers, Jiyalal was a first-generation proletarian doing his best to escape poverty and the marginal living conditions in his native village.

After finishing high school, Jiyalal enrolled in an Indian government run Industrial Training Institute (ITI), a well-known trade school. After graduation, he became a worker at the Maruti Suzuki automobile plant located in the Manesar township, which is home to numerous transnational corporations.

When he commenced work at the auto plant, he was the sole bread winner for his family. Now this burden falls entirely upon his younger brother, Sandeep. After Jiyalal was arrested in 2012, Sandeep had to cut short his own schooling to help support the family.

In a moving obituary written by his former co-worker and fellow MSWU militant Ram Niwas, Jiyalal is described as a person who was sincere, tenacious, and possessed a great sense of humour. Ram Niwas, who used to work alongside him on the assembly line, explained that Jiyalal had risen to become a workers' leader, always remaining calm despite the extraordinary trials he went through.

The date of Jiyalal's death on June 4 coincided with the tenth anniversary of the sit-down strike waged by the Maruti Suzuki workers at the Manesar plant in 2011 for 13 days. Jiyalal took part in this historic struggle. The workers were rebelling against brutal working conditions, including the need to assemble an automobile every 45 seconds and daily management abuse, and fighting for recognition of a new organization independent of the officially sanctioned, pro-company union.

Jiyalal is a victim of ruling class justice. The police, the courts, and the Haryana state and central Indian governments—first under the Congress and then the BJP— worked hand in glove with company management to impose exemplary punishment on these workers. At their trial, the state demanded the 13 MSWU leaders be sentenced to death by hanging.

This is because the Indian ruling elite wanted to reassure profit-hungry foreign corporations that they could depend upon the Indian state to quash any worker opposition to sweatshop exploitation. As state special prosecutor Anurag Hooda infamously declared at the workers' March 2017 sentencing hearing, "Our industrial growth has dipped, FDI (foreign direct investment) has dried up. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is calling for Make in India, but such incidents are a stain on our image."

Responsibility for Jiyalal's painful, grossly premature death lies with those who railroaded him into prison through a monstrous frame-up. The prison authorities who denied him medical care are directly culpable. But it also need be underlined that the beatings he suffered, including on his back, during his first weeks under arrest could well have resulted in untreated internal back injuries and trauma that could have caused or contributed to the subsequent development of the cancer that caused his death.

Jiyalal's death is the second among the 13 Maruti Suzuki frame-up victims. In February, 37-year-old Pawan Dahiya died at his farm after getting electrocuted from an apparently faulty submersible well-pump.

Thousands of other workers who were dismissed en masse by the Maruti Suzuki management in August 2012, in a government-backed purge of the Mansar workforce, are still struggling to make a living. At least two have committed suicide.

The Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and their affiliated trade union apparatuses, the CITU and the AITUC, along with the rest of India's trade unions have completely abandoned the Maruti Suzuki workers. Despite having a sizable presence in the Manesar industrial belt, the Stalinist-led unions have refused to mount any struggle to expose the frame-up and win the release of the Maruti Suzuki workers.

However, the growing upsurge of working class struggle in India and internationally is creating conditions to break through the isolation imposed by the unions and Stalinist parties and to renew the fight for the immediate release and exoneration of these class war prisoners. Workers, having experienced decades of capitalist austerity and a dramatic worsening of their working and living conditions due to the pandemic, are ever more openly challenging the prioritization by the ruling elite in every country of corporate profits over workers' lives and livelihoods.

Recently, Toyota workers in the state of Karnataka mounted a four-month-long strike against brutal working conditions. Hyundai and Renault-Nissan auto workers in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu took job action last month to demand a shutdown of production as COVID-19 spread widely. In the United States, 3,000 Volvo Truck workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, have rebelled against the efforts of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and company management to ram through sweeping concessions and are now in the second week of a strike.

To provide a means for the working class to coordinate its struggles in different factories, industries and across state borders and continents in opposition to big business, their political hirelings in government, and the corporatist trade unions and develop a counter-offensive based on a socialist-internationalist program, the International Committee of the Fourth International has initiated the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

A key task of the IWA-RFC and of all genuine rank-and-file worker organizations must be to redouble the struggle to develop a worldwide movement to win the immediate freedom of the surviving 11 framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers and all other class war prisoners.



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