

A working class martyr: Framed-up Maruti Suzuki worker Jiyalal dead at age 35

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Jiyalal, one of the 13 Maruti Suzuki autoworkers jailed for life in 2017 by an Indian court on frame-up murder charges, has died at the age of just 35. He leaves behind a wife and two small children.

The Indian state bears criminal responsibility for Jiyalal's premature death. It refused to provide him medical treatment even after he was diagnosed with skeletal cancer. Jiyalal was savagely beaten during his first arrest and was held, along with the other Maruti Suzuki workers, in horrific conditions in prison.

Jiyalal is a working-class martyr and a victim of ruling class justice. Workers entering into struggle in India, the United States, and internationally must be made aware of the brutal legal vendetta pursued against him and his work colleagues. It is necessary to redouble the fight to secure the freedom of all the Maruti Suzuki workers.

Jiyalal was a well-known militant worker at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar car assembly plant located in the massive Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt on the outskirts of India's capital, Delhi. Prior to Jiyalal's death, Pawan Dahiya, another of the 13 convicted workers, who had been temporarily released from jail due to the pandemic, died from electrocution at his farm.

Jiyalal and his colleagues were targeted for exemplary punishment by the police, courts, and Haryana state and Indian national governments because they sought to resist the ruling elite's class war agenda of turning India into a cheap labor location capable of generating huge profits for multinationals like the Japanese-owned Maruti Suzuki, India's largest automaker.

In 2011, workers at the assembly plant launched a militant struggle to establish their own trade union in opposition to a government-sanctioned, pro-company union. After a year of bitter strikes and job actions, they finally succeeded in establishing the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) in 2012 with the aim of putting an end to the poverty wages and sweatshop conditions that prevail throughout India's globally integrated industrial sector.

Recognizing that the struggle of the Maruti Suzuki workers was becoming a pole of attraction for workers throughout the Gurgaon industrial belt, management responded furiously. They provoked an altercation in the plant during which a fire

mysteriously erupted, which claimed the life of Awanish Kumar Dev, a human resources manager sympathetic to the workers' struggle. The altercation began after a manager hurled vile castist slurs against Jiyalal, a Dalit (a descendant of "untouchables").

After the fire, Jiyalal, along with all 12 executive members of the MSWU, were charged with Dev's murder.

The subsequent savage repression against the workers at Maruti Suzuki was unprecedented. The police, using lists provided by the company, rounded up and abused over 150 workers. The Congress Party-led Haryana state government endorsed the company's purging of 2,300 full-time and contract workers—almost the entire workforce—before the plant was reopened in August 2012.

The trial of the Maruti Suzuki 13 was a legal travesty. The judge arbitrarily excluded all testimony from workers on the grounds that they would be "biased" toward the MSWU. Evidence was manufactured and witnesses were coached by the police. The burden of proof was shifted onto the workers, with the judge declaring that if the workers could not prove someone else had lit the factory fire, this was proof that they had done it.

This witch-hunt was overseen by the entire political establishment. It began under Congress Party governments in Haryana and at the national level. It was continued seamlessly after they were replaced by the Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party. Summing up the view of the ruling class as a whole, special state prosecutor Anurag Hooda, arguing for the workers to be hanged, declared, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is calling for 'Make in India,' but such incidents are a stain on our image."

"Make in India" is the Indian ruling elite's agenda to establish the country as a prime location for investments by multinationals on the basis of low wages, sweatshop conditions, and a dictatorship of management on the shop floor. It is the economic arm of the Indian ruling class' determination to eclipse China by serving as American imperialism's key regional ally, including by transforming India into a frontline state in Washington's conflict with Beijing.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the WSWs responded to the arrest of the Maruti Suzuki workers by launching a global campaign to demand their

freedom, which won widespread support.

The trade unions, including those led by the Stalinist Communist Party of India–Marxist (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI), abandoned the Maruti Suzuki workers. The CPM and CPI, which have considerable support in Gurgaon, refused to organize any campaign calling for the Maruti Suzuki workers' release. They intentionally isolated the workers even while acknowledging in their own press that other employers were threatening to “do a Maruti Suzuki,” i.e., witch-hunt militant workers using physical violence and legal vendettas.

The Stalinists played this role because they did not want to endanger their political alliance with the big business Congress Party, and because they feared that any struggle in defense of the Maruti Suzuki workers could become a rallying point for a broader working class movement that would rapidly escape their control.

The resurgence of the class struggle in India and internationally is creating the objective conditions to overcome this isolation and revive the global campaign for the freedom of the surviving 11 Maruti Suzuki frame-up victims.

Over the past 18 months, Indian workers have participated in strikes and mass protests against the Modi government's raft of pro-investor reforms, which include privatizations, the gutting of business regulations, an expansion of the use of contract labor, and the banning of most worker job actions. In two nationwide general strikes in 2020, tens of millions of workers held coordinated protests against this ruling class onslaught.

Autoworkers in southern India, including in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, have waged strikes against poverty wages and dangerous working conditions during the pandemic. Last month, multinationals Hyundai and Renault Nissan were forced to temporarily close their plants due to worker job actions.

The upsurge of the working class is a global process. Recent months have seen a series of significant strikes by workers across the United States, including Warrior Met coal miners in Alabama, St. Vincent nurses in Massachusetts, and ATI steelworkers. Major struggles have also been waged by educators across the US and Europe against the dangerous working conditions in schools during the pandemic.

These struggles are bringing workers into ever more direct conflict with the corporatist trade unions. In line with their Indian counterparts, the unions fully support the intensification of the exploitation of the working class, have endorsed the ruling elite's “profits before lives” strategy throughout the pandemic, and are promoting virulent nationalism to justify the imperialist powers' war drive against China.

The rebellion by workers against the union bureaucracy has found its most advanced expression at the Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, where workers have established a rank-and-file committee to oppose the effort of the United Auto Workers union to ram through a concessions-filled contract demanded by the company.

Under these conditions, an appeal from the Maruti Suzuki workers and their supporters to workers across India and internationally for a unified global campaign to secure the immediate freedom and exoneration of the Maruti Suzuki 11 would meet with a powerful response.

Autoworkers in the United States, nickel miners in Canada and bus drivers in Britain know from first-hand experience that the savage brutality is not unique to India or Maruti Suzuki. Over the past 18 months, they have experienced how all of the institutions of the capitalist state and their junior partners in the trade unions have conspired to keep workers on the job throughout a deadly pandemic, leading to countless worker deaths, on the one hand, and the massive accumulation of wealth, on the other.

The organizational framework required to wage such a campaign is provided by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which was launched at this year's May Day rally by the International Committee of the Fourth International. As the IWA-RFC's founding statement explained, it seeks to “develop the framework for new forms of independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale. The working class is ready to fight, but it is shackled by reactionary bureaucratic organizations that suppress every expression of resistance.”

The basis for the building of the IWA-RFC in opposition to these nationalist, pro-capitalist organizations is the fight for socialist political leadership in the working class.

We call upon autoworkers in India, North America, Europe, and internationally, together with workers from all other economic sectors, to demand the freedom of the Maruti Suzuki class war prisoners. Send statements of support to the *World Socialist Web Site* and make the decision to support the construction of the IWA-RFC by building a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.



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