

Indian and Sri Lankan auto industry workers support US autoworkers

Our reporter
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Auto workers in India and Sri Lanka made the following statements in support of the struggle being waged by United Auto Worker members at the Big Three auto companies in the US.

The first comment is from a member of the rank-and-file committee at the Renault-Nissan plant outside Chennai, the Tamil Nadu state capital, in India. The Chennai plant employs about 6,000 workers, at least half of them designated as contract employees or trainees, meaning they are denied permanent status and paid much lower wages.

The developments in the US with the UAW bureaucracy show that irrespective of where they live, workers face the same situation.

Despite 97 percent of UAW members voting for a strike, the union bureaucrats are holding back this struggle to favour the corporations. If the UAW wanted a real fight, it would widen the struggle and strengthen it. Instead, the UAW bureaucracy is weakening this battle and confining it to strikes at a few plants. This is no doubt a path to capitulation.

My brothers and sisters in the US do not believe the UAW bureaucracy and are determined to fight the corporates.

We need to share this information as widely as possible with our fellow workers. We are already doing this through our rank-and-file committee, but we will have to do it on a wider scale and extensively utilise social media.

The corporate management, with the backing of the trade union bureaucracy, are spying on us to target activist workers and their leaders. Because of this, we face challenges in organising the work of our committee.

The bosses are imposing drastic conditions on auto workers. In Indian factories they are setting up CCTV

(close-circuit television) cameras without any consent or agreement from workers. They are restricting mobile phone usage during working hours and extending our working day beyond eight hours. I would like to highlight the fact that internationally we all face the same ruthless conditions.

In December last year our committee issued a statement entitled “Rank-and-file Committee at Renault-Nissan plant in India opposes union attempt to ram through wage-cutting contract.” The statement explained how the trade unions—Renault-Nissan India Thozhilalar Sangam (RNITS) and the United Labour Federation (ULF)—are working with management to betray the workers and carry out the agenda of the corporates.

Last year’s statement said: “For more than four years, the unions kept us entirely in the dark about what was happening in the arbitration/negotiation with Renault-Nissan. Now, fearing growing rank-and-file anger over their inaction, the unions have connived with management to ambush us—forcing us to vote on-the-spot on an agreement that we haven’t seen, let alone studied and discussed.”

This is how the trade unions operate to keep workers in poverty. Trade union bureaucracies are not for workers but for management.

This is not just happening at the Renault-Nissan factory but also at the Ford factory in Tamil Nadu’s Sriperambatur-Oragadam industrial belt where the unions betrayed workers fighting to stop the destruction of thousands of jobs.

Last year Ford, with the agreement of the Chennai Ford Employees Union (CFEU), closed its assembly plant in Tamil Nadu. They insisted workers have faith in the Indian legal system to secure their jobs and win sufficient compensation. This was an utter fallacy. In

this way the union created a safe path for the corporates to wash their hands of workers by paying meagre compensation and destroying thousands of jobs.

It is very clear that this is an international phenomenon.

Prasad, is a professional painter in the auto industry at the Mr. Painter company in Vauxhall Street, near central Colombo, Sri Lanka. The company employs about 600 workers. “It’s news to me about the deteriorating conditions of auto workers and their struggle in America. It now seems that workers in every country have to undergo the same issues,” he said.

“As workers we must support them [the American workers]. Everything is built by the workers, but only a few people enjoy the benefits. There must be fairness for the American workers’ demands.”

Suranjith, a young auto worker with the same company, has 15 years’ experience in the industry as a polisher, having worked on Fords, Land Rovers, Jaguars, Audis and other brands in Dubai and Sri Lanka.

“The American workers struggle in 1886 which led to the Haymarket massacre made it possible for workers around the world to win an eight-hour working day,” he said.

Referring to the struggle of UAW members, he said, “If workers around the world are engaged in struggles, then we must support them. As a contract worker I’m paid according to the quantity of work that I’m assigned. This means there are days without any work and therefore without any payment.

“I used to think that American auto workers led a better life and even wished to go there to work. It seems though that the conditions American workers confront today are comparable with what Sri Lankan workers face.”



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