

Stalinist CITU shuts down Samsung India workers' militant strike on orders of DMK government

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The Stalinist-led Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) shut down the militant 37-day strike of 1,400 workers at Samsung India's Tamil Nadu household-appliance manufacturing plant last week. It did so on the orders of the state's DMK government, which was itself acting at the behest of global capital and India's far-right, BJP-led national government.

The CITU called off the strike without the rank and file having any say, and without achieving any of the workers' demands, including for company and state recognition of the newly-organized, CITU-affiliated Samsung India Workers Union (SIWU).

Instead workers have been sent back to work based on a worthless pledge from the transnational electronics and appliance manufacturer. According to CITU leaders, Samsung has promised to "engage with the workers on their key demands and not to victimize the workers."

Backed to the hilt by the state authorities, the company has at every point demonstrated that it is intransigently opposed to addressing the workers' grievances, which include poverty wages, long working hours, and wretched working conditions.

The CITU is the trade union federation of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM. India's principal Stalinist parliamentary party, the CPM is a close ally of the DMK and, like it, is a strong supporter at the national level of the Congress Party-led INDIA opposition alliance (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance).

Throughout the strike, the DMK government acted as an enforcer for Samsung management, blocking government certification of the union and repeatedly unleashing police to violently attack and detain workers en masse. This reached a climax on Oct. 9 and 10, when police raided the homes of union leaders, stormed the strikers' tent (situated far from the plant due to court order), tore it down, and detained hundreds of workers for hours.

After participating in two days of tripartite conciliation talks with the DMK government's Labour Department and Samsung management, the CITU announced Oct. 15 that it was unilaterally scuttling the strike and that the workers would return to work on Oct. 17.

In order to provide a fig-leaf of democratic consent for its total surrender to the ferociously pro-business DMK government, the

CITU bureaucrats convened a "general body meeting" of the SIWU the next day. It was held at a marriage hall in Kanchipuram, about 30 km away from where the plant is located.

The purported purpose of the meeting was to give workers their say on the shutting down of the strike. However, none of the 1,200 Samsung workers who attended were allowed to speak, or even to ask questions. Instead, they were lectured and hectored by CITU officials, who then called on them to raise their hands in support of the previously-announced return to work.

The CITU's utter submission to the DMK was declared a stunning, even historic, victory by CITU President A. Soundararajan and SIWU President E. Muthukumar, a CITU functionary who is not a worker at Samsung.

Muthukumar cynically praised the workers for following the CITU's orders that they abide by all the court rulings against them and not oppose police violence by appealing for workers in the Sriperumbudur industrial belt and broader Chennai region to take job action in their defence.

"Generally," said Muthukumar, "when there's a protest, especially a strike, there's large-scale violence and riots. It goes to tribunals and courts. But this workers' protest was conducted in a highly ethical manner. The world is looking at this protest with wonder."

A worker who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* following the meeting said Soundararajan told them that they must follow all of management's rules upon their return to work in the same fashion as they obey the laws of the country when they are outside the factory.

Additionally, the workers were told that the union's sole purpose is to demand justice on their behalf; it does not provide protection for them when they make "mistakes." In saying this, the CITU bureaucrats indicated that they would not come to workers' defence if they challenge management's attempts to intimidate them and expand management's powers and prerogatives.

Adding insult to injury, the CITU bureaucrats concluded the meeting by garlanding each other and raising shouts of victory. Similar boasts, aimed at befuddling the workers, have been made by the CITU's national leadership, the CPM and their Left Front allies.

In reality, the CITU's capitulation was total.

Early on in the dispute, the Stalinist bureaucrats made clear that

if the union was recognized by the company and given legal certification, they would shelve the workers' other demands. Making this still more explicit, CITU State President Soundararajan said Oct. 12 the union was "not in a hurry to increase the wage" at Samsung or to secure improved working conditions. Workers, he continued, are "not babies."

Yet the tripartite agreement imposed on the workers by the CITU manifestly fails to provide any form of recognition to the SIWU, which the workers established in June to mount a collective struggle against Samsung.

The SIWU is not mentioned. Nor is there any reference to workers' constitutionally protected statutory right to union recognition—a right, it need be added, that governments and employers across India routinely flout.

To the end, Samsung management contemptuously dismissed the CITU/SIWU's call for the company to provide a written reply to the strikers' "Charter of Demands."

The South Korean-based transnational corporation patently intends to continue to refuse to recognise the SIWU, and to maintain the fiction that the "Samsung Workers' Committee" it has created, with the DMK government's blessing and support—using a small number of workers that it has intimidated or bought off—is "representative" of the workers at the company's Tamil Nadu plant. On Oct. 7, in front of several DMK ministers, Samsung Management signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with this bogus "workers' committee."

When the strike was wound up by the CITU bureaucrats, the workers were told they would be returning to work on Thursday, Oct. 17. However, in what must be taken as a further signal that Samsung intends to break any and all promises it made to secure an end to the strike, management subsequently announced that workers will be informed individually, by letter, when they should report for work.

For decades, the Stalinist CITU and CPM have functioned as an integral party of the capitalist political establishment, systematically suppressing the class struggle. This has included propping up a string of right-wing national governments that implemented "pro-investor" policies and forged an anti-China "strategic partnership" with US imperialism.

Time and again, the CITU apparatus has isolated and sold out militant workers' struggles for fear they would trigger broader working class resistance and disrupt its cosy relationship with the ruling class. The CITU refused to mobilize its many thousands of members in the Sripurumbudur industrial belt, including those who work at Samsung suppliers, in defence of the Samsung strikers. Thus the CITU did nothing to unite the Samsung workers' struggle with that of the nearly 100 permanent workers at a nearby Samsung-supplier SH Electronics who have been on strike for more than 120 days to protest the dismissal of 12 workers for forming a union affiliated to the CITU.

While the CITU's betrayal of the Samsung workers struggle is entirely in keeping with its right-wing, anti-worker record, the brazen manner in which it was carried out is bound up with the political dynamics of Tamil Nadu. In exchange for the CPM promoting the pro-big business, Tamil chauvinist DMK as a "progressive party" and stalwart supporter of "secularism" and

"social justice," the latter has been willing to include it and its Left Front partner, the Communist Party of India (CPI), within its electoral alliances for the national and state elections. Of the six seats the CPM and CPI have in India's lower house of parliament, four or two-thirds come from Tamil Nadu.

According to press reports, the DMK threatened the CPM that if the CITU didn't put a quick end to the Samsung workers' struggle, it would move to punish it by severing their alliance. The DMK, reported the *Quint*, signalled that "the alliance is not imperative for its political strategy."

Despite the Stalinists' best efforts the five-week Samsung strike attracted the attention of workers in Tamil Nadu, one of India's most important industrial states, and across India.

It also caused much concern and anger in ruling class circles, for it was viewed as a threat to their efforts to attract global investment by touting India as a cheap-labour and pro-US alternative production chain hub to China.

This, and the fear of the workers' militant example, is why the DMK government responded with such ferocity to the workers. The national BJP government was equally hostile. It urged Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin to put a quick end to the strike. Later, after the DMK had repeatedly deployed police to attack the strikers, the BJP's Tamil Nadu general secretary, Professor Raama Sreenivasan applauded. "The action taken by the Tamil Nadu government is correct and it should take more stringent action against the Left unions protesting against Samsung," declared Sreenivasan.

The experience of the Samsung workers is common to workers all over the world. The workers demonstrated great determination and self-sacrifice in resisting big business' state-supported drive to sweat ever greater levels of profit from them. But the workers came up against the fact that the nationalist, pro-capitalist trade unions and the establishment "left" parties, including the Stalinist imitators of the CPM, function as instruments for disorganizing the working class and imposing the diktats of capital.

The working class is the most powerful social force in the world. For that power to be mobilized, workers must build new organizations of class struggle, rank-and-file committees, and a genuine mass revolutionary workers' party committed to the program of international socialism and rallying the oppressed masses against Indian and global capitalism.



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