

# Stalinist-led CITU orders end to Samsung India strike leaving 23 suspended workers in the lurch

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Samsung India has intensified its campaign of harassment against workers at its household-appliance manufacturing plant in Tamil Nadu, after the Stalinist-led Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) abruptly shut down a militant month-long strike by 500 permanent workers.

The CITU ordered the workers to cease their strike on March 7 without allowing them any vote on its decision to end the strike, and without the company immediately reinstating 23 workers it has arbitrarily and vindictively suspended. The suspensions were the key issue in the strike.

Emboldened by this betrayal, the South Korean-based transnational company is refusing to pay most of the permanent workers their annual bonus for 2024, and is systematically transferring known militants to more arduous jobs within the plant.

The trade union affiliate of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), the CITU short-circuited the strike, as support for it was growing among workers in the industrial belt on the outskirts of Chennai where the Samsung India plant is located.

The Stalinists feared the strike could become a trigger for a broader working-class mobilization that could rapidly escape their control. They also, no doubt, came under intense political pressure to suppress the strike from their close political allies in Tamil Nadu's DMK-led state government.

The DMK has backed Samsung management to the hilt throughout the now almost year-long struggle of the permanent workers to win recognition of their Samsung India Workers Union (SIWU) and secure a collective agreement that addresses their manifold grievances. The DMK has repeatedly unleashed police violence against the Samsung workers, and for months the state Labour Department refused to recognize the SIWU, although union recognition is a statutory right under India's constitution.

Shortly after forming the SIWU on their own initiative in July 2024, the workers turned to the CITU and affiliated their union with it, in the mistaken belief that it would strengthen their struggle against the dictatorial Samsung management.

Instead, the CITU has systematically isolated the Samsung workers' struggle and, as is its standard practice, refused to

challenge management's creation of a divisive hierarchy among the workers, by appealing for support from contract and trainee workers and fighting for their right to secure, well-paying jobs.

As a result, throughout the four-week strike, the company was able to continue production using the non-permanent workers, and to hire additional temporary workers with the implicit threat that the strikers would be permanently replaced.

The strike began on February 5, when workers ceased work to protest the suspension of three SIWU office-bearers, themselves rank-and-file workers, who had demanded a meeting with one of the company's South Korean managers to protest management's relentless harassment of the workforce, especially union supporters.

Later the company suspended a further twenty workers in an attempt to break the strike.

After this fresh provocation, and under pressure from the strikers, the CITU announced that some two weeks hence on March 13 it would hold a one-day sympathy strike of workers at other plants in the Kanchipuram District. Workers at dozens of plants subsequently announced their intention to participate. However—and this should come as no surprise given the Stalinists' decades-long record of suppressing the class struggle and tying the working class to the DMK and other right-wing bourgeois parties—the CITU and CPM ensured the strike was shut down well before March 13.

In announcing the return to work, CITU District Secretary Muthukumar, who is acting as the main spokesperson for the SIWU, claimed that a great victory had been won since Samsung had rescinded its canceling of the strikers' company IDs and dropped its demand they each provide an "apology" letter.

The Stalinists' claims of a victory have proven to be hollow, just like the claims that Muthukumar made when the CITU arbitrarily shut down the strike mounted by the Samsung workers last fall. The 23 suspended workers are now being subject to additional company reprisals under a management "Disciplinary Action Proceeding," and all the former strikers are being harassed.

Having again sabotaged the Samsung workers' struggle, the Stalinist Muthukumar complained in a March 21 Facebook post that management continues to display open hostility towards the workers despite the CITU bending over backwards to "maintain smooth and peaceful relations."

In the same post, he elaborated on a series of hostile management moves. In addition to withholding the annual bonus, management is constantly pressuring the workers to join the management created "Workers Committee" in lieu of the SIWU.

Workers who participated in the strike are frequently being transferred to jobs that are more onerous or for which they have not received proper training. Some female workers have been reassigned to different departments, where they are forced to handle heavy materials. The workers are also being compelled to pass through "training sessions," at which company managers harass and seek to intimidate them.

The CITU's betrayal of the Samsung workers is in keeping with the Stalinist CPM's role as an integral part of the capitalist political establishment that postures as "left," even "Communist" so as to better confuse and demobilize the working class.

The CPM is a close ally of the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) party and maintains a politically incestuous relationship with it. The DMK provides massive financial support to the CPM. In so far as it and its Stalinist sister party, the Communist Party of India (CPI), continue to have a presence in India's national parliament, it is largely due to the readiness of the DMK to ally electorally with them. The DMK financed the CPM's campaign in the 2019 national elections to the tune of Rs. 100 million (\$1.5 million).

The CPM has long promoted the DMK as a secular and a "progressive" party despite the DMK's fiercely pro-business policies in Tamil Nadu. Both the CPM and the DMK are strong supporters of the INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance). It is led by the Congress Party, which till recently was the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of national government.

It is only within this context that the repeated betrayals by the CITU of not only Samsung workers, but also workers in the Kanchipuram industrial belt can be understood.

After announcing the withdrawal of the latest strike, Muthukumar lectured the workers to tolerate management abuse. "If management mistreats you, don't react; do your job and work hard. Don't worry about the training or how management speaks to you. Just ignore it."

Muthukumar further hectored the workers to cede all independent initiative and blindly follow the orders of the CITU apparatus. "Don't think for yourselves," he ordered. "Let us know if there are issues, and we will handle them. But don't go beyond the boundaries we set." Such rhetoric highlights the CITU's bureaucratic and pro-corporatist orientation of working "amicably with management" and

stands as testimony to the Stalinist bureaucrats' hostility towards and fear of the workers they purport to lead.

Taking advantage of the Stalinists' isolation and smothering of the Samsung workers' struggle and buoyed by the support they have received from the DMK-led state authorities, the company has doubled down on its intransigent stance. It is point-blank refusing to negotiate with the SIWU over the workers' grievances. These include poverty wages, long working hours, wretched working conditions and a harsh and arbitrary discipline regime, where workers are routinely disciplined for protesting abuses and unsafe conditions.

The provocative suspension of the three SIWU office-holders came just nine days after the Labour Department was compelled to officially register the SIWU.

The anti-worker politics of the CPM are also glaringly visible in the neighboring state of Kerala, where the Stalinists lead the state government. Over 26,000 rural public health workers, popularly known as ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers have been on strike for over a month demanding a livable wage of Rs. 21,000 per month (\$243) and pension benefits. However, the Stalinist government led by pro-business oriented Chief Minister Pinrayi Vijayan is hostile to the strike, telling the workers the state has no money to fund even such basic demands.

The experience of Samsung workers mirrors the experiences of workers globally who are facing ever more brutal working conditions and trade unions that act as agents of the management. The Samsung workers have shown incredible resolve and made great sacrifices in opposing Samsung's autocratic management, but their struggle has been sabotaged.

That is why the Samsung workers should decisively break with the CITU and take control of their struggle by establishing an independent rank-and-file committee. Such a committee should unite permanent, contract, temporary workers and other Samsung workers in India and globally. They should also establish solid links with their brother and sister workers in the vast Kanchipuram industrial belt, across India, and beyond.

Only such a movement, rooted in class struggle and socialist internationalism, can successfully counter the brutal exploitation by transnational corporations like Samsung.



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