

Stalinist CITU imposes new sell-out agreement on Samsung India workers

Martina Keerthi, Kranti Kumara
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The Stalinist-led Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has imposed by fiat, or arbitrary order from above, yet another sell-out agreement on workers at Samsung India's Tamil Nadu electric appliance plant.

The agreement was worked out under pressure from the DMK-led Tamil Nadu state government, which has bitterly opposed the Samsung workers' challenge to poverty wages and brutal working conditions for fear that their militant example would encourage broader worker resistance and scare away investors.

The CITU is affiliated with the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), which is itself a close ally of the DMK.

Signed on May 19 in the presence of DMK Labour Minister CV Ganesan, the agreement ignores virtually all of the workers' demands. It provides no relief from long working hours and a punishing pace of work. The 25 militant workers who have been victimized by management remain suspended and under threat of further disciplinary action.

Samsung management, which has repeatedly gone back on its words, has ostensibly committed to hike the wages of permanent workers by 18,000 rupees (US \$210) per month over the next three years, with a Rs. 9,000 (\$105) raise to be implemented in 2025-26 and per annum increases of Rs 4,500 (\$52.50) provided in 2026-27 and 2027-28. A further monthly salary hike of between Rs. 1,000-4,000 (\$12 to \$48) will be paid out to employees based upon the number of years they have been working at the plant. However, workers with less than 3 years seniority will get no supplementary increase.

The agreement severely shackles the Samsung workers. The CITU has instructed members of the Samsung India Workers Union (SIWU) to follow only "legal procedures" if they have grievances, which means that they can only complain to the rotten CITU bureaucrats. The workers have been expressly forbidden from engaging in direct actions such as sit-ins and strikes. Acting more like company officials than worker leaders, the CITU functionaries have claimed that any job action would be illegal under the

state's labor laws, essentially telling them that if they respond to the company's provocations they will be left out to dry.

Workers were not consulted about the agreement, with was signed on their behalf by CITU Tamil Nadu State President A. Soundararajan and CITU State Secretary E. Muthukumar.

Nor are they being allowed to vote on it, despite their having twice waged weeks-long strikes, first last September-October and again in February-March, and enduring a vicious, state-backed campaign of management harassment.

The state CITU leaders—who have seized control of the SIWU, which workers formed at their own initiative in June/July 2024—have failed to even properly inform the rank-and-file of the pay agreement that they negotiated.

Instead of distributing it to them, Muthukumar posted a distorted image of it on the X account of the state unit of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM.

Last month's agreement between the CITU and the management of the South Korean-based transnational company is entirely in keeping with the arbitrary manner that the top officials at the Stalinist labour federation have functioned throughout the now nearly year-long struggle.

Their imposition of a sell-out agreement by fiat, follows on from their abrupt shutdown of a month-long strike by some 500 of the 1,800 permanent workers at the plant. The strike, which began on Feb. 5 as a sit-down strike, erupted spontaneously after management suspended several worker-leaders of the SIWU. Because of constant management harassment and threats and the CITU's opposition to a fight to unite the plant's permanent and contract workers, many union supporters continued working during what was the second strike against Samsung in five months.

The strike was called off, as support was building among workers across the Sriperumbudur-Kanchipuram industrial belt for a one-day strike in support of the Samsung strikers. Sriperumbudur and Kanchipuram lie on the outskirts of Chennai, Tamil Nadu's capital and India's fifth largest city.

An article in the CPM's English-language weekly, *People's Democracy*, sheds light on brutal working

conditions at Samsung's Tamil Nadu plant—conditions that the CITU promoted agreement will do absolutely nothing to alleviate.

“Reports indicate,” it says, “that workers have a brief turnover time of just 10–15 seconds to complete each product, often enduring stretches of four to five hours of continuous work. **Some tasks on the assembly line must be completed within four seconds.** Although the official break time is 10 minutes, workers effectively receive only eight minutes, as they must return one minute early and can leave one minute after the break begins.” (Emphasis added)

According to reports, from this month onwards, the workday at the plant will be extended from an already grueling 11.5 hours to 12 hours, (11.5 hours of work and 30 minutes of unpaid breaks.)

Confident that it has the backing of the right-wing, Tamil chauvinist DMK government, Samsung has mounted one anti-worker provocation after another. These include forcing workers to undergo “retraining” sessions at which managers tried to browbeat them into joining the Samsung Employees Welfare Federation (SEWF), a management created stooge union; and transferring militant workers to other more arduous jobs.

In April, management announced that the around 500 workers who had accepted the SEWF as their “representative” would receive a pay rise, under an agreement it had “negotiated” with the stooge organization. The pay raise was denied to the 1,300 permanent workers who were members of the SIWU and who had taken part in strikes and agitations.

Aware of the explosive anger among the workers and fearing that the CITU was losing all credibility among the rank-and-file after its sabotage of the two previous strikes, the CITU's Muthukumar issued Samsung management a 14-day strike notice to demand pay raises for the SIWU workers and the immediate reinstatement of 25 suspended SIWU members. However, this proved to be bluster, with the CITU taking no action at the April 16 strike deadline.

Starting May 13, around 900 workers began a series of protests, including a one-day hunger strike to press for their demands for a pay raise and reinstatement of the 25 suspended workers. As part of these protests, the CITU scheduled a gathering for Samsung workers in Kanchipuram for May 14. However, the police in Kanchipuram refused to give permission for a rally, fearing that such a gathering could become a magnet attracting other workers in this industrial belt.

This was the context within which on May 19 the CITU reached its “pay agreement” with Samsung.

When a reporter asked about the still suspended 25 workers, it was the DMK labour minister who responded,

not the CITU officials present. He said that the agreement was strictly confined to wage increases and that the fate of the suspended 25 workers would be addressed at some unspecified time in the future.

That the Stalinist CITU should act as a consort of the DMK government should come as no surprise. The CITU's political parent, the CPM, is closely allied with the DMK, participating in DMK-led electoral alliances in Tamil Nadu in both state and national elections, and receiving massive funding from the state's ruling party to support its election campaigns. Even more fundamentally, the Stalinist CPM and CITU agree that “industrial peace” must be maintained so as to preserve Tamil Nadu's reputation as a “business-friendly” state.

Samsung workers have to learn from this bitter experience. They should decisively break with the CITU and take control of their struggle by establishing an independent rank-and-file committee and wrest back control of the SIWU from the CITU. Such a committee will have to unite permanent, contract, temporary workers and establish links with Samsung workers in India and globally. Samsung workers should also reach out to their brother and sister workers throughout the Sriperumbudur-Kanchipuram industrial belt and across Tamil Nadu and India to forge unity against their employers and develop a working class counter-offensive against austerity, privatization, contract labour, communal authoritarianism and war-mongering.

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



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