

# Defying police repression, Maruti Suzuki workers in India continue fight

By Arun Kumar  
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The Congress Party-led Haryana state government mobilized thousands of heavily armed riot police against a peaceful demonstration of hundreds of Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) workers last month. Defying threats, 500 workers and their supporters gathered to mark the first anniversary of the government vendetta, which began with the frame-up of striking workers after the death of a factory manager on July 18, 2012.

The workers have maintained a courageous nearly two-year struggle against state repression and the brutal sweatshop conditions at MSI, the Indian subsidiary of the Japanese transnational Suzuki Motors Corporation.

Police were deployed to intimidate the workers and prevent them from holding a peaceful rally at the site of their choosing in the Manesar industrial belt. As a result, the workers were forced to move their rally to open ground about 20 km north in Gurgaon district.

Describing the police-state measures on July 18, the MSWU (Maruti Suzuki Workers Union), said: “Around 2,000 police personnel were present at the site itself where we assembled, and the mobilization of the police force in Manesar was over 10,000 personnel armed with weapons, lathis, water cannons, tear gas vehicles creating a threatening atmosphere in the entire industrial belt. Many workers were physically stopped from joining our demonstration. Our own workers kept receiving threatening calls from the CID (Crime Investigation Division) against joining the protest. The entire Union body of Suzuki Motorcycles India Employees Union were detained in a police station in Kherki Daula village in Gurgaon by the SHO (Station House Officer) and their phones switched off, so that they could not join our struggle.”

The workers are demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all of the 147 workers who were rounded up and jailed after the MSI manager’s

death, and then brutally tortured by police on behalf of MSI management. (See: “India: Jailed Maruti Suzuki workers subjected to torture”)

The incarcerated workers have been languishing in jail for over a year on totally trumped-up charges with “confessions” extracted by torture. A further 66 workers are still being hunted by police based on a list provided by management.

In addition, the company has also fired around 2,000 contract workers and 546 permanent workers in retaliation. Protesters demanded an immediate reinstatement of all of these workers.

The courts have recently denied the jailed workers bail, with the judge insisting that doing so would trouble foreign investors. According to the MSWU, the Haryana High Court dismissed bail pleas in May, saying, “foreign investors are likely not to invest the money in India out of fear of labour unrest.”

The MSI workers are also demanding an impartial inquiry into the death of the company’s human resources manager, Awanish Kumar Dev, who was killed after management provoked a clash with workers at the factory last July. MSI management and the state government seized on Dev’s death to step up their efforts to prevent the MSI workers’ struggle from triggering a broader struggle by the working class against slave-labour conditions in India.

The Haryana government in partnership with the Congress Party led UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government aims to make an example out of the MSI in order to send a message to global investors that the government will go to any length to guarantee their profit interests.

Both permanent and contract MSI workers began their struggle in 2011, demanding the regularization of contract workers, a wage hike and a halt to repression.

They established an independent union in opposition to the company's stooge union to fight for these demands. Ever since June 2011, they have been engaged in indefinite strikes and factory occupations.

The Congress Party-led state government, led by Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, has openly sided with the MSI management, joining the company in refusing recognition to the newly formed independent union MSWU and repeatedly mobilizing police to act as enforcers of the company's diktats. The government demanded workers sign a company-dictated "good conduct bond" meant to deprive them of any rights, blamed the struggle on "politically-motivated outsiders" and fully supported management's purging of the workforce.

The government also threw the entire elected leadership of the MSWU behind bars. Since then a group of workers has established a provisional leadership of the MSWU to continue their fight. One of the provisional leaders was also arrested suddenly in January.

During a meeting with the provisional leadership of the MSWU, Hooda called the workers "criminals."

The main political responsibility for the perilous situation facing Maruti Suzuki workers rests with the largest union federations in Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt, which are affiliated with the Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

During the Manesar workers' months-long militant struggle in 2011, these unions systematically isolated the strikers and advised them to appeal to Congress state government and labour officials with the stooge union, which have all lined up with the company and the state.

The role of the unions flows from the politics of their affiliated Stalinist parties, which have become parties of the Indian political establishment, fully committed to the ruling elite's economic "reform" policy of transforming India into a cheap-labour platform for local and international investors. The Stalinists are violently opposed to any mobilization of the working class because they fear its potential of developing into a head-on confrontation with capitalist rule in India.

Various pseudo-left organisations, including Maoist-oriented groups and unions, now involved in

the Maruti Suzuki workers' campaign, have told MSI workers to appeal to the Congress governments in Haryana and at national levels.

Under the political influence of the Stalinist unions and other organisations, involved in the Manesar workers' campaign, the MSWU has pursued the same line of appealing to the Congress-led governments.

Maruti Suzuki workers and all their supporters must oppose this political dead end, which threatens their struggle with certain defeat.

To defeat the dictates of the market and the company-government witch-hunt, the Maruti Suzuki workers must turn to their class brothers and sisters across India and internationally, consciously linking the opposition in their fight against victimizations with the fight to develop a working-class counteroffensive against job cuts and slave-labour conditions. This struggle is necessarily a political struggle against the capitalist ruling class as a whole, because the government, state apparatus and all the political parties—including the Stalinists—serve as enforcers of those conditions.

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