

Thirteen sentenced to life imprisonment in India

Free the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers!

20 March 2017

The World Socialist Web Site calls on its readers to sign the online petition demanding the release of the 13 framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers!

Workers across India, throughout Asia and around the world must come to the defense of the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers whom an Indian court has cruelly and vindictively sentenced to life imprisonment. Given the brutal conditions that exist in Indian prisons, the workers have been consigned to the equivalent of a living hell. But they are all innocent men. The only “crime” of which they are guilty is fighting brutal conditions at their auto factory near Delhi.

Their convictions are the outcome of a monstrous frame-up mounted by the Suzuki Corporation, the police and judicial authorities, with the full complicity of India’s principal political parties—the Congress Party and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The savage sentences imposed on the Maruti Suzuki workers must be reversed! The workers must be freed and allowed to return to their families and their jobs.

The 13 workers condemned to life in prison include the entire 12-member executive of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU). Workers at Maruti Suzuki’s Manesar, Haryana car assembly plant established the MSWU in bitter struggle against a stooge union that had connived with the company in their exploitation.

The framed-up workers were involved in a series of militant industrial actions and protests, including walkouts and sit-down strikes, that challenged the sweatshop regime Maruti Suzuki and other major employers, foreign- and domestically-owned, maintain in their Indian plants.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* denounce unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms the persecution of these workers and 18 other workers who were convicted along with them on lesser charges. The Indian state and political establishment have conspired to frame up the Manesar Maruti Suzuki workers to intimidate workers across India and demonstrate to big business that they will act with utter ruthlessness to stamp out worker resistance to low wages,

precarious contract-labor employment and brutal working conditions.

Government officials, prosecutors and judges have repeatedly demanded that the Manesar Maruti Suzuki workers be harshly treated to “reassure” investors. At last Friday’s sentencing hearing, the prosecution went so far as to call for the 13 workers to be sentenced to hang.

The pretext for the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers and an August 2012 workforce purge in which the company fired and replaced 2,300 workers was a July 18, 2012 management-provoked altercation and fire that resulted in the death by asphyxiation of a company human resources manager, Awanish Kumar Dev.

In finding the 13 guilty of “culpable homicide” in Dev’s death, the court willfully ignored its own finding that the police had colluded with the management of the Japanese-owned automaker and that evidence against the workers had been fabricated.

Defense lawyers showed that the mass arrests the police carried out following the 2012 factory-floor altercation were based on lists of “suspects” provided by the company, that the witnesses were coached, and that they were systematically unable to identify those they had accused of rioting and other crimes.

So discredited was the prosecution’s case that the court, in its March 10 verdict, had to exonerate 117 other Manesar Maruti Suzuki workers who the authorities had vehemently insisted were guilty.

The prosecution’s entire case against the 13 workers revolved around the fire. Yet it could not provide a single shred of evidence linking any worker, let alone any of the 13 centrally targeted, to the starting of the fire. Nor could it say anything credible about where, when or how the fire was lit.

The International Committee calls upon working people, students and youth throughout the world to fight for the freedom of the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers: Ram Meher, Sandeep Dhillon, Ram Bilas, Sarabjeet Singh, Pawan Kumar, Sohan Kumar, Ajmer Singh, Suresh Kumar, Amarjeet, Dhanraj Bambi, Pradeep Gujjar, Yogesh and Jiyalal.

The ICFI is launching an international defense campaign aimed at mobilizing the industrial and independent political strength of the working class in India, South Asia and around the world to defeat the company-state vendetta against the Maruti Suzuki workers. The international working class must take up the fight for the immediate release of all of the framed-up workers, the vacating of all guilty verdicts, and the reinstatement of all the workers purged in 2012.

The frame-up and jailing of the Maruti Suzuki workers is the most extreme example of a universal process. In every country, giant corporations and their political hirelings are waging a war against the working class.

In the United States, Europe and Japan, right-wing politicians such as Donald Trump are attacking refugees and immigrant workers even as they accelerate the assault on the jobs, living standards and social programs of every section of the working class. Their aim is to channel even more money to the funding of criminal wars and the further enrichment of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

In India, Bangladesh and across Asia, Africa and Latin America, transnationals such as Japanese-owned Suzuki have set up advanced production facilities where workers are subjected to the most brutal forms of exploitation. The political establishment and state machinery, as exemplified by the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers, are at their beck and call when it comes to ruthlessly suppressing all worker resistance.

It is not possible for workers in any country to defend themselves outside of uniting with their class brothers and sisters throughout the world in a common struggle to defend the social and democratic rights of all workers.

Among Indian workers, there is enormous sympathy and support for the Maruti Suzuki workers. Fearing mass protests, government authorities in the Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt—a huge automating and manufacturing center on the outskirts of India’s capital, Delhi—have repeatedly imposed blanket bans on all gatherings of more than five people and mobilized thousands of police.

In India, as around the world, the trade unions and traditional “left” parties have completely abandoned the working class. The Stalinist-led All Trade Union Congress (ATUC) and Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) have maintained, for the past five years, a criminal near-total silence on the victimization and frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers. Their websites and those of the political parties with which they are allied—the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—have kept silent on the March 10 conviction and March 18 sentencing of the workers.

The Stalinists and other union apparatuses are adamantly

opposed to a campaign linking the defense of the Maruti Suzuki workers to the mobilization of the working class in industrial and independent political struggle against contract labor, low wages and sweatshop working conditions.

They have used their influence to prevail on the MSWU and the Manesar workers to expend their energies on appealing to the big-business politicians and Indian police and courts—that is, to the very institutions that enforce the dictatorship of big business, the growth of poverty and ever-increasing social inequality.

Indian and Haryana state Congress Party-led governments presided over the initial state assault on the Maruti Suzuki workers. In the 14 months that preceded the mass arrests and purging of the Manesar workforce, the Haryana state government repeatedly mobilized police en masse to break workers’ actions and suggested that the MSWU was in cahoots with “terrorists” and other “outsiders” determined to “sabotage” the state’s economy. The BJP-led governments that subsequently came to power in Delhi and Haryana have seamlessly continued the company-state vendetta.

The ICFI urges autoworkers and all WSWS readers and supporters to oppose this travesty and demand the immediate freedom of the imprisoned Maruti Suzuki workers. The plight of these workers must be brought to the attention of workers and all those who defend democratic rights the world over. Join us in fighting to develop an international defense campaign based on the mobilization of the class strength of the working class.

The ICFI has launched an online petition demanding the release of the Maruti Suzuki workers. We call on all our readers to sign this petition and to join a Facebook page set up to organize and mobilize support.

International Committee of the Fourth International

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>