

Sri Lankan university students condemn Maruti Suzuki frame-up

By our correspondents
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Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Students and Youth for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka campaigned last week at universities in Colombo, Kandy in the hill country and Jaffna in the island's war-ravaged north, for the release of Maruti Suzuki workers in India.

Campaign teams distributed hundreds of Sinhala- and Tamil-language leaflets explaining how the Maruti Suzuki workers were set-up by management and outlining the importance of the campaign now being conducted by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Many students and workers denounced the Indian court's sentencing of Maruti Suzuki workers on March 18, including the entire 12-member committee of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), the independent union established by workers at the Japanese automaker's assembly plant at Manesar, northern India. Thirteen workers were sentenced to life imprisonment and 18 fellow employees received heavy jail terms.

The victimised workers played a central role in a series of struggles, beginning in mid-2011, against the unbearable workplace conditions at their plant. Their imprisonment is the outcome of a frame-up organised by the company, the police and judicial authorities, with the full collaboration of the country's main political parties, the Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party and the Congress Party.

SEP/IYSSE campaigners received strong support from students at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura in Colombo.

Deshan, a final-year commerce student, said: "The working class has a long history of fighting for its rights. But in this incident, we see how the capitalist governments are brutally suppressing workers' right to

struggle.

"This is definitely a warning to workers around the world. If the capitalists can cross national boundaries to exploit workers in any country, then the workers must go hand in hand with their fellow workers beyond national limits. I've actually read some articles on the WSWs and think its internationalist approach is correct." Deshan signed the ICFI's online petition after the discussion.

A final-year science student from the University of Sri Jayawardenepura said that he was confused at first about what Sri Lankan students could do to stop attacks on Indian workers. "After a discussion with you, I now realise how important it is to build the international solidarity of the working class in order to defend workers everywhere. This is a new experience for me and I feel that this approach is much needed to fight the capitalist attacks."

Supun, a first-year commerce student, said: "I think it's very important to have this sort of campaign to defend the victimised Indian workers. This is an inhumane assault by the Indian government. Next time it might be Sri Lankan workers who are under attack. We know that hundreds of contract workers in Sri Lanka have been protesting for better working conditions. The Sri Lankan government will take the imprisonment of the Maruti Suzuki workers as an example to crush the workers here. It's essential to unite the working class internationally to stop such attacks."

In Jaffna, SEP/IYSSE campaigners spoke to university students and a group of unemployed graduates who have been demonstrating for more than a month outside the district secretariat to demand employment.

Expressing his support for the ICFI campaign, one of

the protesting graduates, said: “They [the Maruti Suzuki workers] were in a struggle to win their rights, just like us. We demand the unconditional withdrawal of the bogus charges against these workers and their immediate release. We will also face these types of attacks in the future and that’s why we have to unite to defeat these attacks.”

Kumar, an unemployed arts graduate, also drew a parallel with Maruti Suzuki workers: “We have been protesting here to demand employment for more than 30 days now. We are ready to unite with all workers. We cannot accept what has happened to Maruti Suzuki workers and we condemn it. Giving life sentences to workers who are fighting for their rights is an act against workers all around the world.”

Haran, a Jaffna arts student, said: “I only found out about this brutal attack against Maruti Suzuki workers after reading your leaflet. The media here is completely silent about this critical issue. These are our brothers fighting for their basic democratic rights, like us, and I demand their immediate release. All workers and students globally should come forward to support the campaign launched by the ICFI and sign the online petition.”

SEP/IYSSE members and supporters in Kandy spoke to workers and students at the University of Peradeniya.

Ravindu, a third-year management student, said: “Although the TV channels, newspapers and various commentators mention some of the peoples’ grievances their coverage expresses the views of the ruling class.

“The main aim of the multinationals is to bring down wages. A degree is the minimum qualification for a job these days. Previously it was a GCE Ordinary Level. In the near future, I’ll have to look for work at companies like Maruti Suzuki. The frame-up of these workers is a direct threat and one that will be faced by people like me.”

A university worker pointed to the dangers facing the Sri Lankan working class from the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government and its desperate attempts to attract foreign investment. “Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is appealing to multinationals to invest in Sri Lanka. The imprisonment of the Maruti Suzuki workers in India is an example on what these multinationals will do here if their profit interests are

challenged in any way.”

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