

The kiss of death: Stalinists seek to tie Tamil Nadu auto strikes to right-wing parties

By Arun Kumar
10 November 2018

Three thousand workers from the Yamaha India and Royal Enfield motor-cycle manufacturing plants, and the auto-parts manufacturer Myoung Shin India Automotive (MSI) have been on strike in Oragadam—an industrial hub on the outskirts of Tamil Nadu’s capital Chennai—for more than six weeks.

In the face of violent police attacks, mass arrests, and pro-employer rulings from the courts, the workers are waging a determined struggle. They are fighting for improved working conditions, higher wages, the reinstatement of workers victimized by Yamaha for taking the initiative in forming a union, and recognition at all three plants of newly-organized unions affiliated with the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

The CITU is aligned with and controlled by India’s main Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM.

The Tamil Nadu autoworker strikes are part of a growing wave of workers’ struggles in India and internationally, and have immediately come up against the anti-worker nexus that unites the employers, the government, police and courts.

However, the Stalinist CITU leaders are doing everything to isolate the strikes in Oragadam. Although the courts and police have acted in unison to bar the strikers from picketing the strike-bound plants, the CITU has done nothing to mobilize the other workers that it represents in Oragadam, a vast auto-making hub, let alone across Tamil Nadu and India, in support of the striking Yamaha, Royal Enfield, and MSI workers.

And it has opposed the strikers raising demands on behalf of, or otherwise making a class appeal to, the contract workers the companies are using to continue production during the strike, although uniting contract and permanent workers is a strategic question. For decades, the use of contract-labour and multi-tiered workforces (contract, temporary, apprentice, part-time, etc.) has been a key weapon in Indian big business’ offensive against the working class.

Instead, the Stalinists have urged the strikers to direct

appeals to the Tamil Nadu state government, which is led by the AIADMK, a close ally of India’s ruling party, the Hindu supremacist BJP and to the AIADMK-controlled labour department. Similarly, they have told them to put their faith in, and abide by the rulings of, the capitalist courts.

In a further attempt to derail the strikes and tie them to the capitalist ruling elite, the CITU recently called an “all party” meeting at which the Stalinists paraded before the workers leaders of various opposition parties and their affiliated unions and touted them as allies of the strikers.

Those who shared the platform with the CPM and CITU leaders at the bogus October 30th meeting in support of the Yamaha, Royal Enfield and MSI strikes included: K. Sundar, the district secretary of the DMK, the main opposition party in the Tamil Nadu state assembly; M. Shanmugam, general secretary of the Labor Progressive Front, which is affiliated to the DMK; and P. Damodaran, state assistant secretary of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the union wing of the big business Congress Party. Leaders of several other Tamil Nadu-based bourgeois parties, including the MDMK, PMK and VCK, were also invited to address the meeting and pose as supporters of the autoworkers.

Addressing the meeting, CPM Tamil Nadu state leader A. Soundarajan claimed that the auto workers’ struggle has been “transformed,” and is now “between all [opposition] political parties versus the state government.”

Such claims are nothing less than an attempt to implant a kiss of death on the Yamaha, Royal Enfield, and MSI workers’ struggle.

All of the aforementioned parties are fully committed to the anti-working class, pro-investor agenda of the bourgeoisie that has resulted in the exponential growth of India’s billionaires over the past two decades, from 2 to more than 130, even while hundreds of millions are condemned to survive on less than \$2 per day.

The Congress Party—til recently the Indian bourgeoisie’s preferred party of government—initiated the pro-market reforms when it ruled India between 1991 and 1996, and

accelerated them and forged a global strategic partnership with US imperialism when it headed the UPA government from 2004-14.

The DMK has a similar anti-working class record, both as Tamil Nadu's governing party and as a junior partner in Congress- and BJP-led central governments. The smaller regional parties are satellites of the big business DMK and AIADMK and their respective partners on the all-India political arena.

The CPM-CITU "all party" meeting had a double reactionary purpose. To keep political control over the strikers by giving them the impression that the Stalinists were mobilizing support for them, while further turning them away from class struggle. And second, to advance the Stalinists' attempts to stitch up alliances with an array of bourgeois parties in preparation for next spring's national election.

At their national congress last April, the Stalinists agreed that, in the name of defeating the BJP, they are ready to reach enter into an electoral "understanding" with the Congress Party, even though they concede that that it is a neo-liberal, pro-US imperialist party, and will forge even closer alliances with various regional parties. The DMK, which is itself a close Congress ally, is one of the Stalinists' most important prospective electoral partners.

The CPM's October 6th-8th Central Committee reaffirmed this orientation. It announced three tasks for the party in the coming election, strengthening the "left," defeating the BJP, and ensuring "an alternative secular government"—that is, a Congress Party-led or other rightwing bourgeois government—"is formed at the centre."

Diverting the growing movement of the working class behind the bourgeois parties represented at the October 30th "all party" meeting and similar parties in other states is central to these goals: to provide the Congress, DMK and an array of other caste-based and regional bourgeois parties with some desperately needed "left" credentials to help them muster votes; and to augmenting the Stalinists' own influence within the political establishment.

Significantly, the longer the strikes have dragged on, the more the CITU has highlighted the demand for union recognition over all others, while stressing its adherence to India's pro-employer labour relations system. The message is unmistakable: if the employers recognize the CITU, it will work with them to contain and suppress worker opposition just as the CITU and CPM do nationally.

In this regard two further points need be made:

At the October 30th meeting, Stalinist leader Soundarajan—clearly under pressure from workers over the CITU's refusal to take action to shut down the struck plants—delivered a rant in which he suggested the strikers

wanted violence. "Telling the contract workers not to go to work or trying to stop them from going to work," said Soundarajan, "that is not a problem. But that may lead to lot of push and shove and bloodshed. Is that what you want?"

Second, the Stalinist leaders have kept the Tamil Nadu autoworkers in total ignorance about the state-employer vendetta against the workers at Maruti Suzuki's Manesar car assembly in Haryana, in north India. In 2012, Maruti Suzuki, Haryana's then Congress Party state government, and the police organized the arrested of 150 workers on frame-up charges and the sacking of 2,400 workers, because the Manesar plant had become a center of worker resistance to contract labour and poverty wages. Today, 13 workers, including all twelve members of the executive committee of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union, are facing life prison terms after being convicted on trumped up murder charges.

The Stalinists don't want the Tamil Nadu strikers to learn about the Maruti Suzuki frame-up for two reasons: first, because it is a devastating rebuttal of their claims that the big business politicians, courts and other authorities can be pressured into addressing workers' concerns; and second, because any campaign against the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers would scandalize their Congress and other bourgeois political allies.

The Tamil auto strikes and the growing upsurge of the Indian working class of which it is a part highlight the urgency of the struggle to expose the Stalinist CPM and CITU as social props of the Indian bourgeoisie and to arm the working class with a new political perspective based on the Trotskyist program of Permanent Revolution. That is, the systematic mobilization of the working class as an independent political force, rallying the toilers and rural poor behind it in struggle against all sections of the Indian bourgeoisie, and in the fight for a workers' government and the program of international socialism.

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