

Gujarat Tata Motors plant strike: 22 trade unions support suspended workers

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For last 19 days the workers at the Tata Motors Sanand plant in Gujarat have been on strike.

After 19 days of a stand-off between 422 striking workers of the Tata Motors Sanand plant and the company officials, on Saturday around 22 central and city-based trade unions pledged support to the strike. The workers however, unequivocally demanded that they are willing to resume work provided the company takes back the suspended workers and gives them a fair trial.

The workers who are on strike for last 19 days, announced that they will sit on a dharna outside Ahmedabad collector's office in the morning hours of March 14 and will be joined by representatives from 22 trade unions.

At a press meet on Saturday, the workers said that they may call on JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar and Patidar agitation leader Hardik Patel to help them appeal for their labour rights in forming a union. They also said that a trade union Sammelan uniting various trade unions in the state to highlight their plight is also on the cards and are now calling their new union Bhartiya Kamdar Ekta Sangh of Sanand.

Among the 22 trade unions which have declared support for the 423 Tata Motors workers include, AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress), CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions), Maha Gujarat Bank Employees Union, HMS (Hind Mazdoor Sabha), NTUI (New Trade Union Initiative), TUCI (Trade Union Centre of India), All India United Trade Union Center (AIUTUC), GMP (Gujarat Mazdoor Panchayat), AIBEA (All India Bank Employees Association), GFTU (Gujarat Federation of Trade Unions), Jan Sangharsh Manch, Dalit Adhikar Sangh, Jana Natya Manch and the LIC trade union among others. The unions also resolved to hold demonstration before the Ahmedabad Collector on Monday and then in Sanand GIDC along with farmers organisation and other civil society activists.

The workers also took to secret voting among themselves to ask their colleagues whether they wanted to resume work or to continue the agitation. "In the voting, all were in favour of continuing the agitation as they feel they may be suspended like the others and not get a fair enquiry. We are ready for an amicable solution, but our strike is not illegal as the company is claiming. We asked for rights to legally form a union and suddenly we were being treated like criminals by the company. Despite suspending 26 people on February 22, the company has only now sent out chargesheet against them. If we don't find a workable solution in the long run then we aim to unite all trade unions to highlight our plight in a Sammelan and even call leaders like Hardik Patel and Kanhaiya Kumar to highlight our cause," said Hitesh Rabari, among the 7 representatives of the workers in a press conference on Saturday.

At the press meet, Ram Sagar Parihar, vice-president of AITUC also questioned the interference of the Gujarat police who reached the Sanand plant on 22 February, much before any kind of talks had ensued between the disgruntled workers and the management.

In the recent tripartite meeting set up by the Ahmedabad Collector Rajkumar Beniwal, the workers conveyed to the Tata Motors to conduct a fair trial on the suspended workers and take them back and that the rest were ready to resume work.

“These workers were also willing to give an undertaking of peaceful compliance in return for the suspended workers to be taken back and given a fair trial. They even were ready to sit out the enquiry process in the Sanand plant premises. But the company was not willing to take back the suspended workers. At least 20 of the employees of who have been suspended are have won awards for their work efficiency. The Tata Nano plant at Sanand was a role model for good industrial relations in Gujarat, however, if labour rights are not granted to Tata Motors workers then it becomes symbolic of the fact that there are no good industrial relations in Gujarat. After the Dharna, the next step will be to move the agitation to Sanand plant,” said Ashim Roy, Senior Trade Unionist and Advisor to the workers.

Roy also averred that if things don't get resolved they will reach out to finance minister Saurabh Patel and also to members of Opposition party. “If Tata Motors doesn't relent then we may even call on youth leaders like JNU leader Kanhaiya Kumar and Hardik Patel, as many of these workers are farmers sons and are ITI trained. None of these leaders are deshdrohi(rebels) and in their own way are working for the good of the society. We will call on them to condemn this lack of labour rights being granted to Tata Motors Sanand workers,” Roy added.

A statement by the company on Saturday cited, “As per Tata Motors' traditions & policy, the company not only recognizes but also respects the right of the workmen to form a Union. Strong history of healthy working with Unions over a long period of time is a testimony to this. The 26 workmen who have been suspended on charges of serious misconduct and that has nothing to do with Union formation. As mentioned to the District Collector Ahmedabad in presence of workmen representatives, all workmen other than those suspended on charges of indiscipline, should resume duty. And we remain committed to completing the enquiries at the earliest as it is in the interest of business too to complete it soon.”