

தொழிலாளர் கூடம் (Thozhilalar koodam)

A blog on labour issues in Tamil Nadu

Fifth Anniversary of the Maruti Workers Struggle: Significance and Ramifications.

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On 18th July 2012, the struggle of Maruti Suzuki workers for unionizing and working with dignity reached a critical point. In the ensuing violence a worker friendly HR Manager died and 148 workers were arrested out of whom 117 were acquitted after spending 4 years in jail. 2500 workers were illegally terminated by the company. 13 workers have been given life imprisonment of whom 12 were formerly office bearers of the union.

Rally to Mark 5th Year of Maruti Suzuki Stuggle

Under the leadership of Maruti Suzuki workers union, there was a huge rally from Rajeev Chowk in Gurgaon to district administration office. Workers from all four plants of Maruti, Both plants of Honda in Gurgaon and Dharuhera, Hero, Aisin, Ahresty, Bellsonica, Daikin, Rico, Nerolac, Uniproducs, Mark Exhausts, Carrier as well as revolutionary organizations and trade unions like Worker Solidarity Center, Inquilab Mazdoor Kendra, Jan Sangharsh Manch (Haryana), Bigool Mazdoor Dasta, Shramik Sangram Samiti, NTUI as well as several central trade unions participated in the rally. In the meeting that followed, the organizations discussed the need to continue the struggle for justice to the incarcerated workers of Maruti as well as raising necessary funds to support the families of the imprisoned workers.



Rally to Mark 5th Anniversary of Maruti Struggle

Financial Support

During this discussion, Sunbeam union announced a financial support for the present year of 75,000 per family of the jailed workers. Each worker of Maruti workers union has promised 5000 Rs. which amounts to 80 lakh in total for the families. The Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon plant have supported the families in the past as well with the previous amount being around 20 Lakhs. Many other unions like Bellsonica have assured financial support for the families of the jailed workers. However, the provisional committee which has been at the forefront of the struggle since the beginning emphasized that financial commitments does not mean that the ground level struggles are over. In fact, the provisional committee emphasized that the unity of these unions and the organizations is their main strength and this struggle for justice as well as a larger struggle for winning workers rights in the region will only be won by ground level struggles fought on the basis of this unity.



Workers from various factories in the DMIC belt participate

The Lesson from the Struggle

It has been 5 years since workers of Maruti Suzuki confronted the state's paradigm of industrial neo-liberal exploitation in India head on, and as a consequence confronted the authoritarianism of the Indian state. The then Maruti Suzuki Chairman, R.C. Bhargawa termed it a 'Class Struggle.' Haryana state government called it mindless violence and some autonomist organization called it conspiracy by Marxist-Leninists. However everyone recognized that it represented a transitional point in the working class struggle in the Automobile Industry, especially in the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial corridor (DMIC).

During the protracted court case involving the jailed workers (13 of whom still remain in Jail) many events are unfolding to re-shaping our society along a regressive path. Political organizations advocating a fascist – hindutva paradigm have gained significant momentum winning the latest general elections. Their philosophy and agenda dictates the re-establishment of a hindu pyramidal society by oppressing religious minorities, peasants and

workers (of all religious identity). It also involves the submission to neoliberal capitalism through an assault on labour rights and legislative protections.

In the DMIC corridor, workers are fighting for their rights and against exploitation on a daily basis. Shop floor humiliation, inhuman working conditions, lay offs, arrest of protesting workers and police atrocities are fast becoming the new normal. Faced with the worsening conditions, Central trade unions seem to place their main hopes in increasingly ritualistic national level protests, belief in negotiation it's charter of demands with an authoritarian and anti-worker regime interested only in diluting even the existing safeguards for workers. On the other hand while workers militancy seems to grow, one is also increasingly faced with it's inadequacy in stopping the neo-liberal onslaught which is armed with state repression (a favoured tool of facism).

Struggle of Maruti workers for unionization, and for solidarity among contract and permanent workers represent a pole in the working class revolutionary struggle. Workers of Maruti Suzuki succeeded in forming a union inspite of a variety of attempts by the management to disrupt, divide and invalidate their process. Inspite of the best efforts of the capitalist class to divide workers as permanent vs contract, employee vs trainee and on ethnic, regional and religious lines the workers succeeded in unifying themselves as a social category. Moreover, by occupying the factory and stopping production, they also exposed the worst fears of the management. The struggle also turned into a movement where progressive student groups and civil society led by the workers combined forces and fought the state and the ruling class to obtain justice for the Maruti workers.

However many of the subsequent struggles which had a Maruti-Suzuki like genesis have not succeeded owing to a variety of factors. Honda workers continue to fight on, so does workers of OMAX, AUTOMAX and Aisin. BellSonica workers soldier on with their successful unionization while attempting to ensure that the movement does not end at their doorstep. We must hope that the successes, and failures of Maruti-Suzuki Workers movement were not in vain. Let the Proletariat of this country recognizes its role and responsibility in reshaping the society and defeating the facist neo-liberal forces of BJP/RSS.

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