

Union gains as Hyundai India strike ends

Friday 15 May 2009, by [FONTANELLA-KHAN James](#), [International Metalworkers' Federation](#), [SOOD Varun](#) (Date first published: 8 May 2009).

Management will respond to the union's Charter of Demands, jailed strikers are released and will return to work and disciplinary suspension of 20 strike organizers is withdrawn.

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INDIA: Indian autoworkers at Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) and members of the Hyundai Motor India Employees' Union (HMIEU) ended their work stoppage and hunger strike after management agreed to a number of worker demands, mediated by the Tamil Nadu District Commissioner of Labor.

More than 1300 workers went on indefinite strike April 20 with demands on wages, working conditions and a halt to labour rights abuses, including the company's refusal to recognize HMIEU and collectively bargain. The company has a pattern of victimizing union leaders and supporters and has attempted to sidestep the union through a company-appointed Works Committee.

The struggle intensified on May 6 when 900 strikers were arrested. Affiliates of the International Metalworkers' Federation have protested Hyundai Motor India's awful treatment of its workers, prompting letters of outrage as well as meetings and demonstrations at Hyundai's headquarters in Korea.

Among the gains the strike achieved, Hyundai Motor India agreed to:

- allow workers arrested during participation in the strike to return to work,
- not enter a settlement with the Works Committee before May 20,
- reply to each point of the Charter of Demands put forward by the HMIEU, and
- not victimize workers who participated in the strike, including withdrawing disciplinary suspension of 20 workers who had been involved in organizing the strike.

HMIEU and the company will enter into bargaining under the auspices of the District Commissioner of Labor as soon as the May 13 elections are over.

Still unresolved is the issue of reinstatement for 72 workers who have faced unfair dismissals, suspensions and involuntary transfers because of their union activities. They were not directly associated with the recent strike.

A large number of those supporting the strike were precarious workers who make up the majority of the workforce at the Hyundai operations in Chennai. Their fate has yet to be decided. Equal treatment of all workers and the rehiring of precarious workers dismissed prior to the strike are among key issues in the HMIEU's Charter of Demands.

Following news of the strike's successes, major media ran articles with a claim by Hyundai Motor India that some production from Chennai would shift to Europe due to the industrial action. According to the Korean Metal Workers' Union, no such investment decision has been made.

IMF / News article

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* From <http://www.imfmetal.org/main/index....>

Indian autoworkers strike Hyundai

Workers at Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) have entered the fourth day of strike action in protest of gross trade union rights violations and the company's refusal to enter collective bargaining with the union.

INDIA: More than 1300 workers went on indefinite strike on April 20 after management at Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL), located in Chennai, India, refused to negotiate contract demands with the Hyundai Motor India Employees' Union (HMIEU).

The company has taken a firm position that it will not negotiate with HMIEU, the sole registered union at the plant, and instead is pressing to enter into agreement with a company-appointed Works Committee. Workers downed tools after three rounds of mediation by the Deputy Labour Commissioner (DLC), during which HMIL expressed its refusal to negotiate with the union, failed to bring results.

Hyundai Motor India, which employs some 3000 precarious workers, has a history of rights abuses in the plant. The company recently terminated the contracts of some 600 workers, some who had worked at the plant for almost 4 years, just prior to them receiving permanent status.

Since July 2007, in response to the formation of the HMIEU, trade union leaders, members and supporters have suffered from dismissals, suspensions and transfers and workers have faced management's widespread use of threats, harassment and intimidation for joining a union. Currently 65 workers have been fired for their union activities and 34 more are in the process of being dismissed.

Approximately 1200 permanent workers, out of a total of 1500 permanent employees, and a large number of precarious workers are supporting the strike.

Among the charter of demands, workers are calling for:

- Union recognition and a collective bargaining agreement;
- Equal treatment of all workers;
- Reinstatement of all precarious workers fired as a result of the company's response to the economic crisis or those fired in an effort to deny them permanent status;
- Reinstatement of union members and officers unfairly fired, transferred or suspended and the withdrawal of all charges pending against them.

In March 2009, the International Hyundai-Kia Workers' Network meeting hosted by the International Metalworkers' Federation and the Korean Metal Workers' Union passed a resolution in support of HMIEU efforts and calling for an end to violations of trade union rights at HMIL. To see resolution text, [click here](#).

IMF / News article

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Hyundai to shift part of Indian production

By Varun Sood and James Fontanella-Khan in Mumbai

Hyundai Motor India is planning to shift production of one of its premium models to Europe after a strike over unionisation at its south India plant that led to the mass arrest of 750 protesters.

The move by South Korea's biggest carmaker is believed to be the first time such a step has been taken because of labour unrest since the country opened up to foreign investors in 1991.

The strike at the Sriperumbudur unit in Tamil Nadu state, which employs nearly 10,000 people, follows a rise in labour problems in India as campaigning for this month's general elections intensifies and economic times get tougher.

"Because of these problems, we cannot keep up with targets and hence some production will shift to one of our facilities in Europe," said Rajiv Mitra of Hyundai.

Mr Mitra said production of Hyundai's i20 compact saloon was likely to be moved. A decision was expected this quarter.

The company originally planned to produce 120,000 i20s this year at its south Indian plant, of which 80,000 would have been exported, mostly to Europe.

The Hyundai strike comes as a big domestic auto manufacturer, Mahindra & Mahindra, said workers at one of its plants had downed tools. Employees at a facility run by health group Wockhardt Hospitals have also gone on strike.

Last September, a labour dispute that turned violent led to the murder of the chief executive of an Italian automotive parts company based on the outskirts of New Delhi. Nevertheless, the company decided to keep its entire operation in India.

Tata Motors, the country's largest automaker, was forced last year to relocate a plant for the world's cheapest car, the Nano, after protests by farmers.

A prolonged in labour relations would be worrying for India's hopes of becoming an industrial power.

Hyundai, whose plant is based about 40 kilometres from Chennai, said the protests started last month after workers demanded the company recognise a new union.

The dispute escalated on Wednesday morning after 750 workers were arrested for blocking traffic in Chennai ahead of a planned election rally for Sonia Gandhi, leader of India's ruling Congress party. Police released them later that evening.

Edison Periera, a worker representative at Hyundai India, said employees had formed a union in July 2007 but the company's management refused to recognise it.

"We will continue with our protest till the time management agrees to our demands," said Mr Periera.

However, Hyundai India, which employs nearly 10,000 people at Sriperumbudur, said it already had an internal worker representative body.

"For 12 years we have not had any problems. But only now, since Sriperumbudur has become a parliamentary constituency, leftist-backed political parties want to get into the company's affairs," said Mr Mitra.

He said he expected the protest to die down after May 13 when Tamil Nadu goes to the polls in the general elections.

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