

Statement

# Support the Gurgaon Workers - Fight for Unfettered Trade Union Rights

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Gurgaon in Haryana has been time and again projected as the 'shining' India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. It has also been rocked by workers' protests, ignored by the media until it boils over. In 2005, a massive struggle broke out, only to be brutally crushed. But trouble was simmering for the past few months, and it boiled over in late October, as over 80,000 of workers walked off their jobs on the 20<sup>th</sup>, after the death of a colleague over the weekend when police fired on agitating employees of an auto parts company. The workers, belonging mostly to auto parts units in a belt that houses factories of India's biggest car maker Maruti Suzuki India Ltd and bike maker Hero Honda Motors Ltd, were protesting against the death of the RICO Auto Industries Ltd worker on Sunday.

The strike follows the militant struggles across industrial hubs such as Sriperumbudur and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, also home to several automobile companies and their ancillaries.

Protests began early Tuesday morning with hundreds of workers from Rico and Sunbeam Auto Ltd protesting near the company gates adjacent to National Highway 8, which connects Delhi to Jaipur. They were joined by waves of workers from other units such as Sona Koyo Steering Systems Ltd, Lumax Industries Ltd, Bajaj Auto Ltd and Hero Honda Motors Ltd.

The workers of Rico's Gurgaon factory were seething in anger since 21 September, 2009 when 16 employees were arbitrarily sacked by the management citing disciplinary reasons. The management resorted to such vindictive stand in response to workers' demand that their union be recognized by the labour commissioner. It is reported that the management hired gangsters to prevent workers from coming back to work and with the collusion of the police of the police, brought around 300 casual workers to resume work in the factory. There are testimonies of workers who were not allowed to leave the premises of the factory and tortured by the goons.

The management's act violated the workers' basic right to association guaranteed by ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention "Workers and employers, without distinction whatsoever, shall have the right to establish and, subject only to the rules of the organisation concerned, to join organisations of their own choosing without previous authorisation" and ILO Convention 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining "Workers shall enjoy adequate protection against acts of anti-union discrimination in respect of their employment." It is utterly shameful that India has still not ratified Conventions 87 and 98 on the freedom of association, the right to organise, and the right to collective bargaining.

Though Indian Trade Union Act of 1926 and the Industrial Dispute Act of 1947 permits the right to form trade unions and collective bargaining by the workers, the matter has been systematically impinged and violated by the Indian capitalist class. The working class in India, for that matter throughout the world, has established their rights through struggle and sacrifice and they cannot forego their right to collective bargaining including the right to form unions in furtherance of their

legitimate interests whatever may be the circumstances. We strongly denounce the attempts of the Rico management against the workers to suppress their justified collective action for the redressal of their grievances.

We salute the workers and stand in solidarity with their struggle with the hope that their collective class actions would further the workers movement and will motivate more and more struggles against the capitalist tyranny and their associates from the governments to the media.

We support the basic demands of the workers, including:

- \* Arrest and punishment of the people responsible for the death of RICO employee
- \* A substantial compensation to be provided by the company along with job to the kin of the deceased family
- \* The reinstatement of 16 employees sacked by the company
- \* And above all, the company must recognize the right of the RICO employees to form a union and recognize their own democratic union.

The intrigues by the trade-union bureaucracy on this issue are likewise condemnable. Though it was the AITUC which formally called the strike, the motive was revealed categorically by a leading member of the central trade union, who equated the workers' protests sans control as a Maoist menace. So the strike has been called only out of fear of some form of radicalism, not because working class emancipation is the goal of these bureaucrats. The betrayal of the movement by these leaderships after the 2005 repression of Honda Workers in Gurgaon – which was crushed by brutal state violence – is firmly etched in the memories of the workers.

We urge upon all trade unions of the country and internationally to rise in strong protest against such virulent attack on the trade union rights and to hold high the banner of class unity and class independence.

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