

Protests against Bush in India: For an international socialist strategy to fight imperialism

By the Editorial Board
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Hundreds of thousands of workers, peasants, students and other youth will participate in rallies and demonstrations across India in the coming days to protest against the visit of US President George W. Bush and the drive of the Indian bourgeoisie to forge a “global” partnership with US imperialism.

The demonstrators rightly recognize Bush to be the head of a rapacious regime that has waged two wars of conquest in the past five years with the aim of securing US domination over the oil resources of the Middle East and Central Asia, and is now threatening to make Iran or Syria its next target.

To the dismay of India’s United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, the Bush administration has bullied India into participating in the international gang-up against Iran and is seeking to prevent Indian energy purchases from Iran and Syria.

Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will no doubt spout platitudes about the blossoming of a new friendship between the world’s two largest democracies. In reality, what the US and India have in common is a phenomenal growth in social inequality and economic insecurity—the result of their ruling elites’ neo-liberal programs of privatization, deregulation, and unfettered domination of the market over all facets of social life. They also have both seen a growing state assault on democratic rights.

The Indo-American strategic partnership that the Bush administration and the UPA regime are seeking to forge is directed against the interests of working people in India, North America, and around world.

The US has been aggressively courting India, with a view to making it a linchpin of its efforts to prevent China from becoming a threat to the US’s position as the premier power in Asia.

The Bush administration has made no secret of the anti-Chinese thrust of its India policy.

US intelligence and geo-political analysts, reports the *Financial Times*, regularly compare the rise of China and India at the beginning of the twenty-first century to the late nineteenth century emergence of Germany and the US as the world’s most dynamic industrial powers—that is, to the geo-political shifts that set the stage for the world wars of the last century.

While wary of the US’s effort to harness India to its global security strategy, the Indian elite is anxious to secure Washington’s support for India’s acceptance as a major player in world politics: a nuclear-weapons state, permanent UN Security Council member, and acknowledged dominant power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

A second key aim of the proposed Indo-US partnership is to press forward with the transformation of India into a cheap labor site of global information technology, business-processing, scientific research and manufacturing production. Although there

are differences between US and Indian big business over the speed at which India should be fully integrated into the world capitalist economy, they are agreed that price supports and subsidies must be eliminated, business allotted the pivotal role in the construction of public infrastructure, the agricultural sector—in which 60 percent of Indians work—thrown open to agribusiness, and labor laws rewritten so as to facilitate the contracting-out of work, layoffs and plant closures.

In other words, US and Indian capital agree that the very policies that have produced dire social distress in rural India—as exemplified by the phenomenon of farmer suicides—and jobless growth in the cities must be intensified.

The mass protests that will shadow Bush during his two days in India, like the proposed Indo-US strategic partnership, objectively raise the vital question: on what basis can a successful movement against imperialism and the global offensive of capital be built?

At the outset, it must be bluntly said that those who are in the leadership of the anti-Bush protests—the Stalinists of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), their partners in the Left Front, and the trade unions—are adamantly opposed to the independent political mobilization of the working class in India and around the world against the capitalism.

Rather the Left Front and the unions are using the protests against Bush to press the UPA to position India differently in the struggle among the great powers for economic and geo-political advantage, and to provide themselves a political cover for their support for the UPA regime.

The Left Front readily admits that the 21-month-old UPA government has intensified the neo-liberal reforms and pro-US tilt of its predecessor, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government. Yet they insist that the UPA coalition—which is dominated by the Congress, the traditional governing party of the Indian bourgeoisie—must be sustained in office, claiming that this is the only means of blocking the Hindu supremacist BJP from returning to power.

There is no question that the BJP is a vile enemy of working people. But it was not inevitable that the shipwreck of the Indian bourgeoisie’s post-independence national economic development project should have redounded to the electoral benefit of the Hindu right, which for decades was a marginal force in Indian politics.

The emergence of the BJP and a host of casteist parties as major political players during the 1980s and 1990s was directly attributable to the CPI-M’s and the Communist Party of India’s (CPI) decades-long restriction of the working class to a perspective of parliamentarism and trade union struggles. While the two Stalinist parties differed at times over which parties or parties constituted the “progressive” wing of the Indian bourgeoisie that merited support against the feudal reactionaries

and pro-imperialists, they both insisted that the working class must not counterpose itself as the leader of the toiling masses to the Indian bourgeoisie and the capitalist social order.

In keeping with same outlook, the CPI-M and CPI today insist that a government committed to a socially regressive neo-liberal agenda and to forging a strategic partnership with US imperialism must be sustained in office so as to bar the way to an even more reactionary BJP regime.

Events have repeatedly demonstrated the enormous social anger that prevails among India's toilers and the potential for a working-class led political offensive against the bourgeoisie's drive to make India a world power through ruthless exploitation of its vast reserves of cheap labor, a massive military build-up, and alliances with the US or other imperialist powers.

The Indian ruling class—as exemplified by the *New Indian Express* editorial that called for the suppression of all strikes and unions—was shaken by the mass participation in last September's one-day strike against the UPA's economic policies.

But the Left Front has systematically suppressed the class struggle, most recently joining with the unions to shut down a militant strike against the privatization of the country's airports, so as to ensure the survival of the UPA regime. And in West Bengal, where it forms the state government, it is pursuing the very same economic “reform” program the UPA and its NDA predecessor.

By tying the working class to the reactionary UPA, the Left Front is not only facilitating the implementation of the bourgeoisie's neo-liberal agenda, it is creating conditions whereby the BJP and other discredited communalist and casteist parties can batten off the popular opposition to the UPA socially regressive policies.

In the campaign against the UPA's embrace of the Bush administration, the Left Front and the trade unions are likewise seeking to tie the working class and popular anti-imperialist sentiment to the bourgeoisie. With their demand that India's government pursue an “independent foreign policy,” they are making common cause with former Prime Minister V.P. Singh, regionalist-casteist bourgeois formations like the Samajwadi party, and sections of the nuclear and military-security establishment who fear that the proposed alliance with the US will deny the Indian bourgeoisie the freedom of action it needs to pursue its own predatory ambitions.

The CPI-M champions French President Jacques Chirac's notion of a multi-polar world and explicitly counterposes to the proposed Indo-US alliance, the call for India to forge a tripartite alliance with China and Russia.

Similarly the CPI-M and Left Front point to the non-aligned posture of the India during the Cold War as a progressive legacy

on which to build. (The CPI-M's party program says non-alignment “by and large served the country's interests well.”)

In reality, “non-alignment” was an instrument of the Indian bourgeoisie. It leaned on the Soviet Union, while seeking to develop an industrial economy relatively free from the control of the transnationals, through important substitution and national economic regulation. Non-alignment was also a weapon against the working class. It was used to systematically foster illusions in the progressive character of the Indian bourgeoisie and its state through largely rhetorical support for various anti-imperialist struggles. J. Nehru and Indira Gandhi also calculated that good relations with Moscow would be a further guarantee of the good behavior of the Communist Party.

So flagrant was the CPI's support for the Congress Party, a section of the leadership broke away to form CPI-M. But they did so on an entirely nationalist basis and throughout its history the CPI-M has otherwise upheld all the basic tenets of the CPI: support for the privileged bureaucracy that under Stalin's leadership usurped power from the working class in the USSR and the Stalinist doctrine of “socialism in one country”; the claim that important sections of the Indian bourgeoisie have and can continue to play a progressive role in the struggle against imperialism; the assertion that the Indian state, which was born in 1947 as the outcome of the abortion of the anti-imperialist struggle by the Congress leadership and the communal partition of the subcontinent, must be defended as a conquest of the masses and made the focal point for opposing imperialism today.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Leon Trotsky, champion an entirely different course.

The true allies of workers in India in opposing both imperialism and the socially regressive impact of capitalist globalization are workers in North America and around the world.

Workers in India must mobilize themselves as an independent political force and rally the toiling masses in support of an anti-capitalist program. Caste oppression, landlordism and other legacies of India's imperialist subjugation and belated capitalist development will only be liquidated as a by-product of the international socialist revolution.

While US imperialism is at present the most assertive and aggressive imperialist power, a genuine struggle against imperialism requires a struggle against the capitalist system as a whole and the outmoded nation-state system in which it is historically rooted.

All those who support this program should strive to make the WSWS the political and organizational spearhead of a revival of the world workers movement on an international socialist perspective.

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