

Indian postal workers end strike

Keith Jones
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With the Indian government threatening to deploy military personnel to move the mail, the Joint Action Committee of postal unions ordered more than half a million workers to end a nation-wide strike on its eighth day, July 16.

Postal union officials emerged from a two-hour meeting with Communications Minister Sushma Swaraj late Thursday afternoon to declare that they had 'full confidence' in her assurances the government would deal sympathetically with the postal workers' charter of demands. Earlier, union leaders had said that the government had ceded ground on nine of the charter's ten points.

Contradicting the claims of the Federation of National Postal Organisations and the National Federation of Telecom Employees, Swaraj said India's four-month-old coalition government has not accepted any of the unions' demands. She will be recommending to Cabinet, however, that postal workers receive full wages for the strike period.

Swaraj spearheaded the government's efforts to break the strike. Initially, she vowed there would be no negotiations until the strike was called off. Then she threatened to use the military to break the strike.

Speaking in India's parliament Thursday evening, Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee promised that 'there will be no victimisation of those who went on strike.' Earlier in the day, the upper house of India's parliament had been adjourned after opposition members staged a protest to demand that Vajpayee state categorically whether or not the government was preparing to deploy troops against the postal workers.

The widespread support for the strike came as a shock to the governmental coalition led by the Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Janata (Indian Peoples) Party. For the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which lead the country's most powerful unions, there was never any question,

however, of the postal workers' struggle transcending the narrow framework of contract negotiations and spearheading the independent political mobilisation of the working class. The Stalinists' efforts to unseat the BJP revolve exclusively around parliamentary manoeuvres with the Congress, the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional ruling party, and various regionalist and caste-based political formations.

The government's threat to use the army only made the Stalinists' more anxious to terminate the postal workers' struggle. According to the Chennai-based daily the *Hindu*, 'the issue of seeking Army help to break a legitimate strike drew so much opprobrium that both sides thought a settlement should be arrived at, instead of allowing the impasse to continue and the situation to deteriorate.'

The CPI-aligned All-India Trade Union Congress and the pro-CPI(M) Centre of Indian Trade Unions issued separate statements congratulating the postal workers on the 'success' of their strike.

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