

Indian Stalinists reaffirm support for Congress-led regime committed to neo-liberal policies

Keith Jones
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At Wednesday's inaugural session of the 18th national congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the CPM's two senior-most figures delivered addresses aimed at defending and legitimizing the party's continued support for the 11-month United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

Yet the CPM leadership concedes that the UPA is, to use the words of the congress' principal resolution, "pursuing the same policies of liberalisation and privatisation" as its predecessor. The "government is unwilling to change course," continues the resolution, "and, in essence, pursues the same policies" as did the National Democratic Alliance government, led by the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

CPM Politbureau member and former West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu said the Congress, the traditional governing party of the Indian bourgeoisie and the dominant partner in the UPA, "should introspect. Can it continue with the same economic policies of indiscriminate liberalisation and privatisation? Will there be any difference between its policies and those of the BJP?"

The truth is that it was the Congress, when in office between 1991 and 1996, that initiated the shift in the Indian bourgeoisie's strategy, from national economic development to one focused on attracting foreign capital and export-led growth. All governments in India at the Union and state level, including the CPM-led regime in West Bengal, have since participated in the dismantling of the nationally-regulated economy and the associated sell-off of public sector units, slashing of public services and price supports, and drive to make workers more subservient to the demands of management.

CPM General Secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, whose speech had to be read out by another party leader because of failing health, said the CPM's support for the UPA government was "to meet exigencies of the current situation," that the CPM favors the eventual creation of a "third alternative" to the Congress and BJP, and that the CPM is "not giving up on our basic agenda."

In other words, the CPM will continue to sustain the Congress-led UPA in power.

The CPM was formed in 1964 after splitting from the

Communist Party of India (CPI), which, in accordance with the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, was in the thrall of the Congress party.

The CPM claims to be heir to the revolutionary international socialist tradition of Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin. One measure of the extent to which this is untrue is the CPM's continuing adulation of Joseph Stalin, who, as the political spokesman of the privileged bureaucracy that usurped power from the Soviet working class, mounted a veritable genocide against socialists within the USSR.

Another is the CPM's praise for the Chinese Communist Party, which is working hand-in-glove with international capital in imposing conditions of early Victorian-era exploitation on the burgeoning Chinese working class. "China's rapid economic growth and all-round progress has led to its emergence as a major power in the international arena," declares the CPM's 18th congress resolution. "... The Chinese government and the Communist Party are engaged in tackling the problems of unemployment, regional disparities and the rise of corruption which are a product of China's rapid growth and engagement with the global capitalist system."

A third measure, less important, but nonetheless revealing is the CPM's decision to invite leaders of Sri Lanka's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) to attend its congress as fraternal delegates. The JVP, which is a partner in Sri Lanka's United Peoples' Freedom Alliance government, spouts populist phrases and lauds Mao and Castro but is a party of extreme anti-Tamil chauvinism.

A self-avowed patriotic party, the CPM is the left-wing of India's bourgeois order.

The social crisis created by the Indian bourgeoisie's drive to transform India into a low-wage manufacturing, office processing and research producer for world capitalism, has given the CPM unprecedented influence in the corridors of power.

The UPA government took power last May and survives in office thanks only to the parliamentary support of the Left Front, a multi-party coalition that includes among others, the CPI, but which is dominated by the CPM.

When the UPA government was being formed, the Congress asked the Left Front to accept cabinet posts. But at the insistence of the CPM, the Left Front declined. One of the main reasons it gave for doing so was that it feared that the BJP would be able to monopolize the opposition to the UPA. This statement underscores that the CPM leadership well-recognized, even as it was helping give birth to the new government, that it would pursue unpopular policies.

Subsequently, the CPM bowed to the entreaties of the Congress leadership that it give a public demonstration of its commitment to sustaining the UPA in power for a full five-year term and accepted the appointment of a party leader to the post of speaker of the lower house of India's parliament, the Lok Sabha.

The CPM and Left Front are also formally tied to the government through a committee established to monitor the implementation of the Common Minimum Programme, an accord among the constituents of the UPA but which the CPM and Left Front helped author.

If the Congress was so eager to associate the Left Front with the government it was not simply because of the parliamentary arithmetic. To its great surprise, the Congress found itself returned to power on a wave of popular opposition to the neo-liberal policies of the BJP. It quickly concluded that associating the CPM-led Left Front with the government would constitute the best means to overcome popular opposition to a new wave of neo-liberal reforms, including the gutting of restrictions on the laying off of workers and closure of plants.

That big business concurs in this assessment has been shown by the lack of any significant support from the corporate media for the BJP's attempts to disrupt and destabilize the new government.

But the actions of the UPA government—including a 25 percent hike in military spending, the opening up of new sectors of the economy to foreign investment, and the gutting of a promise to provide 100 days paid labor to at least one member of every poor and lower-income family—are causing the CPM leaders to fear that the coming popular backlash against the government will rebound against it.

In response to pressure from the Left Front, the UPA did announce some modest social spending increases in its February budget, but at the same time the finance minister said that he had reached the limit of what the government could afford without risking a fiscal crisis.

The reality is that India stands on the verge of great social convulsions. Fourteen years of neo-liberal reforms have produced ever-increasing economic insecurity, deepening poverty, and growing social inequality. Rural India is experiencing what is described as the worst agrarian distress in decades. Unemployment stalks both the countryside and the major urban centres.

The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, believes, to use the slogan of the failed BJP election campaign, that “India is

shining.” It believes or at least wants to believe that it is on the verge of becoming a major force on the world stage, thanks to the influx of foreign capital and India's military prowess.

But the bourgeoisie is basing its ambitions and aspirations on a world capitalist economy fraught with explosive imbalances and contradictions—contradictions that find their acutest expression in the US, with its gargantuan current accounts, trade and budget deficits. And it is entering onto the world stage at a time of ever-intensifying great-power geo-political rivalry. A slump in the world economy or a drop off in foreign investment risks precipitating a 1997 south-east Asian style collapse.

It is under these conditions that the CPM and Left Front are seeking to shackle the working class and oppressed masses to the Congress-led UPA.

In doing so it makes two arguments. First, that through the Common Minimum Programme neo-liberal policies can be slowed or muted, an argument which it is finding increasingly hard to defend. Second, that supporting the UPA is the only way to keep the Hindu supremacist BJP from power.

The BJP is certainly a vicious reactionary force. But it can only be fought and defeated by the working class advancing its own solution to the social crisis, which reaction has exploited, and rallying the oppressed masses behind it.

For decades the Hindu nationalist right was a marginal force in Indian politics. If it has become a contender for power and the Indian bourgeoisie was able to transform the shipwreck of its post-independence national project into a new offensive against the working class and oppressed masses, it was because of the class collaborationist and nationalist policies pursued by the Indian Stalinist parties. For decades the CPM and its sister Stalinist party, the CPI, subordinated the working class to one or another bourgeois party, in the name of fighting imperialism and feudal reaction, and constrained the working class to militant trade union struggles.

The unpostponable task facing workers and socialist-minded toilers and intellectuals in India is the building of a new mass socialist party of the working class committed to fighting imperialism and the national bourgeoisie in unison with the international working class.



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