

Indian Stalinists reaffirm support for UPA government

Keith Jones
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The Communist Party of India (Marxist), the dominant partner in the Left Front, has reaffirmed its intention to sustain the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in power for a full five-year term—even whilst conceding that the UPA has implemented neo-liberal socioeconomic reforms and has aligned India with US imperialism.

Last week CPM general-secretary Prakash Karat urged voters in West Bengal and Kerala to vote for the CPM and its allies in state elections, arguing that the reelection of the Left Front in West Bengal and the coming to power of the Left Democratic Front in Kerala would strengthen the Left Front's efforts to pressure the UPA government into pursuing "pro-people policies."

Speaking in Kolkata (Calcutta), Karat said, "For the last two years that we have been supporting the Manmohan Singh [UPA] government our effort [has been] to make it implement the pro-people policies promised in the common minimum programme [CMP], and victory in these elections would give strength to exert further pressure to do so."

Karat's speech had two objectives: first, to distance the Left Front from a UPA government that is increasingly discredited among India's toiling masses in the hopes of boosting the Left's electoral standing and its leverage in the politics of the Indian establishment; second, to provide a new justification for the Stalinists' policy of sustaining the Congress-led UPA in office.

While they periodically threaten the government with dire consequences if it continues to ignore their complaints, the Stalinists are determined to contain the deep-rooted popular opposition to the ruling class agenda of privatization, deregulation and the dismantling of public and social services within the

confines of parliamentary maneuvers and extra-parliamentary protests aimed at influencing the UPA.

Karat maintained that the jury was still out on whether the UPA will implement the "pro-people CMP" or the program of Indian and international capital, which he demagogically termed "a CMP of George Bush."

The reality is that the UPA is led by the Congress, the traditional governing party of the Indian bourgeoisie. No less than the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition that preceded it, the UPA is entirely committed to the Indian bourgeoisie's strategy for transforming India into a world power, by building up India's military might, making it a center of global cheap-labor production, pursuing close relations with the US and otherwise engaging in great-power geopolitics.

In recent months the UPA, to the delight of big business, has lurched even further right, repeatedly carrying through significant policy shifts over the protestations and pleas of Karat and the CPM-led Left Front. These include joining the US-led gang-up against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Commission, placing millions of jobs at risk by opening the retail sector to increased FDI, privatizing the Delhi and Mumbai airports, and taking India's "strategic partnership" to a new level by accepting the Bush administration's offer of US assistance in India becoming a world power (the Indo-US nuclear accord.)

Yet the Stalinist CPM and its Left Front allies insist that there is no question of the 60-plus Left Front Members of Parliament withdrawing their support for the UPA, just as they insist in West Bengal, where they form government, that they have no choice but to implement investor-friendly policies aimed at attracting capital.

In a press interview the day before Karat's Kolkata speech, CPM Politburo member and elder statesman Jyoti Basu told the *Press Trust of India*, "If we leave them (the UPA), there will be elections and the BJP will come to power. We do not want the BJP to come back to power."

Like Karat, Basu vowed that the Left Front will be more vocal in its denunciations of the UPA's "violations" of the Common Minimum Programme in coming months.

Ostensibly the legislative program of the UPA, the CMP was drawn up in the days after the May 2004 general election with the political and even editorial assistance of the Left Front leadership. It couples vague promises of action to alleviate mass unemployment and rural distress and improve public health care and education with pledges to intensify the very program of economic "reform" that is responsible for the sharp growth in poverty and economic insecurity and the collapse of basic public services.

Predictably, Manmohan Singh and other UPA leaders have responded to the Stalinists' complaints that the CMP is not being respected by saying that they are implementing it faithfully.

In no way does the CMP constitute a progressive alternative to the right-wing policies of the UPA. It is a political hoax based on the claim that it is possible to reconcile the neo-liberal agenda of the bourgeoisie with the needs of the masses, the same fraud, it need be added, that lies at the basis of the program and rhetoric of the Left Front government in West Bengal. In terms similar to the Congress, which in the 2004 elections made a calibrated appeal to popular opposition to the reforms, by speaking of "reforms with a human face" the Left Front government in West Bengal speaks of making Bengal a magnet for foreign investment so as to bring about "industrialization for the class struggle."

Reflecting the division of labor within the CPM leadership, Karat, the party's foremost leader on the national stage, has been criticizing the UPA for its pro-big business policies, while the boss of West Bengal's Left Front government, Chief Minister and Politburo member Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, has been emphasizing his government's pro-investor orientation and determination to discipline the state's militant working class.

Bhattacharjee told a press conference earlier this

month, "We are trying to be friendly with the capitalists.... We are not practicing socialism." While claiming that he and the CPM remain Marxists, he added, "Since we are practical, we know it is wise to be capitalist at the moment when the whole world is wooing capitalism."

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he was not concerned when the press asked him about the Left Front's threats of louder protests over the government failure to heed its criticisms and slow the pace of neo-liberal reform. "The Left parties," said Singh, "are our valued allies at the center in the last two years.... I have full faith we will resolve the issues in the larger interest in an amicable manner."

Singh knows of what he speaks. The CPM-led Left Front is playing a crucial role in suppressing and politically misdirecting the mass opposition to the neo-liberal reforms and the Indian bourgeoisie's strategic alliance with the Bush administration, while spearheading the implementation of investor-friendly, anti-working-class policies in West Bengal.



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