

# India: While waving red-flags, the Stalinist CPM lurches further right

Arun Kumar  
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The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, India's principal Stalinist party and the dominant partner in the Left Front, concluded its 19th national congress Thursday, April 3.

Since May 2004, the CPM-led Left Front has been sustaining India's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government in office "from the outside." Led by the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government, the Congress Party, the UPA government has pressed forward with neo-liberal policies aimed at making India a center of cheap labor production for the world capitalist market, while seeking to cement a "strategic, global partnership" with US imperialism.

At major traffic junctions in Coimbatore, the south Indian textile manufacturing center that was the venue of the CPM's congress, CPM activists erected red-paper arches and posters of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Red flags and a big banner proclaiming "Workers of the World Unite" greeted the CPM delegates as they entered the auditorium where the six-day congress was held.

All this was nothing more than window-dressing. The waving of red flags and various other hollow "revolutionary" rituals are meant to prevent consideration of the pivotal role that the CPM plays in propping up the rule of the Indian bourgeoisie.

Not only is the CPM harnessing the working class to the right-wing UPA government. In the three states where the Left Front forms the government—West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura—it is unabashedly pursuing pro-investor policies, including using bloody violence to suppress peasant resistance to the seizing of their land for special economic zones. (See West Bengal's Stalinist government mounts terror campaign to quash peasant unrest.)

There was an overwhelming press presence at the CPM congress. This was not simply because the CPM leads the third largest bloc in the national parliament, but because of mounting press speculation that the Congress Party leadership may soon defy the CPM and its Left allies by proceeding with the implementation of the Indo-US civilian nuclear treaty.

In the political resolution the party leadership submitted to CPM congress it made clear that its wish and intent is to sustain the UPA in power for its full five-year term. If there is an early election it will be because the Congress Party has decided to precipitate one by proceeding with the nuclear treaty under

conditions when a majority in parliament (that goes from the Left Front through to the Hindu supremacist BJP) oppose it.

Speaking at a press conference on the CPM congress' second-day, Politburo member Sitaram Yechury, reiterated his party's support for the UPA government. "We support the UPA," said Yechury, "in order to keep communal forces away from state power."

Later in reply to a question, Yechury expanded on the Stalinists' position that the Congress must be sustained in power as it is a "lesser evil" than the "main enemy," the BJP. "Our stand," said Yechury, "is *non*-Congress and *anti*-BJP. We do not subscribe to the position of equidistance from Congress and BJP, as we think communalism is a big threat to the integrity and unity of the country."

The CPM leadership, however, cannot ignore the mounting opposition to the UPA government within the working class and in rural India, where calorie consumption has actually fallen since the Indian bourgeoisie abandoned state-led development in 1991 in favor of India's full integration into the world capitalist economy.

The CPM announced plans to stage protests over spiraling food prices, but all within the framework of pressing the UPA to deliver "pro-people" policies.

The CPM congress also placed increased emphasis on its longstanding call for a "third alternative" to the Congress and BJP. Said Yechury, "[T]here is a large amount of discomfort about the present government's neo-liberal trajectory and also its efforts towards taking India into a strategic alliance with the US. So, the important political issue is the formation of a Third alternative based on alternative economic and political policies. We are looking for a non-Congress, anti-BJP political alternative."

The Stalinists are claiming that this third alternative will be founded on principled agreement on three critical questions, "uncompromising opposition to communal forces," opposition to anti-people economic reforms, and opposition to making India a subordinate ally of US imperialism.

"There is a difference," claimed Yechury, "between a third front and a third alternative." A third front is "a cut and paste job," whereas a "Third alternative will be based on definite policy measures."

If the CPM leadership is shying away from using the term “Third Front” it is because such a combination was already tried, with the CPM providing much of its political leadership. From 1996 to 1998, a “Third” or United Front coalition formed India’s government, with the CPM providing “outside support.” This government continued the neo-liberal reforms of its Congress Party predecessor, thereby opening the door for the BJP to come to power at the head of a multi-party coalition in March 1998.

The bluster aside, what the CPM is indeed proposing is yet another electoral bloc with various regionally- and caste-based bourgeois parties. Many of these parties were members of the previous Third Front and all have been complicit in carrying out the Indian bourgeoisie’s economic “reform” program. The CPM has already entered into a dialogue and quasi-alliance with the Andhra Pradesh-based Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which is itself part of a prospective third front, the United National Progressive Alliance.

The TDP was a key member of the CPM-supported United Front government. Then after the United Front fell from office, the TDP entered into an alliance with the BJP and from 1998 to 2004 it supported the BJP-led Union government. Meanwhile in Andhra Pradesh, the TDP formed a state government that was in the lead of the implementation of neo-liberal reforms across India, winning frequent and lavish praise from the World Bank.

Yet the CPM is willing to embrace the TDP as a potential “principled” ally in the struggle against communalism and anti-people reforms.

The CPM has also not ruled out forming electoral pacts and alliances with the Congress Party’s UPA allies and this even while they remain part of the current government.

Of no less importance was the CPM congress’ endorsement of the “industrialization” program—i.e. the pro-investor policies being implemented by the West Bengal state government—and its defence of the violent suppression of the peasant resistance at Nandigram.

The CPM-led government in Kerala was reportedly instructed to heed the West Bengal example and press forward more rapidly with policy changes aimed at wooing Indian and international capital.

While the CPM leadership boasts about the party’s political influence, there are numerous signs of mounting crisis, from the widespread protests of left-wing intellectuals over the repression at Nandigram to the party’s own organizational report, which conceded that CPM leaders are more and more indulging in the vices of India’s traditional political elite.

According to the *New Indian Express*, to which a copy of the report was leaked, “Some party cadres follow caste and religious practices. There are complaints about some party members practising the dowry system. Some party members organise ostentatious parties in connection with birthdays, weddings and construction of new houses.”

The article quoted the report as saying, “The party laments that corruption has made serious inroads among the party leaders too. ... The party had already issued guidelines that party leaders and mass organisations’ leaders should submit a statement of income and assets...”

Mention was made in the report of the manager of one of the party’s Kerala papers, *Deshabhimani*, accepting a 10 millions Indian rupee payment (then about US \$175,000) from a businessman.

Later at a press conference, West Bengal Chief Minister and Politburo member Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee confirmed that the party will be mounting a “rectification” campaign. “We want,” said Bhattacharjee, “to keep politics free of money and muscle power and criminalization.” What Bhattacharjee, who has dismissed criticisms of his courting of the Tatas and other corporate bosses by declaring socialism to be a far-off cry, could not admit is that this corruption is but an expression of the CPM’s ever-deeper integration into the bourgeois establishment.

The 51 fraternal delegates from 26 countries who attended the CPM congress also reveal much about its political trajectory.

They included representatives from the US Communist Party, which will be stumping for the election of the Democratic Party in this November’s US elections, and from the Communist Party of France, which time and again since the 1930s has come to the rescue of French capitalism and as recently as 2002 served in a government pursuing anti-working-class austerity measures.

The largest fraternal delegation was a six-member delegation from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). China’s ruling party presides over an authoritarian regime that ruthlessly suppresses the Chinese working class on behalf of foreign capital and a rising Chinese bourgeoisie. Recently the CCP amended its constitution to formally allow capitalists to join the party.

In its greetings to the CPM’s 19th congress, the CCP appreciated its Indian counterpart’s “keen efforts in adopting Marxist theories to the realities of India.” For its part, the CPM hails China as a socialist country, with the West Bengal Left Front government proclaiming the pro-investor regime China has developed over the past three decades as a model for its own industrialization program.



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