

Why India's Stalinists oppose the US nuclear deal

Deepal Jayasekera
15 July 2008

India's main Stalinist Party, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) has led the four-party Left Front (LF) coalition in withdrawing its parliamentary support from the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government over the latter's going ahead with the Indo-US civil nuclear treaty.

The Stalinists ceased their backing for the government after acting as the major prop keeping it in power for more than four years and with less than one year left in its term. Its opposition to the UPA's attempt to push ahead with the nuclear deal with the US has nothing to do with the interests of the multi-million Indian working class and rural poor.

The CPI-M and LF have made repeated rhetorical criticisms of the UPA government's implementation of neo-liberal economic policies and its drive to secure a strategic alliance with Washington. Among the urban and rural workers and poor, however, these policies have discredited not only the UPA government but its Stalinist backers as well. Increases in the prices of basic food items and fuel, with an inflation rate of 12 percent, have provoked widespread hostility towards the government.

Moreover, the CPI-M-led provincial administrations—West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura—carry out basically the same economic policies, adding to the erosion of their support among the workers and poor farmers. Particularly, the ruthless manner in which the West Bengal LF government implemented policies to transform the state into cheap labour haven for local and foreign investors — as shown in the killing of dozens of farmers in Nandigram—provoked widespread anger.

In opposing the Indo-US nuclear deal, the Stalinists argue that the deal is a part of Washington's attempt to develop a strategic alliance with India with the aim of harnessing New Delhi to the US global military-geo-political agenda. In a statement issued on July 9 announcing its withdrawal of support, the LF said: "The Congress-led government has embraced a strategic alliance with the United States. This dubious deal with President Bush is the centrepiece of a number of agreements like military collaboration and concessions to US capital in the retail sector, education etc."

Although there is no doubt that this is the case, the Stalinists' opposition to India's growing strategic alliance with the US, and to the Indo-US nuclear deal in particular, is not a genuine

anti-imperialist policy, based on the independent political mobilization of the international working class against the capitalist world order. They are defending the interests not of the Indian workers and their international class brothers, but those of the Indian national bourgeoisie. The LF's July 9 statement argues: "The Indo-US Nuclear Deal is against India's vital interests."

They oppose a strategic alliance with the US because of their concern that such an alliance will subordinate the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie to those of Washington. The Stalinist foreign policy expresses the position of some sections of the Indian elite who fear that the UPA government is too closely binding India's interests with those of the US, and that they will therefore see their own position undermined.

In arguing against an Indo-US nuclear treaty, the Stalinists added in their July 9 statement: "The nuclear deal will not provide India energy security. Since it is anchored in a US law, the Hyde Act, it will hamper an independent foreign policy and restrict our strategic autonomy." Here they have cited the legislation passed by the US Congress approving changes to US law needed to allow nuclear trade with India. What they refer to as hampering "an independent foreign policy" and restricting "our strategic autonomy" are provisions in the Hyde Act putting indirect restrictions on India's future nuclear tests and also demanding New Delhi's backing for Washington's provocations against Iran.

The dominant sections of India's financial elite, including a sizeable section of the current UPA government, see New Delhi's forging of a strategic alliance with the US as a major plank for realizing its global power ambitions. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has pledged Washington's support for India to become a world power.

The Stalinists are not opposing those strategic aims of the Indian elite, but differ only on what are the best tactics for achieving them. They argue that New Delhi's strategic alliance with the US will restrict its room for forging relations with various other world powers and rival bourgeois ruling elites. That strategy of developing relations with various contending powers to further the interests of India's ruling elite is what they call an "independent foreign policy".

As an alternative, the CPI-M proposes returning to a "non-

aligned policy”, that is, the foreign policy that the Indian bourgeoisie professed for decades during the Cold War between US imperialism and the former Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy. Then, mainly under governments of the currently ruling Congress Party, New Delhi sought to manoeuvre between Washington and Moscow for its own interests, while maintaining a close alliance with the latter and keeping its distance from the former. Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, the Indian elite has dropped its “non-aligned policy” and turned towards the US and other Western powers, including Europe.

In opposition to US imperialism’s drive for global dominance, or “the unipolar world” the CPI-M calls for a “multi-polar world”, a balance of power among various contending world powers. It represents an alternative strategy for maintaining the imperialist world system against the international working class. The CPI-M is extending its political backing to the same plundering interests of other world powers, which oppose Washington’s unilateral militarist policies only in so far as they undermine their own geo-political interests.

Instead of forging a strategic alliance with the US, the CPI-M advocates an alliance between India, Russia and China. Moscow and Beijing have their own geo-political interests and strive to extend their economic, political and military influence. Russia and China see Washington’s unilateral aggressive policies as undermining their own strategic interests. The Stalinists’ promotion of an alliance with Moscow and Beijing is also based on the calculation that—as in the old non-aligned days—it will give the Indian elite a better bargaining position for making deals with Washington.

The CPI-M is not opposed to New Delhi developing ties with the US in so far as they boost the Indian bourgeois state’s political, economic and military position. The Stalinists have repeatedly said that they do not want India becoming a “junior partner” of the US, i.e., subordinating the interests of India’s national bourgeoisie to Washington.

While the CPI-M keeps mouthing anti-American rhetoric for public consumption, to preserve its dwindling support among the workers, youths and rural poor, state administrations led by the party have developed their own ties with the US. After managing to get Washington’s approval of his longstanding request for an official invitation, West Bengal chief minister and CPI-M senior politburo member Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is planning a visit to the US in order to forge close ties with Washington and woo US investors to his state. His visit has been continuously delayed by the growing political crisis facing his government due to public anger against its ruthless implementation of neo-liberal economic policies.

In November 2005, as placard-carrying CPI-M cadres and supporters protested joint India-US air force exercises at the Kalaikunda base in West Bengal, the state’s chief minister Bhattacharjee sent his finance minister to US to woo American

investors to his state. His state administration not only allowed the joint exercises to take place there, but also provided necessary security for them.

The nationalist outlook of the Stalinists in defending the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie at the expense of the workers and poor peasants can be found as well in their response to the price increases on food and fuel. They have proposed that the UPA government take measures within the national boundaries like banning futures trading, reducing taxes and controlling hoarding. While these practices within India have contributed to the crisis, the main source of spiralling food and fuel prices lies in the world market.

The Stalinists are enthusiastic supporters and also collaborators in New Delhi’s drive to boost its posture as a regional power and to pursue its global power ambitions. The party’s top brass, including senior leader Sitaram Yechury, has been personally involved on behalf of the UPA government in pushing the Nepali Maoists to conclude an agreement with the Nepali Congress Party-led Seven Party Alliance aimed at ending the Maoist insurgency and restabilising bourgeois rule there. New Delhi treats Nepal as falling well within its own sphere of influence and political stability in this land-locked neighbouring country and as crucial to its own geo-political interests.

The CPI-M fully supports New Delhi’s growing ties with the regime of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan, despite it being a US puppet government. In replying to a WSWs correspondent in a press briefing held during the party congress last April, senior CPI-M politburo member Ramachandran Pillai defended New Delhi’s role in Afghanistan: “India is developing relations with various countries.”

When confronted with the fact that Karzai heads “a US puppet government established after a US invasion in Afghanistan,” Pillai responded: “Even we are having relations with the US.” As far as the Stalinists are concerned, New Delhi’s growing role in Afghanistan is directly related to its geo-political ambitions and strategic interests, which the CPI-M fully supports.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact