

India: Stalinists proclaim right-wing AIADMK a pillar of their “Third Front”

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The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) have formed an electoral and potential governmental alliance with the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a notoriously right-wing, Tamil regionalist party, in preparation for India's national elections, which must be held in the first half of 2009.

From May 2004 through June 2008, the twin Stalinist parties and their Left Front sustained India's Congress Party-led, minority United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in power.

The UPA government, like the Bharatiya Janata Party-dominated coalition that preceded it, has pursued neo-liberal "reforms" that have dramatically increased economic insecurity and social inequality. Yet the Stalinists' justified their support for the UPA government with the claim that it could be pressured into pursuing "pro-people" policies and that it was the only means of blocking the return to power of the Hindu supremacist BJP.

In early July, however, the Congress Party, the traditional governing party of the Indian bourgeoisie, effectively booted the Stalinists out of the government so the UPA could implement the Indo-US civilian nuclear treaty.

For over a year the Left Front repeatedly pledged that it would sustain the Congress Party-led UPA in power for a full five year-term; its only condition being that the UPA not proceed with the Indo-US treaty, which has been promoted in both New Delhi and Washington as the cornerstone of a "global strategic" alliance between India and US imperialism.

Having been spurned by the UPA, the Stalinists have revived their call for a "Third Front"—that is for an ostensibly anti-BJP, anti-Congress alliance, comprised

of the Left Front and various regional and caste-based bourgeois parties.

The Stalinists played a pivotal role in bringing to power and leading a similar formation more than a decade ago, the "United Front" government of June 1996-March 1998. Supported from the "outside" by the Congress Party, the United Front government was a right-wing regime which pressed forward with the Indian bourgeoisie's plans to transform India into a cheap-labor producer for the world capitalist market and thereby opened the door for the BJP to come to power in the 1998 election. Several key members of the United Front, which proclaimed itself a bulwark of "secular India," subsequently defected, thus helping to sustain the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance coalition in office.

The right-wing character of the Stalinists' new Third Front is underscored by its embrace of the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or AIADMK.

The Stalinists have repeatedly formed electoral blocs with either the AIADMK or its main rival in Tamil Nadu state politics, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), their choice of partner being largely determined by the existing national political equation.

Until last July, the Left Front was allied with the DMK, which is a member of the UPA coalition. But after the Stalinists were obliged to withdraw their support for the UPA government, they redefined their relations with the DMK, which currently forms the state government in Tamilnadu, giving sudden prominence to denunciations of the right-wing policies that their erstwhile DMK ally has implemented.

From a class standpoint, there is no fundamental difference between the DMK and AIADMK. Both are bourgeois parties that use and manipulate Tamil ethno-nationalist appeals. That being said, the AIADMK is a

particularly noxious political formation.

It is led, in dictatorial fashion, by Jayalalithaa, a former film star and protégé of AIADMK founder M.G. Ramachandran.

Jayalalithaa epitomizes the most degenerate type of Indian politician, whose political power is based on exploiting ignorance and dispensing patronage. She flaunts her wealth, and revels in the most lurid forms of sycophancy. Her name has become synonymous with corruption and outright gangsterism.

While the Stalinists have now bestowed upon the AIADMK their blessing as a "secular" party, it has a long history of working with the Hindu supremacist right.

AIADMK "supremo" Jayalalithaa dispatched *kar sevaks* or party activists to participate in the 1992 BJP-led, Hindu chauvinist agitation that ended in the razing of the *Babri Masjid* mosque in Ayodhya and the worst communal rioting in India since the 1947 partition of the subcontinent.

The AIADMK was a partner in the first BJP-led coalition government, rejoined the BJP-led NDA in the run-up to the 2004 elections, and has repeatedly made common cause with the BJP. It supported the BJP's candidate for president in the 2007 presidential election and has joined with the BJP in mounting a reactionary, obscurantist campaign against the building of the Sethu Samudram canal. (See: India's Congress Party buckles to Hindu Supremacists' communal campaign over *Ram Sethu*)

The BJP had hoped to forge an electoral alliance with the AIADMK for the coming national elections. But the AIADMK leadership calculated that support from the Stalinists would do much more in the way of boosting their party's electoral fortunes, especially in exploiting popular grievances with the UPA national and DMK state governments, than allying with the BJP, which is only a bit-player in Tamil Nadu politics.

The AIADMK came into violent conflict with the working class when it last formed the state government in Tamil Nadu, between 2001 and 2006. The AIADMK government repeatedly used scabs or blacklegs to break strikes and in the summer of 2003 mounted a campaign of repression against striking state government workers. Police arrested strikers en masse and mounted midnight raids on the homes of strike leaders. Ultimately, it fired more than 200,000 workers. The Indian Supreme Court

subsequently endorsed Jayalalithaa's actions, issuing a notorious and sweeping judgment in which it affirmed that there is no constitutional right to strike.

Jayalalithaa also trampled on the democratic rights of her bourgeois political opponents, including invoking the draconian provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).

In the 2004 national elections, the AIADMK and its allies, including the BJP, failed to win a single seat in Tamil Nadu. Thereafter, Jayalalithaa affected something of a retreat. Many of the sacked government workers were restored to their jobs and the government put a hold on its Hindu supremacist-inspired law banning religious conversions. But in the 2006 elections, the AIADMK government was defeated by an electoral alliance headed by the DMK and including the two Stalinist parties.

The other major partner in the Stalinists' prospective Third Front to date is the Andhra Pradesh-based Telugu Desam Party. Led by Chandra Babu Naidu, the TDP is also a former ally of the BJP. Although it did not formally join the government, the TDP was a key prop of the BJP-led NDA government for its entire six years in office (1998-2004). During the same period, Naidu became the World Bank's favorite Indian politician due to the ruthlessness with which the TDP state government he headed in Andhra Pradesh pursued pro-investor and pro agri-business policies.

In India, as around the globe, the world financial crisis and economic slump will mean a rapid intensification of the class struggle. The Left Front's efforts to cobble together an alternate "national" bourgeois coalition comprised of parties notorious for their pursuit of anti-worker policies and collaboration with the Hindu right underscores the urgency of the working class' breaking with the Stalinist parties.



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