

India bans CPI (Maoist) under draconian “anti-terror” law

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India’s Congress Party-led central government has declared the Communist Party of India (Maoist) a “terrorist” organization under the draconian “anti-terrorist” legislation that it rushed through India’s parliament last December.

This legislation has been widely condemned by civil liberties organizations. It is founded upon vague and sweeping definitions of what constitutes terrorism and membership in a terrorist organization. So sweeping are these definitions that persons expressing political sympathy with a banned organization or who participate in a strike that disrupts “essential services” could potentially be charged with abetting terrorism.

The amendments to India’s *Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act* that were adopted last December overturn longstanding judicial principles. They empower the state to detain persons without charge for up to 180 days, create special courts that can try terrorism offenses *in camera* (i.e. without public and press scrutiny), and places the legal onus on the accused to prove their innocence if they are apprehended with weapons.

As a result of the ban imposed Monday, membership in the CPI (Maoist) or any organization the government deems to be a front for its activities is illegal; the CPI (Maoist) is banned from carrying out all constitutionally-protected political activity, including meetings, demonstrations, and the publication and circulation of political materials.

According to the government, Naxalite insurgents are active in about 180 of India’s 625 administrative districts. Most of these are these in the most remote and economically deprived parts of India and many are home to large *adivasi* (tribal) populations.

The Indian press has downplayed the significance of the government’s proscribing of the CPI (Maoist), noting that the two organizations that came together to form it in 2004—People’s War and the Maoist Communist Centre of India—had previously been banned by the central government.

“It was always a terror organization,” declared Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, “and today an ambiguity has been removed.”

There are, however, unmistakable signs that the Indian government is preparing a major military-police offensive against the CPI (Maoist) and other Naxalite groups.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has repeatedly termed the Naxalites the country’s greatest internal security threat.

The presidential address—presented earlier this month when

parliament reconvened for the first time since the re-election of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)—proclaimed “internal security” the government’s first priority: “A policy of zero-tolerance toward terrorism, from whatever source it originates will be pursued. Stern measures to handle insurgency and left wing extremism will be taken.”

Speaking at the end of the parliamentary debate on the presidential speech, Manmohan Singh linked the struggle against “left-wing extremism” to the Indian bourgeoisie’s drive to attract foreign investment, noting that many of the areas where the Naxalites are active are rich in natural resources.

Indeed, one of the factors that accounts for the growth in Naxalite insurgency is the opposition of tribal peoples to state-big business attempts to dispossess them of their traditional lands for resource extraction projects.

In recent weeks the Indian press has carried several reports that under Chidabaram’s direction Home Ministry officials are “fine-tuning” a plan for a major, post-monsoon operation led by the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and involving state security forces against the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and other Naxalite groups in the contiguous eastern Indian states of Jharkand, Chattisgarh and Orissa.

Following a press furor over the expansion of Maoist influence in Lalgah (a part of the West Midnapore district), West Bengal’s Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led government called in the CRPF last week to reassert government control. The people of Lalgah have longstanding grievances against the West Bengal government arising from chronic poverty and administrative corruption. But the catalyst for the recent expansion of Naxalite influence in the area was the brutal police dragnet mounted against the local population after the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, was the target of a Maoist bomb attack while travelling through Lalgah.

The West Bengal state government initially rebuffed the UPA government’s demand that it outlaw the CPI (Maoist) under state law, saying that such action would only impede a political solution to Naxalite insurgency. But after Chidabaram proclaimed the CPI (Maoist) a terrorist organization, Bhattacharjee, who is a member of the CPI (Marxist) Politburo, rushed to reassure the central government that the West Bengal government will enforce the ban. This is hardly surprising. The CPI (Marxist) or CPM has for decades administered the capitalist state machine of what is one of

India's most populous states and has lurched still further right over the past decade, aggressively implementing the Indian bourgeoisie's economic reform program. This has included expropriating peasants for Special Economic Zones to be run by domestic and international big business.

The Congress-led UPA government is anxious to implicate West Bengal's Left Front government in its anti-Maoist offensive, calculating that it will provide a better political cover for a bloody pacification campaign.

The CPI (Maoist) and the Naxalites as a whole are a retrograde Stalinist current. They have made a cult of armed struggle, glorying in the "annihilation" of oppressors, that is the killing of especially abusive landlords and corrupt local politicians and administrators. This goes hand in hand with all manner of opportunist alliances with bourgeois parties. During the past two years they have assisted Trinamul (Grassroots) Congress leader Mamata Bannerjee, a long-time ally of the Hindu supremacist BJP, in her cynical attempt to recast herself as an advocate of West Bengal's oppressed peasantry. In the name of the fight against "social fascism," they championed Bannerjee's campaign to thwart the pro-investor land expropriations being carried out by the Left Front government, thereby helping the Trinamul Congress, now partnered with the Congress Party, to sweep West Bengal in last month's national election.

The CPI (Maoist) upholds the pre-1960s political record of the Communist Party of India—that is, the CPI's decades' long subordination of the working class, in line with the Stalinist-Menshevik theory of two-stage revolution—to the Congress Party on the grounds that it was the rightful leader of India's democratic revolution. And, as its name attests, the CPI (Maoist) promotes the "path" of Mao Zedong, whose nationalist-Stalinist politics blazed the way for China's rapprochement with US imperialism and its transformation into a vital prop of world capitalism.

While the Naxalites make occasional ritualistic references to the revolutionary role of the working class, they are in fact deeply hostile to the international working class. Their program of "protracted" peasant-based "people's war" confines the working class to the role of spectator, while dissipating the revolutionary energy of the oppressed peasantry in isolated, armed conflicts with the state.

But if the Naxalites are now being targeted for a major offensive by the Indian government, it is because they have become the vehicle through which some of the most marginalised and impoverished sections of India's toilers are voicing their anger and outrage over the lack of opportunity and the increasing encroachment on the lands.

Two factors account for this:

The neo-liberal policies pursued by the Indian bourgeoisie over the past two decades—including the dismantling of agricultural price supports, the diversion of state funds from agriculture to the mega-projects demanded by big business, and the starving of

education and health care budgets—have had a devastating impact on rural India. Figures show that caloric consumption actually declined between the early 1990s, when the reforms were first implemented, and the middle of this decade.

Second, the parliamentary Stalinist parties, the CPM and CPI, and their trade union affiliates have prevented the working class from advancing its own program to answer the social crisis and rallying the support of India's rural masses behind an offensive against Indian capitalism, including such remnants of feudal and colonial oppression as landlordism and casteism. The Stalinist-led Left Front has implemented pro-investor policies where it directly holds power and supported one rightwing government in New Delhi after another, including for four years the current UPA regime.

The Naxalites have, of course, made their own contribution to the political paralysis of the working class, by abandoning it to wage guerrilla warfare in India's jungles.

The UPA government, in the name of combating "Naxalite terrorism," wants to reassert the state's control over large swathes of rural India using bloody force and draconian anti-terror laws. Its aim, as Singh himself admitted, is to ensure capitalist development can proceed apace.

India's security forces are notorious for their systematic human rights abuses—including summary executions, disappearances, and torture—and for their targeting of entire populations in crushing insurgencies, whether ethno-nationalist or Naxalite.

The BJP state government in Chattisgarh has surreptitiously organized and armed an anti-Maoist "peasant militia," the Salwa Judum, that has carried out numerous atrocities and, in conjunction with state security forces, mounted raids on villages deemed too friendly to the Naxalites.

In a foretaste of what can be expected under India's new anti-terror laws, the Chattisgarh government held a prominent human rights advocate and provisioner of health care to marginalized communities, Dr. Binayak Sen, in jail without trial for two years after he had criticized the Salwa Judum's violent activities. Sen was charged with abetting the Maoists under Chattisgarh's Special Public Security Act and the central government's *Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act*. Only after human rights organizations organized an international defence campaign did India's Supreme Court last month order Sen's release on bail.



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