

Indian workers must adopt socialist strategy to oppose UPA-led big business offensive

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Tens of millions of Indian workers will join a one-day countrywide general strike today, Tuesday, February 28, to protest soaring prices, the spread of contract-labor, privatization, government complicity in big business' systematic violation of labor regulations, and the appalling conditions under which 90 percent of the workers who are employed in the so-called informal sector toil.

The strike is testimony to mounting working-class anger and opposition. The past year-and-a-half has seen a wave of militant strikes and factory occupations, including at plants owned by Maruti-Suzuki, Hyundai, BYD Electronics, and Foxconn.

But workers must beware. The unions that have called today's protest—all eleven government-recognized central labor bodies and numerous industry-wide labour federations—have done so with the aim of containing and suppressing the resistance of the working class, not developing a working-class counter-offensive against big business and its Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

This is true not only of the Indian National Trade Unions Congress (INTUC) and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), respectively the union arms of the Congress Party and the Hindu Supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP. The All India Trades Union Congress (AITUC) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the Stalinist parliamentary parties with which they are aligned—the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—rail against the “neo-liberal” policies of the Indian bourgeoisie, but they have played a critical role in implementing them.

Over the past two decades the CPI and CPI (M) have repeatedly propped up right-wing big business governments at the Centre, including the Congress Party government of Narasimha Rao that inaugurated the Indian bourgeoisie's “new economic policy.” For four years, from May 2004 to June 2008, the Stalinists' Left Front provided the votes that sustained the current UPA government in power, and promoted its lie of “inclusive growth.” To this day, the Stalinist parties

and the AITUC and CITU claim that the UPA government can be pressured into adopting “pro-people policies.”

In those states where the Left Front has held office, most notably West Bengal, it has unabashedly pursued “pro-investor” policies, using police and goon violence to dispossess peasants of land coveted by big business and banning strikes in IT and IT-enabled industries.

The AITUC and CITU have made a one-day national protest strike a virtual annual event for the past decade, so as to provide the Left Front with a political cover for its reactionary parliamentary maneuvers and role in implementing big business' agenda of making India a haven for cheap-labor production for world capitalism.

But the Stalinists are claiming that today's protest strike is different—indeed “historic”—because all the rival central union federations have endorsed it. They are especially enthusiastic that for the “first time in the history of Independent India,” the INTUC and BMS—that is the trade union affiliates of the bourgeoisie's principal national parties—are participating jointly in a one-day general strike.

In the name of “working class unity,” the AITUC and CITU have also welcomed the participation of the union federation aligned with fascistic Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Labour Progressive Front (LPF). The union wing of the DMK, a Tamil-regional party that is a partner in the UPA government, the LPF became notorious for its sabotage of workers' struggles, including scab-herding, under the recently ousted DMK government in Tamil Nadu.

The participation of these rightwing forces underscores that India's ruling elite is well aware that today's strike is meant to be a safety-valve, is meant to dissipate the mounting social anger and harness the working class to an “oppositional” politics that is entirely within the confines of the political parties and political structures of the bourgeoisie

Much has been made of the participation of the Congress-

affiliated INTUC in defiance of appeals from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the UPA Labour Minister. But Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi expressly authorized the INTUC's participation in the last CITU-AITUC initiated protest strike, telling the INTUC President and Congress MP G. Sanjiva Reddy that she understood that his job is to "represent the workers."

The "unity" that the Stalinists have forged is the unity of the labor apparatuses of the parties of the Indian establishment. It is directed against the incipient movement of the working class.

What it means in practice was well-illustrated in their joint efforts to quell the militant struggle of the workers at Maruti-Suzuki's Manesar car assembly plant last summer and fall. The AITUC and CITU joined forces with the other union apparatuses to prevent the strike from becoming the spearhead of a broader worker-rebellion in the Manesar-Gurgaon industrial belt, repeatedly pressured the workers to accept settlements that failed to address their key demands, and urged them to appeal for help from the Haryana state Congress Party government, which was working hand-in-glove with Maruti-Suzuki to break the strike.

If the INTUC and the BJP-allied BMS have responded to the Stalinists' appeals that they join today's protest, it is because they see it as a means of posturing as worker advocates and boosting the credibility of their respective parties.

For the Stalinists the pursuit of closer ties with the rival union apparatuses is a means of furthering their decades-long policy of aligning first with one bourgeois party, then the other, in the name of defeating the purported "main danger from the right", at both the national and state level. In Tamil Nadu, the CPI and CPM used the participation of the AIADMK, a party which when it had last been in power used strikebreakers and mass firings to break a strike of government workers, in various protests in support of striking workers as a stepping stone to an electoral alliance with the AIADMK in last year's state elections.

Currently the Stalinists are promoting the need for a Third Front—an electoral alliance to be concocted from various regionalist and caste-ist parties, all of them former Congress and BJP allies. But it cannot be ruled out that in the near future they will ally implicitly or explicitly with the Congress or BJP.

During the past two decades, Indian big business "rose" through brutal exploitation of the working class and while presiding over acute agrarian distress. Now, in response to the global capitalist crisis, it is demanding an acceleration of pro-market reform, the gutting of remaining restrictions on layoffs and closures, and cuts to the meager amounts allotted to social

spending.

There is even a growing clamour against the National Rural Employment Guarantee on the grounds that it is "unaffordable" and that providing some rural poor with jobs paying little more than a dollar US per day is distorting the "rural labour market."

Workers in India, as around the world face, a struggle not against a single government but a political struggle against capitalism and for the reorganization of society on socialist lines, so that production can be based on human need rather than subordinated to the profits of a few. Militant industrial action in defence of jobs, against casualization and for basic rights must be developed as part of an independent political offensive of the working class for a workers' and peasants' government.

Such a struggle can only be developed through a political and organizational break with the Stalinist political parties and the trade union apparatuses. To wage their struggles, workers should form independent action committees, which should be developed as independent organs of working-class power.

The working class must provide leadership to poor peasants and other sections of the oppressed masses, in their struggle against the landlords, moneylenders and big business corporations, by advancing a socialist program.

Above all this requires the building of a mass revolutionary workers' party as part of an international party of the working class, an Indian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the party founded by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, indefatigable opponent of Stalinism, and foremost strategist of international socialism.

To advance their struggle to overthrow the capitalism workers need a new party, a revolutionary party based upon the program and perspective of international socialism. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections, Socialist Equality Parties in US, Canada, Britain, Germany, Sri Lanka and Australia, are only political movement, which is fighting to build such a revolutionary leadership of the international working class.



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