

India: Stalinist CPM holds party congress amid mounting internal crisis

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India's principal Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, is holding its 20th Congress this week in Kozhikode, Kerala amid a mounting and deep-rooted internal political crisis.

For decades the CPM has functioned as a pivotal prop of the Indian bourgeoisie, containing and suppressing the struggles of the working class and tying it to reactionary maneuvers with what the CPM itself characterizes as the parties of the Indian bourgeoisie.

The CPM has played a vital role in the implementation of the bourgeoisie's "new economic policy", adopted in 1991, which has transformed India into a cheap-labor producer for global capitalism. The CPM and the CPM-led Left Front have helped constitute and propped up a series of coalition governments in New Delhi—including the current Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government—that have implemented rightwing pro-market "reforms."

Although it declined to participate formally in the UPA, the CPM played a major role following the May 2004 elections in rallying other parties to ally with the Congress. Key planks and passages of the UPA's ostensible Common Minimum Programme, which touted the lie that it was possible to have "reform with a human face," were actually proposed by the CPM. For the next four years, the CPM continued to provide the UPA with its parliamentary majority, although it conceded that the UPA was carrying out reactionary economic and foreign policies virtually indistinguishable from those of the BJP-led government that preceded it.

Moreover, in those states where the CPM has led the government, it has self-avowedly pursued "pro-investor" policies. In West Bengal this included banning strikes in IT- and IT-enabled industries and using police and goon violence to suppress peasant resistance to its expropriation of land for Special Economic Zones and other big business ventures.

As a result, the CPM has suffered a significant erosion of its support within the working class and rural toilers, which has been expressed in a series of stunning electoral reversals. The CPM and the CPM-led Left Front electoral/parliamentary alliance were arguably the biggest losers in the 2009 national election. The CPM saw its representation in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's parliament) slashed from 43 to 17, while that of the Left Front was reduced from 61 to just 24.

In state assembly elections in the spring of 2011, the CPM-led Left Front suffered a 9 percentage-point drop in its vote-share and fell from power after 34 years of continuous rule over West Bengal, India's fourth most populous state. It was also ousted from office in the southwestern state of Kerala. Currently, the CPM leads only one state government, that of Tripura, a small (population 3.7 million), principally Bengali-speaking, former princely state.

In the recent state assembly elections—in Uttar Pradesh, which with a population of almost 200 million is far and away India's most populous state, the Punjab, an historic bastion of the Stalinist movement in India, and three other states—neither the CPM, nor its Stalinist Left Front partner, the Communist Party of India (CPI), won a single seat.

It is an open secret that the CPM leadership is fractured over what rightwing orientation to pursue.

The leadership of the party's West Bengal unit opposed the national party leadership's decision to withdraw parliamentary support from the Congress Party-led UPA government in July 2008, after the Congress chose to push through the Indo-US civilian nuclear accord and consummate a "global strategic partnership" with Washington. It subsequently objected to the party's attempt to cobble together a "Third Front" for the 2009 general election comprised of former governmental allies of the Hindu-supremacist BJP like the AIADMK and TDP, urging the CPM to try to mend fences with the Congress instead. And in the hope of persuading the Congress not to ally with the rightwing populist Trinamul Congress (TMC) in the 2011 West Bengal state elections, the CPM's West Bengal unit continued to make ever-more desperate appeals to the Congress, arguing that it was a more dependable and responsible ally than the TMC. A key element of this appeal, one fully supported by the national party leadership, was the CPM-led West Bengal government's full-throated support for Operation Green Hunt, the Indian government's counter-insurgency war against a Maoist-led revolt of tribal people threatened with dispossession by big business natural-resource extraction projects.

In a public display of his dissatisfaction, the former West Bengal Chief Minister and longtime CPM Politburo member Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has repeatedly failed to attend central party leadership meetings since 2008. According to press reports, he will also not attend this week's party congress.

The CPM's Kerala unit, meanwhile, has long been riven by factional warfare pitting former Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan against the CPM State Secretary Pinaravi Vijayan.

These differences have been papered over in the run-up to this week's party congress. The leadership clearly fears an open airing of differences, all the more so under conditions where the CPM's electoral reversals have undercut its ability to use state patronage to help manage the party's internal affairs. The recently published CPM membership figures underscore the extent to which its "mass membership" is bound up with its proximity to government office. Fully 764,000 of its 1,044,883 members come from the only three states where it has ever succeeded in forming a government—West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura. In Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh, large states which are home to major industrial centers, it has respectively 12,586; 3,575; and 6,056 members.

Since withdrawing its support for the Congress-led UPA, the CPM has promoted the idea of reconstituting a Third Front government, comprised of various caste-ist and regionalist parties, akin to the pro-"reform" government which ruled India between 1996 and 1998. Toward this end, it formed an electoral alliance with the AIADMK, a Tamil regionalist and Hindu chauvinist party that when it last held office used police violence, arrests and mass firings to break a strike of state government workers, assisting the AIADMK to return to power in the 2011 Tamil Nadu

elections.

The CPM has also struck a series of alliances, most of them only tacit, with the BJP. But at the end of 2011, party General-Secretary Prakash Karat openly defended joining hands with the BJP to oppose the Congress' plans to open up the country's retail sector to Walmart and other giant multi-brand retailers. "What is wrong in co-ordinating with the BJP to stop the government from taking measures that will impact the livelihood of the poor?" rhetorically asked another senior CPM leader.

The CPM has repeatedly justified its political alliances with rightwing bourgeois parties, including its support for the first UPA government, on the grounds that this was the only means to block a return to power by the virulently communalist BJP. Now, in the name of opposing a government it helped bring to office, it is helping the discredited ultra-rightwing BJP burnish its image.

The CPM has also defended the "pro-investor" policies it implemented in West Bengal, claiming that the principal reason for its electoral defeat was that big business targeted it because of its opposition to "neo-liberal" policies. This is a bare-faced lie. The CPM-led Left Front openly courted and received the support of big business, or at least powerful sections of it, in the 2006 state election. It was the Left Front's rightwing policies that subsequently made it possible for the TMC, led by the anti-communist demagogue and former BJP ally Mamata Banerjee, to posture as a friend of the oppressed peasantry of West Bengal.

In response to its loss of popular support and elite influence, the CPM has called for renewed emphasis on worker and peasant struggles, while insisting, despite the eruption of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression, that the political horizons of the working class must be restricted to fighting for an end to "neo-liberal" policies and for a "multi-polar world."

By placing itself in the leadership of various protests, the CPM aims to prove to the Indian bourgeoisie that it continues to play an indispensable role in politically controlling the working class and harnessing it to the bourgeoisie's "national interests".

In the past two years, there has been rising a tide of worker unrest against sweatshop wages, contract labor, and dictatorial working conditions, much of it centered in the globally-integrated auto, electronics and other industries that have emerged over the past two decades. At Hyundai, BYD Electronics, and other plants in Tamil Nadu, workers have turned to the CPM-affiliated Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) for support, only to have the Stalinists isolate their militant struggles, which have invariably come into conflict with the government and courts, and urge them to appeal to rightwing big business government and parties to intervene on their behalf. Indeed, CITU leaders instructed workers in Tamil Nadu, to end their struggles on the grounds that when CPM's electoral ally, the AIADMK, came to power things would improve.

Similarly, the CPM and CITU and the CPI and its All-India Trades' Union Congress played a pivotal role in containing the explosive struggle at Maruti-Suzuki's Manesar car assembly plant, which triggered widespread sympathy strikes and threatened to become the catalyst of a working-class challenge to the Indian bourgeoisie's cheap-labor strategy. Repeatedly, the Stalinist politicians and their union apparatuses pressured the Maruti-Suzuki workers to surrender to the companies' dictates, ultimately enabling the company to prevail and the sympathy strike movement to be defused.

The Stalinists have responded to the growing anger and militancy within the working class by forging closer ties to the rival union apparatuses, including those affiliated with the Congress Party and the BJP. Thus the Stalinists have hailed the Congress- and BJP-allied unions' participation in a one-day nationwide protest strike February 28 as "historic."

Tens of millions of workers, including many workers from the so-called informal sector to whom normal labor standards don't apply, joined the protest strike, providing further evidence of the depth of the opposition to

the Congress-led government and the "reform" program of the Indian bourgeoisie. But for the Stalinists such protests have become a ritualistic, annual event, mounted to provide political cover for their maneuvering with the government and various bourgeois parties. As in the past, the protest was organized with the stated purpose of pushing the Congress-led UPA to pursue "pro-people policies," i.e., with the express aim of opposing the development of an independent political offensive of the working class in opposition to the bourgeoisie and its government.

The CPM was founded in 1964 in a split from the CPI, which had been seriously discredited by its slavish support for the Congress Party government of Jawaharlal Nehru and its fulsome support for India in its 1962 border-war with China. From its birth, the CPM upheld the entire counter-revolutionary tradition of Stalinism, hailing the bureaucratic police regimes that governed the USSR and the People's Republic of China, denouncing Trotskyism with blood-curdling rhetoric, and defending the reactionary legacy of the CPI. This included the CPI's support for the agreement between British imperialism and the colonial bourgeoisie to suppress the democratic revolution through the 1947 "independence" and partition of the sub-continent.

Under the slogan of "People's Democratic Revolution," the CPM perpetuated and perpetuates the Stalinist two-stage theory that holds that the struggle for socialism is not on the agenda in India; rather the working class should join with the "progressive, anti-imperialist" section of the national bourgeoisie in completing the democratic anti-feudal, i.e., national bourgeois struggle. Only five decades on the CPM had moved much further right, having long ago integrated itself into the political establishment and for decades administered bourgeois rule and implemented "pro-investor" policies in key states like West Bengal.

The centerpiece of this week's CPM congress will be the adoption of two lengthy resolutions, a "Political Resolution" and a "Resolution on Some Ideological Resolutions." These resolutions are fraudulent, aimed as they are at providing justifications for the CPM's role in politically suppressing the working class and implementing pro-big business policies, while promoting the hoax that the CPM is a Marxist party and an heir to the 1917 October Revolution.

Still there is some value in critiquing the contents of these documents for they illustrate the CPM's conscious counter-revolutionary perspective and ever-rightward evolution. This critique will be presented in two further *World Socialist Web Site* articles to be posted in the coming days.



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