

Indian Communist Party (Marxist) continues to defend Stalin's crimes

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At a press conference last month, WSWs reporters challenged leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM on their continued defence of the crimes of Stalin against the international working class, including the Moscow Trials of 1936-38. The response of the CPM leaders makes clear that the party continues to defend the entire reactionary heritage of Stalinism.

The press conference took place in the southern Indian city of Kozhikode alongside with CPM's 20th national congress. The CPM was formed in 1964 in the midst of the Sino-Soviet split in the international Stalinist movement. The CPM subsequently eclipsed the Moscow-aligned Communist Party of India (CPI) in the parliamentary arena, holding power in several Indian states, including West Bengal and Kerala.

The WSWs asked senior CPM leader Sitaram Yechury: "In 1992, the CPM presented a resolution on certain ideological issues. It said: 'The uncontested contribution of Joseph Stalin in defence of Leninism, against Trotskyism and other ideological deviations, the building of socialism in USSR ... are ineradicable from the history of socialism.' Today, after 20 years, what is your attitude towards this statement?"

Yechury attempted to dismiss the questions as simply "archival matters"—in other words, academic historical issues with no contemporary relevance. But he stood by the 1992 document, stating: "As far as our assessment of Stalin is concerned what we said in 1992 remains ... The assessment we made in 1992, we are bound to that assessment. We have not deviated from it."

In fact, the ideological differences between Stalinism and Trotskyism are of fundamental importance for workers today. The reactionary nationalist perspective "building of socialism in USSR" or "socialism in one country", first elaborated by Stalin and Bukharin in 1924, was a complete repudiation of the socialist internationalism on which the Russian Revolution of 1917 had been based and which Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition intransigently defended.

The program of "Socialism in One Country" represented the interests of the conservative bureaucracy that emerged in the Soviet Union under conditions of its continued international isolation and economic backwardness; and it usurped power from

the working class. The Stalinist bureaucracy's subordination of the interests of the international working class to its own narrow interests resulted in one disaster after another, including the defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution.

The corollary of "Socialism in One Country" was the revival of the two-stage theory: that is, in countries such as China and India, the working class must subordinate itself to a supposedly progressive wing of the national bourgeoisie in carrying out national democratic tasks and relegate the struggle for socialism to the indefinite future. As Trotsky established in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, the bourgeoisie is organically incapable of waging a consistent struggle against imperialism or meeting democratic aspirations and social needs of the masses. In China, the bourgeois Kuomintang, promoted as progressive by Stalin, massacred the insurgent workers and peasants in 1927.

The CPM adherence to "Socialism in One Country" and the two-stage theory takes the form today of political support for various parties of the Indian bourgeoisie and its complete integration into the Indian political establishment. Between 2004 and 2008, the CPM directly supported the Congress-led coalition government as it made deep inroads into the social position of working people. In Indian states where it has held power, the CPM has implemented an openly pro-market capitalist program and ruthlessly suppressed any opposition by workers and peasants.

The WSWs also asked whether the CPM still defended the Moscow show trials that were used as the pretext by Stalin to murder hundreds of thousands of Marxists and socialist-minded workers and intellectuals. Yechury avoided a direct reply, but declared evasively: "This is a matter of history. It is a matter of disputable history. It is a matter that should be established by historical research."

Contrary to Yechury's claim, the Moscow trials were exposed at the time as a monstrous travesty designed by Stalin to suppress any political opposition within the Soviet Union and the Third International. Trotsky, who was the chief accused, called for an international commission of inquiry to examine the charges against him. Amid vehement opposition from the Stalinist bureaucracy, a commission was convened in 1937 under renowned American philosopher John Dewey. After exhaustively examining the

evidence, including Trotsky's own testimony, it declared the Moscow trials to be a "frame-up".

Subsequent historical research has demonstrated again and again the criminal character of the Moscow trials—the finest representatives of the generation that carried out the Russian Revolution, including the entire Central Committee of Lenin's Bolshevik Party were murdered. Even Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, in his 1956 "secret speech" acknowledged some of these crimes, but attempted to put the blame on just one man—Stalin.

Obviously on the defensive, Yechury tried to defend Stalin by claiming that he had been instrumental in defeating the Nazi armies in World War II. "When Hitler and Germany attacked Soviet Union in 1941, if the entire Bolshevik party was eliminated, if the whole party was decimated, victory over fascism would have been impossible.... That finally Hitler was defeated, it was not your American Stars and Stripes, it was not your Union Jack, it was not your French Flag. It was Soviet Red Flag that flew over the right side ... Nobody else had gone there [to Germany], except Stalin, the one who went there to defeat Hitler."

This is a falsification of history. The Red Army certainly played a central role in the defeat of Hitler. But this was despite, not because of, Stalin whose policies were instrumental in enabling Hitler to come to power in 1933 and in paving the way for World War II and the Nazi invasion against the Soviet Union.

Stalin's ultra-left "Third Period" line divided the German working class right at the point when united action was required to defeat the menace of the Nazism. Guided by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow, the German Communist Party (KPD) branded the Social Democratic Party (SPD) as "social fascists" and opposed any joint defence of the working class.

The Stalinist bureaucracy subsequently subordinated the working class to its manoeuvres with the so-called democratic powers. The associated policy of the Popular Front—tying the working class to sections of the "democratic" bourgeoisie—resulted in the defeat of the French general strike movement and the Spanish Revolution, opening the path to war. On the eve of World War II, Stalin signed a pact with Hitler that directly paved the way for the Nazi invasion of Poland and conflict with France and Britain.

Stalin's purges, including the elimination of the entire leadership of the Red Army, badly weakened the Soviet Union's defences and paved the way for the Nazi invasion in 1941. It was the Soviet working class that defended the gains of the Russian Revolution and defeated the Nazi invasion through an immense sacrifice, despite the criminal role of bureaucracy.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the CPI, whose tradition the CPM upholds and defends, followed every opportunist twist and turn of Stalin's policies with disastrous consequences for the Indian working class. After the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union,

the CPI—in line with Stalin's alliance with the US and Britain—gave its full support to British colonial rulers in India, acting as their chief strike breakers during the war. The CPI opposed the Quit India movement that erupted in August 1942 against British rule and supported the brutal police repression against protesters and strikers.

As Trotsky warned in the 1930s, the Stalinist bureaucracy would ultimately destroy the Soviet Union and restore capitalism unless it was overthrown in a political revolution. That warning was vindicated not only with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but also the policies of capitalist restoration carried out by the Stalinist bureaucracy in China from the 1970s that destroyed the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution.

At the press conference, the WSWS asked senior CPM leader Ramachandran Pillai how his party regarded China. Absurdly, Pillai claimed that China was still "a socialist state" and declared that there was "no capitalist exploitation". In fact, over the past 30 years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has transformed China into the world's premier cheap labour platform for the major international corporations. Capitalist exploitation and all of the consequent social evils, including the deepening divide between working people and the wealthy capitalist elite, are on open display in China.

The CPM has carried out the similar policies when it was in power in the Indian states of West Bengal—seeking to attract foreign investment by depressing wages and conditions and ruthlessly suppressing any opposition by workers and the rural poor. The treacherous role of the CPM and CPI in propping up bourgeois rule underlines the necessity for workers to make a long overdue political and theoretical reckoning with Stalinism. Far from these issues being unimportant "archival matters", the working class can only begin to wage a struggle for socialism by assimilating the necessary lessons drawn by the international Trotskyist movement in its difficult and protracted political fight against Stalinism and its apologists.



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