

Indian Stalinists invoke Hindu-communalist threat

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India's two major Stalinist parties, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the larger Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, organized a national "Secular Convention" in India's capital last week. It was a political fraud.

In the name of fighting communalism and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Stalinists joined forces with a host of right-wing, regionalist and caste-ist parties—most of them previous coalition partners of the BJP.

According to the Stalinists the "unity" of the Indian people against communalism was affirmed by embracing the likes of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, whose Janata Dal (United) was the BJP's most important partner in its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for 17 years ending only this past June.

The Convention was cast as a response to two events: the BJP's selection of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate for India's spring 2014 national general election; and the recent communal clashes in the Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh—clashes that left some 50 people, most of them Muslims, dead and in which local BJP leaders played a prominent role.

Modi is an arch-communalist and a vile enemy of the working class. He instigated the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom that left more than a thousand people dead and hundreds of thousands of homeless.

Modi's entry into the national political arena and emergence as the standard-bearer of the Official Opposition BJP has been propelled by the very public backing he has received from Indian big business. (According to a recent column in the *Economist* titled "Why Indian firms are rooting for Modi," "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that almost everyone in a suit and with a pulse in the private sector wants Narendra Modi to become prime minister ... Private-equity types, blue-chip executives and the chiefs of India's big conglomerates all think he can make the trains run on time.")

Yet the Stalinists, to say nothing of their "secular" allies, said virtually nothing about this in the run-up to or at last week's convention, attributing Modi's rise entirely to the machinations of the RSS, the shadowy Hindu communalist "volunteer organization" that provides the BJP with most of its cadre.

Big business is looking to Modi—a self-styled strongman who has lavished favors on corporate India and suppressed strikes—to expedite the imposition of the "pro-market" agenda of deregulation, privatization, price-subsidy cuts, and deficit reduction advanced by the current Congress Party-led government, whether by heading a BJP-led regime or increasing the right-wing pressure on whatever combination of parties holds the reins of power after the coming election.

The bourgeoisie's embrace of social reaction underscores the urgency of the working class boldly advancing its own solution to the

capitalist crisis—the fight for a workers' government committed to the socialist reorganization of socio-economic life—so as to rally the impoverished peasants and toilers against the bourgeoisie.

Instead the Stalinists seek to politically paralyze the working class, chaining it to all manner of rightwing parties and parliamentary politics.

When in office the parties that the Stalinists are promoting as "defenders of secularism" pursue the socially-incendiary "pro-market" agenda of the bourgeoisie. They preside over ever-deepening poverty, economic insecurity and social inequality—over the very conditions that, in the absence of a working-class alternative, feed the social anxiety and frustration that the Hindu right exploits.

Moreover, these parties themselves make reactionary regionalist and caste appeals and connive with the Hindu communist BJP and its allies.

Pride of place at the Stalinists' "Secular Convention" was given to Nitish Kumar—thus proving for the umpteenth time that a politician or party has only to withdraw from the BJP-led NDA for the Stalinists to give them their "secular blessing".

On cue, Kumar delivered savage broadsides against the "fascist" Modi. He and the convention's Stalinist sponsors ignored the obvious, albeit inconvenient, question: If Kumar and his JD (U) are such fervent opponents of communalism why until six months ago were they partners—including in Bihar's JD (U)-BJP coalition government—with a party that not only counted Modi as one of its leaders, but which in the early 1990s led the agitation that resulted in the razing of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya, precipitating the greatest communal violence in India since Partition?

After Kumar, the most prominent recruit to the Stalinists' Secular Convention was Samajwadi Party head Mulayam Singh Yadav, whose close ties to Anil Ambani, the billionaire head of one of India's largest conglomerates, have long been a subject of public comment. Uttar Pradesh's Samajwadi Party government has been implicated in the communal clashes in Muzaffarnagar, with considerable evidence supporting the charge that the state government failed to act precipitously to contain the clashes so as to create a communal polarization from which it hopes to gain electorally.

To the Stalinists' chagrin, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa did not attend the convention, sending one of her minions instead. The AIADMK is a notorious right-wing party, which has employed anti-terrorist laws to jail political opponents and used strikebreakers, mass firings and mass arrests to break a 2003 strike of government workers. Jayalalithaa and her AIADMK also have a long record of conniving with and promoting Hindu communalism. The AIADMK was a partner in the BJP-led

NDA at its birth and has served with the BJP in government. In 2002, Tamil Nadu's AIADMK government enacted, to applause from the BJP, a so-called anti-conversion bill aimed at stopping lower caste Hindus trying to flee caste discrimination through conversion to another faith. And Jayalalithaa has boasted about her personal friendship with no other than the arch-communalist Modi, including congratulating him on his elevation last June to the BJP national parliamentary board.

The corporate media generally presented the Secular Convention as preparatory to the creation of a Third Front, an electoral alliance uniting the Stalinists' Left Front and various regional and caste-ist parties in opposition to the BJP's NDA and the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance.

This is partially true. If the Stalinists themselves denied this, it was because they knew that to identify the Convention with a prospective Third Front would have scared off many of the invitees.

While parties like the JD (U) and AIADMK calculate that sharing a platform with the Stalinists will help them posture as "secular" and even "pro-poor," they also want to keep their hands free for the election-alliance bargaining that will get underway in earnest at the beginning of the new year.

However, the Stalinists' also had a double agenda. For them the convention was a means of both exploring the possibilities for a Third Front and of preparing the ground for closer political collaboration with the Congress Party—whether in the form of an explicit pre- or post-election alliance or implicit support as a "lesser-evil" to the BJP.

The Stalinists have routinely aligned with the "secular" Congress on the grounds that it is the only way to keep the Hindu right at bay. And with last week's convention, they reaffirmed their claim that communalism can and must be opposed by the working class allying with the "secular" parties of the bourgeoisie.

In issuing their convention call, the Stalinists made a show of not inviting the Congress and its UPA allies. Under conditions where there is mass opposition to the UPA's regressive pro-market policies, including subsidy cuts, fuel price hikes and public sector disinvestment, the Stalinists have been compelled to mount anti-government protests, whilst imposing on them the reactionary perspective of pressuring the UPA to adopt "pro-people" measures.

However, the Stalinists ultimately did welcome a Maharashtra-based UPA ally, the Nationalist Congress Party into the convention.

The Congress, for its part, had only good things to say about the Left Front initiative. "We have full respect for what they do," declared Congress spokesman Raj Babbar.

Workers, youth and intellectuals must draw a balance sheet of the past quarter century. In the name of opposing the Hindu right, the Stalinists have supported one right-wing government after another—most of them led by the Congress Party—with disastrous consequences for the workers and toilers.

In the early 1990s they helped prop up the minority Congress of government Narasimha Rao, enabling the bourgeoisie to survive the shipwreck of its state-led national economic strategy and initiate the drive to transform India into a cheap-labor producer for world capitalism.

From 2004-8 they were effectively Congress' most important coalition partner, helping to organize the UPA and write its Common Minimum Programme, and providing the votes that sustained it in office. This arrangement only ended, when Congress choose to break ties so as to ram through the Indo-US nuclear accord.

While the BJP is an inveterate opponent of the working class and

carried out a raft of right-wing measures when it led India's government from 1998-2004, most of the "heavy lifting" in the bourgeoisie's class war assault over the past two decades, including the implementation of its new economic policy and the forging of a strategic partnership with US imperialism has been carried out by Congress party-led governments—governments that have for the most part been propped up in parliament by the CPM-led Left Front.

The Stalinists have used the threat from the Hindu right to try to intimidate the working class. But the growth of the communal right and the proliferation of parties based on the promotion of caste and regional-ethnic identities was itself the direct outcome of the political strangling of the working class upsurge that convulsed India in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Communist Party of India served as a coalition partner in Indira Gandhi's government, including during the 1975-77 Emergency when it suspended basic civil liberties and jailed tens of thousands of workers and leftists. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) lent its support to J.P. Narayan's anti-Congress bourgeois opposition movement, then in the 1977 elections blocked with the Janata Party—an ad hoc coalition that included as a major constituent element the BJP's predecessor the Hindu supremacist Jana Sangh.

No section of the Indian bourgeoisie is committed to secularism or democracy. The Congress Party joined with the Muslim League and British imperialism to partition the subcontinent, because it was organically incapable of mounting and hostile to a revolutionary struggle against British imperialism based on an appeal to the common class interests of the workers and toilers of India. In 1984, Congress leaders instigated a pogrom against Sikhs following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. And Gandhi's Congress successors, her son Rajiv Gandhi, and later Narasimha Rao, connived with the Hindu chauvinist, BJP-led campaign to raze the Babri Masjid.

The rallying of important sections of the bourgeoisie behind Modi is a manifestation of the intensification of the class struggle. With Indian capitalism being roiled by the world economic crisis, the bourgeoisie is determined to intensify the assault on the working class and ready to employ communal reaction and authoritarian methods to do so.

In response, the working class must mobilize its class strength, rallying the toilers behind it, by opposing the entire bourgeois political establishment and advancing a socialist program. This requires the building of a new revolutionary working class party in opposition to the Stalinist parties and their trade union allies: an Indian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the indefatigable opponent of its bureaucratic degeneration.



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