

Delhi's AAP government resigns

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The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP—Common Man's Party) government of Delhi—India's National Capital Territory and, with 22 million residents, its largest metropolitan region—resigned last Friday after 49 tumultuous days in office. AAP Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tendered his resignation, claiming that India's two principal parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had thwarted his government's agenda by preventing it from tabling a bill in the legislative Assembly to create an anti-corruption ombudsman or *Jan Lokpal*.

Seeking to appeal to the mass popular disaffection and anger with the political establishment, Kejriwal charged that the Congress and BJP had combined to bring down his government as retribution for it laying corruption charges against the previous Delhi Chief Minister and indicting India's Petroleum Minister Veerappa Moily, his predecessor Murli Deora, and industrialist Mukesh Ambani for colluding on gas pricing.

Kejriwal's explanation was self-serving. All indications are the 14 month-old AAP staged last week's crisis, calculating that its efforts to transform itself into a national party and emerge as a serious force in the coming all-India parliamentary elections would be boosted if it ceded the reins of power in Delhi.

Delhi's constitutional head of government, the Lieutenant-Governor, had publicly declared that his approval was required before the *Jan Lokpal* bill could be tabled. But the AAP defiantly refused to submit it to his office for scrutiny and brought it before the Delhi Assembly knowing full well that the Congress and BJP would assert that on constitutional grounds they had no choice but to squash the legislation.

That the AAP's moves were scripted in advance received further confirmation when the party wasted no time in announcing an initial slate of 20 candidates for the national election slated for this April and May. The candidates include ex-government bureaucrats, a banker and prominent environmental, antipoverty, and anti-"corruption" campaigners, including Medha Patkar of the National Alliance of People's Movements.

While Kejriwal is denying any such personal ambitions, the ex-Chief Minister and AAP convenor is being widely touted as a prospective prime minister.

Both the Congress Party and the BJP have termed Kejriwal's resignation a "drama." However, for their own reasons, they both welcomed the exit of the upstart AAP from office.

Although its assembly votes had sustained the AAP in office, the Congress Party—India's premier big business party and the dominant partner in India's national coalition government—condemned Kejriwal. "He was never serious about governing," declared Congress spokeswoman Sandeep Dikshit. Kejriwal "tried to subvert the constitution and was a smooth liar," said Dikshit, whose mother, Sheila Dikshit, was Delhi's Congress Chief Minister until last December. "He lied through his teeth while attacking Congress."

Arun Jaitley, a prominent leader of the Hindu supremacist BJP, welcomed the end of the AAP "nightmare." He termed the AAP government Delhi's worst-ever.

On resigning, Kejriwal urged the Lieutenant Governor, a Congress appointee, to dissolve the Delhi Assembly and call new elections. Instead India's Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has imposed "president's rule" for six months. The Congress was anxious to avoid a second crushing electoral defeat in Delhi, fearing that it could seriously damage its national election campaign.

The AAP, which has proclaimed the fight against government corruption its *raison d'être* and its clarion call, is an aspiring capitalist party.

Nominating itself as a guardian of morality and a bane of corruption, the AAP's rule in Delhi was marked by populism, racist illegal vigilante raids by the Law Minister against African women and street agitation led by Kejriwal himself. (See "Delhi's AAP government teeters after month in office")

The AAP's sudden rise to prominence is rooted in mass disaffection with the BJP and Congress, whose policies

have brought fabulous wealth to a tiny layer of Indian billionaires and multimillionaires while condemning the mass of the population to hunger, want and economic insecurity. The AAP's ability to rally significant support from the poor and working class of Delhi is also an indictment of the Stalinist parliamentary parties—the CPM or Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the CPI or Communist Party of India. The Stalinists have suppressed the struggles of the working class, propped up a series of national governments (including from 2004-2008 the Congress-led UPA) that have implemented neo-liberal “reform,” and in those states where they have formed the government have pursued what they themselves characterize as pro-investor policies at the expense of the workers and toilers.

The AAP was formed by leaders of India Against Corruption, which led mass protests in Delhi in 2011-12 after a series of scandals had exposed how the UPA government has sold off public assets to big business for a song. While railing against corruption, the AAP has always focused its fire on the politicians, not their big business paymasters, and studiously ignored the real roots of corruption in the capitalist cash-nexus—a social order in which political leaders are nothing more than agents of domestic and international capital.

With the AAP now seeking to entrench itself in the cesspool that is Indian national politics, it is making its support for capitalism and big business ever more explicit.

Speaking Monday to the leadership of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), one of India's two most important business lobby groups, Kejriwal declared. “We are not against capitalism, but we are against crony capitalism.”

Employing free market rhetoric that would not have been out of place in a speech by Margaret Thatcher, Kejriwal told the CII, “Let me make a categorical statement ...The government has no business doing business and it should be left to the private sector.”

Kejriwal said the “government should privatise sectors with more competition immediately” and declared his support for the elimination of agricultural price supports and controls. “In the agricultural sector,” said the AAP convenor, “pricing is important. Control on farmers should be lifted; we should deregulate the agricultural sector.”

Such a move would drive small peasants into bankruptcy and threaten the mass of the population with higher prices, especially for better quality grains and produce.

Making clear that the real target of the AAP's anti-corruption campaign are petty government officials not the business houses who dictate government policy, Kejriwal painted a portrait of an embattled business class. The business community, he told the CII, are “constantly under the threat of being harassed and persecuted ... We need to create an environment which encourages businessmen, not discourages them.”

“I have asked industrialists,” continued Kejriwal, “to tell me which are procedures that need to be redefined so that government should have very little interference.”

On all but bended-knee, the AAP's best-known spokesman urged India's corporate bosses—those who are forever complaining that India “wastes” too much money on social expenditure and this in a country where three-quarters of the population survives on less than \$2 day—to help write the party's economic program. “Our purpose to be here,” he declared, “is to appeal to you to join us in nation-building and tell us what to do.”

The AAP's temporary measures to reduce water and electricity rates in Delhi and their rhetorical attacks on a handful of businessmen who have benefited disproportionately from government largesse, like Reliance Industries Mukesh Ambani, rattled sections of India's business elite. Much of the corporate media has taken to denouncing the AAP as “socialist.”

But Kejriwal's speech to the CII has done much to reassure India's corporate elite that the AAP can be a useful tool in containing social discontent and pressing for privatization and deregulation.

“We are satisfied,” Adi Godrej, the chairman of the Godrej Group, told the *Hindustan Times*. “(Kejriwal) clarified that he believes in private enterprise. It was a welcome speech.” He is pro-business and that is reassuring,” said Harsh Mariwala, chairman of the consumer goods company Marico.



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