Indian parliament votes to create new Telangana state

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India's Congress Party-led government has rammed a bitterly contested law through parliament that creates a new state, Telangana, by bifurcating Andhra Pradesh—a southern Indian, predominantly Telugu-speaking state that is home to 85 million people.

The Congress is portraying the creation of Telangana as a triumph for democracy and a blow to social inequality. These are cynical lies from a government that has pursued "free market" policies that have brought untold wealth to a tiny layer of capitalists, while condemning India's workers and toilers to grinding poverty and economic insecurity.

If the Congress has bullied its coalition allies and faced down a rebellion in its own ranks to force through the creation of India's 29th state, it is out of crass, short-term electoral calculations.

The creation of a new government apparatus for Andhra Pradesh's ten northwestern districts will give a narrow layer of Telangana businessman, politicians, and professionals greater access to government patronage and largesse, but do nothing to meet the social and democratic aspirations of the region's workers and rural poor. Moreover, Andhra's bifurcation has and will be used to set working people against each other. The leader of the Telangana agitation, K. Chandrashekhar Rao, and his Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) have repeatedly vowed that a Telangana government will bar "settlers"—i.e. those born outside the region—from state employment.

The past two weeks saw tumultuous scenes in India's parliament as the Congress Party high command pushed through its *Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation* bill even before resolving many important and contentious issues concerning the creation of Telangana and the organization of Seemandhra (the name of the state to be formed from Andhra's remaining 13 districts).

Pro- and anti-Telangana legislators clashed on the floor of the *Lok Sabha*, the lower house of India's parliament, when the government tabled the bill Feb. 13. During the brawl, an opponent of Telangana, Lagadapati Rajagopal, the Congress MP from Vijayawada—Andhra's third largest city—reportedly used pepper spray on his rivals and broke a glass. Another parliamentarian was accused of brandishing a knife. As a result, several MPs had to be hospitalized.

Although the Congress Lok Sabha Speaker, Meira Kumar, suspended sixteen MPs who opposed the Telanagana bill, pandemonium again broke out when debate resumed this past Tuesday. Ultimately, the Congress with the support of the official opposition, the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), rammed the legislation through both houses of parliament, by shutting down debate and eschewing a recorded vote in favor of a voice-vote.

In a further anti-democratic move, India's Congress government is expected to place Andhra Pradesh under "president's" or central government rule. On Wednesday, the state's Congress chief minster, N. Kiran Kumar Reddy, resigned from his post and the party to protest the state's bifurcation.

Since Congress announced it intended to create Telangana four years ago, there have been repeated agitations and counter-agitations on the issue by rival factions of the Andhra elite, which has split along Telangana and anti-Telangana lines, cutting across traditional party affiliations.

The Telangana elite has sought to rally popular support by claiming that the poverty that prevails in the region is the result of neglect by successive governments at the state and national levels. The elite in Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema—the areas that are to comprise Seemandhra —have responded by appealing

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to Telugu regionalist sentiment and by stoking popular apprehension about their Telugu rivals' exclusivist state employment policy and designs on Hyderabad, the current state capital.

Whatever their claims, none of the rival factions of Andhra elite are concerned about the fate of working people. Their campaigns for or against Telangana are based on the selfish defence of their own privileges. The Telangana elite calculates that a separate state will strengthen their position in bargaining with the central government in New Delhi and with global capital. The Seemandhra elite fears that the loss of Telangana will weaken their bargaining power in national politics.

The most bitterly contested issue between the two rival factions is control of Hyderabad, which falls within the Telangana region. With a population of 8 million, Hyderabad is India's sixth largest city and a global IT-hub, serving as the Indian base of many US companies, including Google, Amazon, Dell and Microsoft.

As the city accounts for more than 44 percent of all Andhra Pradesh's state government revenue, both factions are desperate to control it.

In an attempt to appease the concerns of the Seemandhra elite, the *Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation* law calls for the city to serve as the joint capital of both states for a 10 year-period, during which a new capital is to be built for Seemandhra. This "compromise" has failed to mollify the opponents of bifurcation, as the central government has still not clarified how Hyderabad's revenues will be divided among the two state governments over the next ten years, nor how much central-government money will be allotted to developing a capital for Seemandhra.

The Seemandhra elite, including several of the legislators who violently opposed the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh on the floor of India's parliament, have huge business interests in Hyderabad and are determined to prevent it falling into their Telangana rivals' hands. Rajagopal, who pepper-spayed Telangana supporters in parliament, owns the 150 billion-rupee (US $2 billion) Lanco Group of Companies, which is involved in infrastructure projects and real estate business in Hyderabad. M. Venugopal Reddy from the Andhra Pradesh-based Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the MP accused of brandishing a knife in India's parliament, is the director and promoter of the Ramky Group, which runs multi-million infrastructure and real estate projects and pharmaceutical companies in Hyderabad.

Water resources for electricity generation and irrigation are another major issue in dispute, as Andhra Pradesh's principal rivers, the Godavari and Krishna, flow through Telangana into Coastal Andhra. The Seemandhra elite fears that the new Telangana administration will use its control of the headwaters to its benefit, restricting the water flow to Coastal Andhra.

The Indian Stalinists have played an important role over decades in lending political legitimacy to the Telangana agitation. The Communist Party of India (CPI) and various Maoist groups have openly supported the campaign Chandrashekhar Rao and his TMS have led for a separate Telangana state. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM has opposed the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, but not from the standpoint of the struggle to mobilize the working class against the Indian bourgeoisie. It fears the creation of a Telangana state will encourage the push for the carving out of a Gorkhaland state from the northern districts of West Bengal. The CPM, which led West Bengal's government for 34 years ending in 2011, has for decades functioned as a spokesman for the West Bengal regional bourgeoisie in Indian politics.

The creation of new states through the restructuring of Indian bourgeoisie rule will not solve any of the burning social and economic problems arising from the failure of capitalism. It will only serve the interests of various regional bourgeois elites and further intensify linguistic, regional, caste and communal tensions.

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