

Indian Stalinists reaffirm right-wing “political-tactical” line

Our correspondents in Visakhapatnam
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The 21st congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, which is being held this week in the southeastern port city of Visakhapatnam, has formally reaffirmed the right-wing “political-tactical line” under which India’s principal Stalinist parliamentary party has pursued since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In accordance with this line, the Stalinists have politically suppressed the working class, providing pivotal support to the bourgeoisie in its drive to make India a cheap-labor haven for world capital. On the national stage, the CPM and its Left Front have propped up a succession of right-wing minority governments, most of them led by the Indian bourgeoisie’s traditional party of government—the Congress Party—that have pursued neoliberal policies and tilted ever more decisively toward Washington. In those states where it has formed the government (West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura), the CPM has implemented what it itself characterizes as “pro-investor” policies.

The congress’s first order of business after it went into closed session Tuesday afternoon was to discuss and adopt the “Draft Review Report on the Political and Tactical Line” presented by the outgoing Politburo and Central Committee.

The report purports to offer a frank reassessment of the party’s political strategy and its application over the past quarter-century.

The report’s drafting was an effort on the part of the leadership to contain a mounting political-organizational crisis. As a consequence of its right-wing policies, the CPM has suffered a hemorrhaging in its working-class support and a series of electoral debacles. Since 2011 the CPM has formed the government only in the tiny northeast Indian state of Tripura. In the 2014 national election the CPM and its Left Front won just a dozen seats, far and away its worst result ever.

While conceding a handful of minor mistakes in the application of its “political-tactical line,” the “Draft Review Report” staunchly defends the record of the CPM. This includes the CPM’s role in helping create the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which ruled India from

2004 to last May, and the CPM’s propping up of the UPA government for four years, ending only in July 2008.

The “Review Report” has now been officially adopted by the CPM congress, the party’s highest body. While some forty amendments were accepted, these were, party spokesmen insisted, of a minor character, serving to “strengthen” the document’s basic line.

In other words, under conditions where the Indian bourgeoisie has moved sharply to the right, bringing to power the “Hindu strongman” Narendra Modi and his BJP to more aggressively pursue neoliberal reform at home and assert India’s great power ambitions on the world stage, the Stalinists have reaffirmed their role as the loyal “left wing” of the bourgeois order—a party that shackles the working class to parliamentary politics and alliances with the Congress and all manner of right-wing regionalist and casteist bourgeois parties.

With the exception of the inaugural session held last Tuesday morning, the CPM congress has been closed to the press. However, each afternoon a senior party leader is providing a press briefing. The first two, those held on Wednesday and Thursday, were addressed respectively by Prakash Karat, the CPM’s outgoing general secretary, and Brinda Karat, a CPM Politburo member and Prakash Karat’s wife.

At these press briefings, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters have repeatedly demanded that the CPM leaders provide an accounting to the working class for their pro-capitalist policies, which have resulted in the strengthening of the bourgeoisie and communal reaction. They have been met with evasions and demagoguery.

A WWSW reporter asked Prakash Karat to explain why it was that the BJP, not the Left Front, was able to exploit the mass opposition to the Congress in the 2014 election, and if this was not bound up with the fact that the CPM was itself popularly identified with the Congress regime. In reply, the CPM General-Secretary declared, “Everybody knows that in this country politics is dominated by parties which have the support of the big business and big capitalists. When the

Congress Party gets discredited the BJP takes advantage of that, and when the BJP gets discredited it goes to the Congress to take advantage of the situation.”

Both Prakash and Brinda Karat tried to claim that the CPM’s call for a “Left and Democratic Alternative” is a strategy for mobilizing workers and other toilers and oppressed in social struggles, although it has been invoked by the Stalinists for decades to legitimize their maneuvers, alliances and electoral combinations with the Indian political establishment.

Speaking of the “Left Democratic Alliance,” Prakash Karat said, “We have been saying this for the last 30, 40 years... We are now reviewing why we have not been able to implement this goal. This is nothing to do with elections at all. The forces we want to gather [are those] who can oppose the present bourgeois system and present an alternative to that. The building of this alternative consists of mobilizing workers, farmers and other sections of the masses.”

Brinda Karat echoed his remarks the next day: “I want to explain to those who see politics in terms of electoral politics—of course it is a very, very important part of politics—what we are really looking at is how we mobilize the social forces, not just the parties but the social forces.”

The CPM’s sudden deemphasizing of electoral politics and rhetorical calls for “mobilizing the masses” are bound up with its marginalization in official bourgeois politics. The Stalinists recognize that if they are to regain their influence and positions within the bourgeois establishment they have to prove to the ruling elite that they continue to play a vital role as a political safety valve, as a means of controlling and containing the mounting social anger in the working class and rural poor over dire poverty, mass joblessness and ever-deepening social inequality.

The treacherous role of the Stalinists in mass struggles is exemplified by their attitude to the victimized workers at the Maruti-Suzuki car assembly plant in Manesar, Haryana. The CPM-affiliated Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the other union federations have systematically isolated these workers, who have faced a state-company witch hunt in which thousands have lost their jobs and 150 of the most militant have been jailed on frame-up charges since August 2012. Opposed to mobilizing the industrial strength of the working class in defense of the victimized workers, the Stalinists have urged them to appeal to the state government, Labor Department and courts, which have all been working hand-in-glove with the company against them.

The two Karats also made a show of the fact that the CPM has forsaken its attempt to cobble together a Third Front from the likes of the AIADMK, JD (U), BJD, TDP etc. to electorally oppose the BJP and Congress Party. “We have come to the conclusion,” said Prakash Karat, “such an

alternative was not feasible. Essentially their program cannot be an alternative to the Congress or the BJP.”

The reality is that the Stalinists came to this “conclusion” after it was thrust upon them. Their desperate efforts to woo these right-wing parties, all of them onetime allies of the BJP and/or the Congress, first in the 2009 and then in the 2014 national elections had increasingly brought them only discredit and humiliation.

However, for all their posturing about leading mass struggles, the Stalinists were quick to leave the door wide open for alliances with the regional bourgeois parties, if only for the moment at the state level. (The next national election is not due until 2019). Said Prakash Karat, “It is possible in certain states we may have electoral alliances with them, and we can go in joint struggles with them against communalism and other common issues.”

In a significant development that marks a further shift rightward, the CPM congress passed a resolution calling for “reservation” (i.e. preferential hiring and quotas) for Scheduled Castes (i.e. the Dalits or former Untouchables) and India’s tribal peoples to be “extended to the private sector.” This demand has been raised and popularized by the casteist, pro-capitalist Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

“Reservation” is currently restricted to the public sector. But, argued the CPM resolution, as a result of privatization, contracting out, the growth of public-private partnerships, and a government “ban on recruitment,” public sector jobs are a shrinking proportion of the labor force.

Rather than fight to unite the working class across caste and communal lines to oppose the bourgeoisie’s pro-market, neoliberal agenda and fight for socialism, the Stalinists are proposing to divide workers along caste lines so they can fight among themselves for the “equitable” caste division of capitalist misery.

The authors also recommend:

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