

India: Stalinist CPM shifts still further right

Our correspondents in Visakhapatnam
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India's main Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, made a further pronounced shift to the right at its 21st national congress, which was held in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh over six days last week.

The congress formally reaffirmed the “political-tactical line” the CPM has pursued over the past quarter century, endorsing the “Review Report on the Political and Tactical Line” submitted by the party leadership.

Dismissing—in the notorious words of the late CPM Politburo Member and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu—“socialism as a far cry,” the CPM has provided pivotal support to the Indian bourgeoisie in its drive to make India a cheap-labour producer for world capitalism. From 1989 to 2008, it provided parliamentary support to a succession of right-wing minority governments in New Delhi, many of them led by the Congress Party, that pushed through “pro-market,” neo-liberal reforms; and in those states where it has formed the government, principally West Bengal and Kerala, the CPM has implemented what it itself has characterized as “pro-investor” policies.

Under conditions where the Indian bourgeoisie has turned to the Hindu supremacist BJP to intensify the assault against the working class and pursue an even closer partnership with US imperialism, the Stalinists have made clear that they intend to redouble their efforts to politically shackle the working class to “the secular” opposition parties—a formula the CPM has long invoked to justify alliances with the Congress and a host of regional and caste-based bourgeois parties.

The CPM congress concluded Sunday with the unanimous election of Politburo member Sitaram Yechury as the party's new general-secretary. Yechury, who hails from Andhra Pradesh, has long been identified with a West Bengal-based faction of the party that favours closer relations with the Congress, the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government and the party that initiated neo-liberal restructuring in 1991.

The West Bengal party leadership, which developed

intimate ties to big business and the security apparatus during the 34 years (1977 to 2011) that it led the state government, was known to have opposed the CPM's July 2008 decision to withdraw support for the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

Prakash Karat, who was prohibited by the party constitution from seeking a fourth-term as general-secretary, sought to thwart Yechury's bid to succeed him. According to press reports, only on Saturday evening, after it had become clear that Yechury would carry the incoming Central Committee, did Karat drop his opposition and prevail on his preferred candidate, the 77 year-old Ramachandran Pillai, to step aside.

Under Karat's leadership the CPM and its Left Front helped bring the Congress-led UPA to power in May 2004. The Stalinists corralled various smaller parties into joining the UPA, helped draft the incoming government's “Common Minimum Programme,” and continued to prop up the UPA government for the next four years, even as it carried out socio-economic policies that the CPM conceded were little different from those of the previous BJP-led one.

Nonetheless, within the context of the right-wing Stalinist politics of the CPM, Karat has been “anti-Congress”—the leader of those in the party leadership who favour a so-called policy of “equidistance” from the two main parties, the Congress and BJP. This faction has championed instead electoral alliances with various regional and caste parties, all of them ex-Congress and/or BJP allies and vicious opponents of the working class, including the AIADMK, BJD, and the JD (U).

The internal-divisions within the CPM are bound up with the compulsions of local state politics. In West Bengal, the Congress was long ago supplanted by the Trinamul Congress as the CPM's main electoral rival. In Kerala, Karat's native state, the Congress remains the principal rival of the CPM-led Left Democratic Front for control of the state government.

Significantly, whilst the frictions between Karat and the majority of the CPM national leadership, on the one hand,

and the West Bengal leadership and Yechury on the other, have been common knowledge for years, there is no evidence of any significant dispute between them over the pro-investor policies the CPM-led Left Front government implemented in West Bengal. These included privatizations, social spending cuts, a ban on strikes in IT and IT-enabled companies, and the violent suppression of peasant opposition to lands expropriations for big business development projects.

Officially the CPM's remains opposed to allying with the Congress. However, in reply to a question at a press conference last Friday about the possibility of CPM-Congress cooperation, Yechury kept the Stalinists' options. "We will tackle that situation as it emerges," he declared. He then repeated that the CPM's main aims are "fighting Hindu communalism and neo-liberal policies," adding, "In this perspective alone, we can think of going towards other parties on an issue basis. ... We don't go for alliances for the sake of alliances."

The Stalinists have long justified their systematic subordination of the working class to right-wing bourgeois parties, including their support for the Congress-led UPA government from 2004 to 2008, as the only means of "fighting" the Hindu communalist BJP.

The *Hindu*, a Chennai-based liberal daily that has long been sympathetic to the CPM, rightly viewing it as an integral part of India's political establishment, was quick to laud Yechury's elevation to the CPM's top post. In its lead editorial Monday, it chastized the outgoing CPM general-secretary Karat as "a theorist reluctant to compromise," while praising Yechury for being "more accommodative to other parties." "Mr. Yechury," declared the *Hindu*, "believes in greater cooperation and coordination with other secular-democratic parties and in building a more broad-based front."

Several media outlets, including the *Indian Express* and *DNA India*, have reported Yechury declaring in some of his first public remarks as CPM General Secretary that he favours a quick merger of the CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI), the other main Stalinist parliamentary party and a longtime member of the CPM-led Left Front partner.

"There is no time-frame for the merger," Yechury is reported to have said. "It may take two months or six months. But it will happen definitely and that is our determination and also promise."

In a subsequent interview with the *Times of India*, Yehcury denied making such remarks. "I never talked of merger," he claimed, adding that his first priority is "to

strengthen the party, work for Left unity so that the Left and Democratic Alternative could be created in the country."

However, this is not the first time Yechury has gone on record in support of a CPM-CPI merger and preferably a quick one. In 2011 he made similar remarks at a function organized by the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists.

The CPM was formed in 1964 by a breakaway group from the CPI that accused the CPI leadership of "revisionism," while upholding as its own "heritage" the entire history of the Stalinist CPI, including its systematic subordination of the working class and the anti-imperialist struggle to "Mahatma" Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, on the grounds they were the rightful leaders of the "democratic revolution," and the CPI's support for the 1947 "independence" settlement and the communal Partition of the subcontinent.

A major issue in the 1964 split was the CPI's slavish support for the Congress Party. These divisions persisted through the 1970s, when the CPI entered into a coalition government with the Indira Gandhi-led Congress and supported her in the imposition of the 1975-77 Emergency, while the CPM aligned with bourgeois opposition Janata Party, which ousted Gandhi in the 1977 election.

The CPI and CPM have now worked closely together for more than three decades. Nevertheless, the majority of the CPM leadership has hitherto not been anxious for a merger as it would change the factional balance within the party leadership and result in a makeover of the party apparatus in which some officials would be demoted or even deprived of their jobs altogether.

But with both Stalinist parties having suffered a series of electoral debacles as a result of the hemorrhaging of their working-class support, a merger is now viewed by many, especially in the CPI, as a matter of survival. In the last May's all-India election, the CPM won 9 seats, its worst ever-showing by far, and the CPI just 1.



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