

Indian workers need a socialist strategy

The Socialist Equality Party

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Tens of millions of workers across India are participating in today's one-day general strike to voice their opposition to the socially incendiary, pro-investor policies of the Modi government.

Indian big business brought Narendra Modi and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power 15 months ago to more aggressively assert its predatory interests, to intensify the exploitation of the working class and rural toilers, and to integrate India still more fully into US imperialism's strategic agenda in the Indo-Pacific region.

The BJP government has slashed social spending by 10 percent. It has accelerated and expanded the sell-off of Coal India and other Public Sector Undertakings, while moving to gut legal restrictions on layoffs and plant closures. It is encouraging Washington in its war preparations against China (Obama's so-called "pivot to Asia") and is recklessly pursuing its own reactionary confrontation with Pakistan in an attempt to boost the Indian bourgeoisie's claim to be South Asia's regional hegemon.

Workers have sought, time and again, to challenge the drive to make India a foreign investment haven and cheap-labor hub for world capital. But the trade unions—including the ten labor federations that have called today's one-day protest strike—have suppressed the class struggle and faithfully assisted the ruling class in the implementation of its neo-liberal agenda.

Militant struggles like those of the workers at the Maruti Suzuki car assembly plant in Haryana and the Neyveli Lignite Corporation in Tamil Nadu have been systematically isolated by the unions. Even more telling is the unions' political role: their affiliation with and support for parties—from the Congress Party and the DMK to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist)—that for the past quarter-century have implemented neo-liberal policies whenever they have held office at the national or state level.

For the unions, today's strike is not a means of developing an independent political movement of the working class with the aim of bringing to power a workers' government that will resolve the socio-economic crisis at the expense of big business.

No, on their part it is a rightwing maneuver. The unions' aim is to contain the mounting anger in the working class, divert it into impotent appeals to the BJP and big business to change course, and further their respective party bosses' electoral prospects.

A measure of the strike's character has been given by leaders of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the labour wing of the Congress Party. Congress has formed India's government for 15 of the past 20 years and has done most of the heavy lifting in the implementation of pro-market reforms. Senior INTUC official A.K. Singh described the strike as only "token," while INTUC President Ramen Pandey said that it was participating in the protest at the express instructions of Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi.

The leading political role in today's strike, as in previous such protests, is being played by the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trades Union Congress (AITUC), the union affiliates of the country's two main Stalinist parties—respectively the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The Stalinists have long been an integral part of the bourgeois political establishment.

From 1991 through 2008, the CPM, CPI and their Left Front sustained in office a succession of right-wing governments, most of them Congress Party-led. And in those states where they have formed a government—West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura—the Stalinists have implemented what they themselves describe as "pro-investor" policies. These include lavish tax concessions for big business, social spending cuts, bans on strikes in the IT and IT-enabled sectors and the violent repression of peasant opposition to land expropriations for big business development projects.

For the Stalinists, one-day general strikes (this is the sixteenth they have organized since 1991) have served as a political cover for their own pivotal role in implementing the bourgeoisie's agenda and for their maneuvers with the Congress Party and a host of rightwing regional and caste-ist bourgeois parties. Thus, during the four-year period when they were sustaining the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government in office, the Stalinists

called several one-day strikes.

Then as today, the CITU, AITUC, CPM and CPI claimed that protests could compel the government to renounce the bourgeoisie's class strategy and adopt "pro-people" policies.

What they vehemently oppose is a socialist perspective—the systematic mobilization of the working class as an independent political force, with the aim of defending jobs and public services, ending contract labour, improving wages and working conditions, and rallying the rural toilers in the fight for a workers' and peasants' government. Such a revolutionary government would expropriate big business and place the basic economic levers under the democratic control of the working class so socio-economic life could be organized to meet social needs, not enrich the few.

The Stalinists, in response to a series of electoral debacles produced by their rightwing policies and their consequent marginalization in official politics, have somewhat changed tacks in recent years. In the name of "trade union unity," they have sought closer ties with the unions affiliated to the Congress, BJP and the regional bourgeois parties.

Up to the last minute, they appealed to the BJP-aligned Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha (BMS) to make good on its earlier pledge to join the strike. They have also hailed the participation of the labour front of the Shiv Sena, a fascistic organization and coalition partner of the BJP in the national and Maharashtran state governments.

The enlisting of such rightwing forces is the opposite of working class unity. It underscores that, on the part of its organizers, today's strike has nothing to do with developing a genuine working class counter-offensive.

By forging closer ties with the labor affiliates of political parties across the spectrum of official Indian politics the Stalinists are laying the groundwork for further electoral alliances and parliamentary maneuvers that politically harness the working class to the parties of the ruling class. The CPM and CPI are also seeking to convince India's elite that they remain a vital instrument for policing the working class. They want to stake their claim to continuing influence in establishment politics and to the perks and privileges that entails.

Capitalism has failed. The world over, the response of the bourgeoisie to the greatest crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s is the same: an ever-widening assault on the social position of the working class at home and aggression and war abroad.

The strategic problem facing workers in India and their class brothers and sisters around the globe is that the trade unions and ostensible left parties are all violently opposed to a challenge to the capitalist profit system. They have invariably proven to be instruments of big business in

imposing austerity on the working class.

The most recent and poignant example of this is Greece, where Syriza, a pseudo-left party whose rise was lauded by the CPM and CPI, quickly jettisoned its claims to oppose austerity and, on the orders of European capital, imposed social spending cuts even more vicious than its rightwing predecessors.

This was not because capitalism is unassailable, but because Syriza's upper-middle class leadership was adamantly opposed to mobilizing the Greek and European working class. It far preferred imposing social misery on working people to a revolutionary challenge to capitalism.

To assert their class interests, workers in India must build new organizations of class struggle in opposition to the pro-capitalist unions and Stalinist parliamentary parties. This means, above all, the construction of a new revolutionary socialist party.

In fighting for the working class to become an independent political force, the advanced workers and youth of India need to assimilate the lessons of the great strategic experiences of the international working class in the imperialist epoch. This requires appropriating the struggle waged by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Fourth International, against the Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped power from the Russian workers and ultimately dissolved the USSR and restored capitalism in Russia.

Trotsky's struggle for the program of international socialism is continued today through the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

All those who recognize the burning need for the revolutionary political reorientation of the working class should come forward to build the Indian section of the ICFI. The ICFI and its Sri Lankan section, the Socialist Equality Party, will provide every assistance in realizing this great aim.



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