

Indian Stalinists form pro-imperialist Third Front in Tamil Nadu

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The Stalinist Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and Communist Party of India (CPI) are preparing another trap for the working class in Tamil Nadu, amid the campaign for the Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry regional legislative elections of May 2016. They have formed a Third Front, or People's Welfare Front (PWF), with right-wing regionalist and caste-ist parties like the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) and Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK).

The CPM and CPI are abandoning their longstanding alliance with the two major bourgeois parties in Tamil Nadu, the ruling AIADMK (All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), amid rising disillusionment and anger with these parties. Their program and the character of their leading personnel make clear, however, that the PWF speaks not for the working class, but for bourgeois and affluent middle class elements closely tied to imperialism and transnational capital.

The central feature of the PWF's program is its alignment with the interests of the imperialist powers, above all, the US government and its "pivot to Asia" aimed against China. The PWF was formed amid a broad re-orientation of Indian foreign policy, more closely aligning New Delhi with Washington's strategic needs. This week, the Indian government entered into talks to open the country's ports and air force bases to the US military.

The PWF has chosen MDMK leader V. Gopelasamy, a pro-US politician and admirer of Obama, as the leader coordinating the activities of the different PWF parties. In July 2008, Gopelasamy met Obama in Chicago and showed him a copy of Gopelasamy's book *Yes We Can*, named after Obama's campaign slogan. Gopelasamy said that Obama's "dynamism and charisma have touched the hearts of people in the remote corners of the world, crossing the barriers of the continents."

Gopelasamy released his book in Delhi in 2010, declaring, "Mr. Obama had achieved what nobody else could do."

A November 25 PWF statement declares, "we will face the election on the basis of our minimum program. We have published a minimum program that is agreeable to all the parties in the coalition. Therefore we avoided some issues including separate Tamil Eelam [in Sri Lanka], and opposition to Koodankulam nuclear power plant."

The Stalinists are hostile to popular opposition to the Koodankulam nuclear plant, and silent on the position of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, because these might cut across the Indian bourgeoisie's maneuvers with imperialism.

The Koodankulam nuclear power plant is located in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district. Construction began in 2002 and continued after the 2004 Indian general election, which brought to power the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, which the CPI and CPM supported.

Thousands of people from hundreds of villages protested against the project, fearing pollution and fallout from the nuclear plant. This reflected deep and legitimate distrust of such projects among the Indian people, after the deadly 1984 industrial disaster at the Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal. The UPA government suppressed these protests, however, as it viewed the plant as the only way to promise transnational corporations reliable electricity and thus to bring foreign investors to India.

On the question of Sri Lanka's Tamil minority, the Stalinists again defend the Indian bourgeoisie's alignment with Washington. The Indian ruling class and Stalinist parties had long exploited popular sympathy in Tamil Nadu for the oppressed Tamils in Sri Lanka, arming Tamil nationalist groups in Sri Lanka whenever the Indian

government wanted to pressure the Sri Lankan regime in Colombo.

Amid rising strategic competition with China in Sri Lanka, however, both Washington and the UPA backed the Sri Lankan military offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the final years of the war, providing the Colombo regime with military assistance and logistical support. The LTTE were massacred by the Sri Lankan government with the support of the Obama administration in 2009. In the final stage of the war, more than 40,000 Tamils were killed, and tens of thousands of people displaced and interned.

Any serious investigation of the Sri Lankan government's war crimes against Tamils in Sri Lanka would cut across the alliance Washington and New Delhi have established with Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena's government. Sirisena was installed in a US-backed regime change operation in January 2015, designed to shift Sri Lanka's economic and strategic orientation away from China and towards India and the United States. The government in Colombo is staffed by military and political officials who played leading roles in the bloody final offensive against the LTTE.

Moreover, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Tamil National People's Front (TNPf), the key Tamil ally of the Indian Stalinists, have both oriented themselves to the Sirisena government and taken up positions in the Sri Lankan state.

For these reasons, the PWF and the Indian Stalinists have abandoned even their cynical, tactically-motivated criticisms of the Sri Lankan government's oppression of the Tamil masses.

Gopalasamy, now the PWF's leader, used to boast that in 1989, he illegally took a boat ride from India to Sri Lanka to visit LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Now, however, he is promoting the Obama administration, which sanctioned Colombo's massacre of the LTTE.

The formation of the PWF testifies to the political bankruptcy of Indian Stalinism, a quarter century after its allies in the Kremlin bureaucracy dissolved the USSR and restored capitalism. Its orientation to the Indian Congress and its rejection of the struggle for world socialist revolution, including socialist revolution in India, ultimately transformed it into a reactionary bourgeois party allied to imperialism.

The CPI and CPM played a key role in the opening of India to foreign capital by the Congress starting in 1991. Having supervised this process in certain states of India that they governed, such as West Bengal, and blocked

working class opposition to pro-business measures elsewhere, they have emerged as representatives of a constituency of bourgeois and affluent middle class elements hostile to the working class.

Tamil Nadu was one of the regions of India where the reactionary implications of Stalinism's counterrevolutionary orientation emerged the earliest and in the sharpest form.

Ever since the defeat of the Congress party in the 1967 state elections in Tamil Nadu, amid a wave of strikes and protests in the working class, the Indian Stalinists supported Dravidian nationalist parties—the DMK and later the AIADMK, a DMK split-off—in power in Tamil Nadu. Prior to independence from Britain in 1947, these parties had opposed the Congress and the struggle for independence, supporting British colonial rule. Afterwards, they were always on the right of Indian bourgeois politics.

For decades, the CPI and CPM worked to subordinate the working class to the DMK and then the AIADMK, hailing the one and then the other as “secular” parties with a “pro-people” agenda.

Since 1991, however, both parties have implemented free-market policies and opened cheap-labor special economic zones for transnational corporations. In 2003, a Stalinist-backed AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu sacked nearly 200,000 striking public sector workers with the support of a BJP-led government in New Delhi, and implemented a draconian anti-worker ‘essential services’ law in 2003, using mass firings and mass arrests.

Amid the collapse of the Congress party at the national level, the Indian Stalinists suffered a debacle in the 2014 parliamentary election, losing support in Kerala, Tripura, West Bengal and across India. They face escalating unrest among workers in Tamil Nadu, with struggles amid sharp increases of prices for basic food items. Neyveli lignite mine workers, sanitary workers, and employees of transnational companies in the special economic zones, such as Foxconn, Hyundai and BYD, have all mounted strikes and protests.

The PWF's formation is a desperate attempt under these explosive conditions to demoralize workers' struggles and tie them to bankrupt bourgeois parties.



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