

Oppose Indian government's witch-hunt of JNU students

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Sri Lanka)
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on youth and workers in India, across South Asia and internationally to oppose the witch-hunt India's Hindu Supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government is mounting against students at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) whom it claims raised "anti-national" slogans.

The state repression at JNU is aimed at criminalizing dissent. It is part of the government's preparations to answer opposition from workers, the rural poor and students to its pro-investor "reforms" and its lining up behind US imperialism's war preparations against China with state violence and communal reaction.

JNU Student President Kanhaiya Kumar and two other students, Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya, have been charged with sedition—meaning they could be jailed for life—for their role in a February 9 protest marking three years since the judicial murder of Afzal Guru. A Kashmiri Muslim, Guru was framed up by Indian authorities for the December 2001 terrorist attack on India's parliament.

At the government's behest, the JNU administration is also targeting Kumar, Khalid and Bhattacharya, along with 18 other students, for harsh discipline, including possible expulsion from the university.

The attack on the JNU students has been spearheaded by the highest levels of the BJP government. Home Minister Rajnath Singh instructed the Delhi police to raid JNU and arrest Kumar after receiving "complaints" from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the youth wing of the BJP's close ally, the fascistic RSS. Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani, the minister directly responsible for India's universities, has been demanding university administrations crack down on "anti-national" elements, while promoting a pamphlet edited by BJP Vice President Balbir Punj, *Communists and Jihadists at Work in JNU*.

Last year Irani pressured Hyderabad University to strip PhD student Rohith Vemula of his fellowship after he screened a documentary film that exposed the BJP's role in provoking communal violence against Muslims in Uttar Pradesh. The government-backed victimization of Vemula rendered him destitute and led directly to his taking his own life in January.

Citing the JNU events, Irani is now calling for India's national universities to be compelled to hire military "instructors" to teach "patriotism."

The government's case against the JNU students is a transparent, politically motivated frame-up. Video footage that reputedly shows students at the Feb. 9 JNU protest raising "pro-Pakistan" slogans and which the corporate media disseminated widely has been shown to have been doctored.

More fundamentally, the notion of state-proscribed "anti-national" speech violates the most elementary democratic principles and must be vigorously opposed.

It goes hand in hand with the BJP's promotion of a bellicose, Hindu communalist-laced Indian nationalism. During their 23 months in office

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP government have systematically intervened to place *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalist) ideologues in charge of the country's educational, cultural and scientific organizations, while excusing or downplaying violence against Muslims and other minorities.

State Repression and Communal Reaction

The Modi government's witch-hunt of the JNU students is part of a turn to authoritarian methods of rule and stoking of social reaction whose principal target is the working class and rural toilers.

Battered by the global capitalist crisis, the Indian bourgeoisie brought the self-styled "Hindu strongman" Modi and his BJP to power to pursue social incendiary neo-liberal reforms aimed at wooing international capital. Continuing on from the previous Congress Party-led government, Modi has slashed social spending, cut price-subsidies and accelerated privatization. But this has only whetted big business's appetite for even more unpopular measures—the gutting of labour law restrictions on layoffs and plant closures, easy access for industrialists and developers to cheap agricultural land, and the shifting of an even greater share of the taxation burden onto working people through a regressive Goods and Services Tax (GST).

As it conspires with big business to implement these measures, the Modi government is transforming India, behind the backs of the population, into a "frontline" ally of Washington in its strategic offensive and war preparations against China. By acting as satraps for US imperialism, the Indian bourgeoisie hopes to realize its own predatory great power ambitions, in the first instance securing regional dominance in South Asia.

This ultra-reactionary agenda cannot be implemented peacefully. The Indian elite's rhetoric about "high growth" cannot hide the reality. India is more socially unequal than ever. While a handful gorge on the profits of the past quarter-century of capitalist expansion, the overwhelming majority are condemned to poverty, hunger and economic insecurity.

By labelling its opponents as "anti-national," the BJP government seeks to legitimize their state suppression. By stoking Hindu communalism, it seeks to incite reaction and divide the working class.

Globally, under conditions of capitalist breakdown, the ruling classes around the world are adopting similar methods. Everywhere the phony "war on terror" has been used to justify a massive expansion of the repressive apparatus of the state and sweeping attacks on democratic rights. Meanwhile, the bourgeois elites sponsor parties and politicians who promote bellicose nationalism, like Modi and Japan's Prime Minister Abe, and rail against refugees, immigrants and minorities, as exemplified by Donald Trump, the current frontrunner for the US Republican presidential nomination.

The Stalinist CPI and CPM and the political suppression of the working class

Social deprivation, the attacks on democratic rights, the Indian elite's complicity in US imperialism's bloody and reckless drive to maintain global supremacy, the growth of communal reaction—all speak to the urgency of the Indian working class advancing its own socialist solution to the failure of capitalism and in opposition to the entire bourgeois political establishment.

However, the response of the Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India Marxist or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—has been just the opposite.

They have redoubled their efforts to chain the working class to the Indian political establishment and state.

JNU Student Union President Kanhaiya Kumar is a leader of the CPI's student group, the All India Student Federation (AISF). On the instructions of the CPI leadership, Kumar has repeatedly voiced his confidence in the institutions of the Indian state, including its courts and army, and advocated allying with the Congress Party, the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government, to defend “democracy” and “secularism.”

In fact the Congress has a decades-long record of conniving with the Hindu right, to say nothing of violently suppressing the struggles of the working class. Indeed even as it was claiming to oppose the witch-hunt of the JNU students, the Congress was pressing for the suspension of a Muslim legislator from the Maharashtra state assembly because he had refused to shout the slogan, “Victory for Mother India.”

Citing the need to defeat the BJP and a sometime BJP ally, the Trinamool Congress, the CPM-led Left Front is now jointly contesting the West Bengal state election with the Congress and hoping post-election to form a coalition government with it.

For the past quarter-century, the Stalinists have justified supporting a string of right-wing governments at the Center, most of them Congress-led, on the grounds that this was the only means of blocking the Hindu supremacist BJP from power. The result of the Stalinists' unrelenting drive to politically smother the working class, tying it to governments that have pursued neo-liberal reform and a strategic partnership with US imperialism, is that today the BJP has a parliamentary majority for the first time ever.

A second and very much related element in the Stalinists' response to the repression at JNU and the BJP's labelling of their opponents as “anti-national” has been the CPI and CPMs' full-throated campaign to promote themselves as the foremost defenders of what they call the true “progressive” Indian nationalist tradition.

In reality Indian nationalism is and has always been an ideological weapon of the Indian bourgeoisie, a means for it to mask its rule and harness the masses to its selfish class aims.

Terrified that the struggle against British colonial rule would escape their control, the “progressive nationalists” of the Congress, led by M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, suppressed the anti-imperialist upsurge that had convulsed the subcontinent in the first half the 20th century. In 1947-48, they struck a deal with British imperialism under which they inherited the colonial state apparatus and implemented the communal partition of South Asia into a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India. Not only did this produce a horrendous bloodletting, with more than 1 million killed in Partition massacres, and more than 10 million rendered refugees: It gave rise to the reactionary inter-state conflict between India and Pakistan and transformed communalism within India into an indispensable

Leon Trotsky and the program of socialist internationalism

It is high time for Indian workers and youth to draw a balance sheet of the ruinous role of the Stalinists parties in India and around the world.

The reactionary politics of the CPM and CPI flow inexorably from their common Stalinist roots, from their support for the privileged bureaucracy that usurped power from the Russian working class in the 1920s, renounced the program of world socialist revolution, and, under the banner of “socialism in one country,” pursued accommodation with world imperialism. In line with this in India, and other countries of belated capitalist development, the Stalinists advocated the “two-stage theory” of revolution, claiming that socialism was not on the historical agenda and that the working class could do no more than support the “progressive” section of the national bourgeoisie in opposing imperialism and “feudal reaction.”

For decades the twin Stalinist parties have functioned as an integral part of the bourgeois establishment, including administering the capitalist state apparatus for long periods in West Bengal and Kerala. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the bureaucracy under Gorbachev in 1991 and the Indian bourgeoisie's abandonment of state-led development, the CPM and CPI have lurched still further to the right. They have fully supported the ruling class drive to make India a haven for cheap-labour production for world capitalism, pursuing wherever the “Left” has formed the government what they themselves call pro-investor policies.

Leon Trotsky, with Lenin the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, fought tooth and nail against the Stalinist bureaucracy, upholding the program of international socialism. It is to this program, today embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its internet organ, the *World Socialist Web Site*, that Indian youth and workers should now turn.

The BJP's anti-working class and communalist agenda can only be defeated though the independent political mobilization of the working class in an alliance with the rural poor on the basis of a socialist program to establish a workers' and peasants' government in India, as part of the struggle for the United Socialist States of South Asia.

The Indian bourgeoisie's alliance with US imperialism in its war drive against China underscores the urgency of building an anti-war movement of the international working class on the basis of international socialism.

These are the tasks confronting the working class, students and other young people in contemporary India.

The IYSSE is the youth organization of the ICFI which is fighting to build revolutionary Marxist-Trotskyist parties in every country. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI, and the IYSSE (Sri Lanka) are eager to offer their unstinting support to all those ready to take up the fight to build a revolutionary party of the Indian working class.

As a first step, join the ICFI's International May Day rally, Sunday, May 1.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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