

Indian Stalinists try to paper over deep rift over tie-up with Congress Party

Deepal Jayasekera
28 June 2016

Fearful the party could be heading for a split, the leadership of India's main Stalinist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, is desperately trying to paper over deep factional divisions over how open an alliance to forge with the Congress Party, the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government.

The divisions within the CPM Politburo and Central Committee have intensified in the aftermath of the debacle the CPM and its Left Front suffered in the recent state assembly elections in West Bengal. India's fourth most populous state, West Bengal was long the Stalinists' principal electoral base and was ruled by a CPM-led government for 34 consecutive years ending in 2011.

For the state elections held over five phases this April and May, the CPM forged an electoral alliance with Congress. The CPM urged a Congress vote in close to a third of the 294 assembly constituencies and stumped for a "Left-Secular," i.e., a Left-Congress, coalition government.

At the conclusion of its long-delayed first meeting since the state elections, the CPM Central Committee (CC) issued last week what the *Kolkata Telegraph* correctly described as only "mild" criticism of the party's electoral tactics in West Bengal—that is, of its alliance with the big business party that over the past quarter-century has done most of the heavy lifting in implementing the bourgeoisie's pro-investor agenda and in forging a strategic partnership between New Delhi and US imperialism.

The CC statement said: "[T]he electoral tactics adopted in West Bengal" were "not in consonance with the CC decision not to have an alliance or understanding with the Congress. This should be rectified." Significantly, as party "sources" emphasized in leaks to the corporate media, the CPM Politburo, which prepared the statement for endorsement by the CC, deliberately avoided characterizing the West Bengal state unit's alliance with

the Congress as a "violation" of the party's line. Calling it a "violation" would have required taking disciplinary action against the West Bengal leadership and, although they did not mention it, quite possibly against the current general secretary, Sitaram Yechury, who made no secret of his support for the CPM-Congress electoral bloc in West Bengal.

"Had we held the Bengal unit guilty of violating the party line," an unnamed "senior party leader told the *Kolkata Telegraph*, "action would have had to follow. So, the expression 'not in consonance' was used."

In the run-up to the CC meeting, the former CPM general secretary, Prakash Karat, and leaders of several of the party's most important state units, including those in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Tripura, had publicly denounced the West Bengal CPM's alliance with the Congress. However, this proved to be little more than huffing and puffing.

As the outcome of the CC meeting demonstrates, Karat and his so-called "hard-line" anti-Congress faction contented themselves with a formal, almost entirely hollow, restatement of the party's opposition to both of the Indian bourgeoisie's main parties, the Congress and the Hindu supremacist BJP.

Although the CC statement called for "rectification" of the party's electoral line in West Bengal, it did not call for the party to stop closely collaborating with the Congress in the state assembly, nor in mounting joint protests against West Bengal's right-wing Trinamool Congress Party (TMC) government.

Rather, highlighting the violence of the TMC against its political opponents, including the CPM, the CC statement called for the "broadest people's resistance" to oppose "the murder of democracy and civil liberties" in West Bengal. This language echoes that used by the West Bengal CPM to justify allying with the Congress both before and after the state assembly elections.

When Yechury spoke with the media at the conclusion of the CPM CC meeting, he confirmed that “rectification” would not prevent the Stalinists from continuing to work closely with the Congress. Asked whether “joint action” with the Congress against the ruling TMC would continue, he said, “Movement of resistance against terror will continue.”

Cynically, Yechury went on to claim that what had been contentious was the West Bengal CPM’s electoral tie-up with the Congress and since there are no elections, whether district, state or national in the offing, the CPM-Congress collaboration should be able to continue unimpeded.

Yechury also stipulated that when the CC statement had “saluted the two *crore* fifteen *lakh* [21.5 million] people who ... voted for the slogan of ousting the Trinamool Congress government and isolating the BJP,” this was meant to include those who had voted for the big business Congress Party. “Because all of it was against the Trinamool government.”

The CPM CC’s mild criticism of the West Bengal leadership for flouting the party’s official political line stands in marked contrast to its treatment of a member who publicly criticized the party leadership for not disciplining the West Bengal CPM.

Within hours of Jagmati Sangwan, a CC member and leader of the party’s women’s wing, telling reporters that she was outraged at the failure of the party leadership to call the West Bengal party to account for “violating” the party’s “political-tactical line,” the CC summarily expelled her from party membership.

At his press conference, Yechury stoutly defended the expulsion, including the party leadership’s refusal to give Sangwan any opportunity to explain her actions before casting her out of the CPM.

These developments underscore that the differences within the CPM leadership are not of a principled character; rather they are entirely pragmatic and factional. At issue is how best to regain the party’s influence within the bourgeois political establishment and the access to the pelf and privilege that it provides.

The West Bengal leadership, backed by Yechury, advocates a tie-up with the Congress, as the way to revive the party’s electoral fortunes. Their rivals, led by Karat, fear too close association with Congress will damage the party’s prospects in Kerala and Tripura, because in those states the Congress is the CPM’s principal electoral adversary. They also recognize that formally tying the CPM to what has historically been the premier party of

the Indian bourgeoisie will further discredit the Stalinists’ claims to be a left and oppositional force.

Instead the Karat faction advocates, in the name of a “third” anti-BJP, anti-Congress “front,” electoral alliances with a host of reactionary caste-based regional bourgeois parties and steps to strengthen the CPM-led Left Front by promoting “left unity” with various small Maoist parties.

That said, Karat and his supporters have a long record of supporting right-wing Congress-led national governments. It was under Karat’s leadership that the CPM played a key role in the formation of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2004. And although the CPM did not formally joined the UPA, calculating it could best suppress popular opposition to it by remaining “outside,” for four years, ending only in June 2008, it provided the UPA with its parliamentary majority.

At the June 18-20 CC meeting, CPM West Bengal leaders argued their alliance with the Congress Party, a thoroughly discredited dynastic party which is itself in the throes of a desperate crisis, is the only way to save the CPM’s cadres from violent TMC attacks. According to press reports, a state party leader told the CC: “If we do not remain alive how will we fight our political adversary?”

This is an open admission of the utter collapse of the CPM’s base of support among the working class and rural toilers and its transformation into a corrupt political machine at the beck and call of big business. During the last two decades it held office in West Bengal, the CPM-led Left Front government ruthlessly carried out the Indian bourgeoisie’s pro-investor economic reforms, gunning down peasants who protested the state government’s expropriation of land for big business projects and outlawing strikes in IT and IT-related sectors.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact