

Indian workers need a socialist strategy to oppose pro-investor “reform,” austerity and war

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Tens of millions of workers across India will join a one-day general strike this Friday to voice their opposition to the socially incendiary austerity measures and pro-investor “reforms” being implemented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

The strike is a clear sign of mounting social anger among workers, youth and rural toilers. But the Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) that has called this protest is comprised of union congresses that have systematically suppressed the class struggle and are directly affiliated to political parties that have played a pivotal role in the bourgeoisie’s drive to make India a cheap-labour haven for world capitalism. This is true not only of the Congress Party-affiliated Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), but also of the ostensibly “left” unions that lead the JTUC: the Congress of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All-India Trades Union Congress (AITUC)—which are, respectively, the union affiliates of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

For the union apparatuses and the Stalinists the September 2 strike is a maneuver, a means to contain and defuse growing social opposition and to block the development of an independent political movement of the working class against the BJP government and the entire capitalist social order.

Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP were brought to power by Indian big business in May 2014 to accelerate pro-investor “reform”—that is, the assault on the working class—and more aggressively assert its predatory, great-power ambitions on the world arena.

The Modi government has slashed subsidies and social spending, including funding for healthcare and the National Rural Employment Guarantee. It has accelerated disinvestment (the privatization of state-owned industries); eliminated or reduced caps on foreign investment in numerous sectors; imposed a regressive Goods and Sales tax that will be used to further shift the tax burden onto working people; and is conniving with the BJP-led state governments to gut restrictions on job cuts and labour standards.

At the same time, Modi has integrated India into the US war drive against China. On Monday, Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar signed an agreement that gives US combat planes and warships day-to-day access to Indian military bases.

Social polarization and the failure of bourgeois rule

The claim of the Stalinist-led Joint Trade Union Committee that the BJP and India’s ruling elite can be pressured into pursuing “pro-people” policies is a lie.

The entire seven decade-long history of independent India demonstrates the opposite: the impossibility of realizing even the most elementary democratic and social aspirations of the workers and toilers under the rule of the bourgeoisie. Until 1991, India’s bourgeois elite pursued a strategy of state-led, national capitalist development that they tried to palm off as socialism. During the past quarter century, they have transformed India into a cheap-labour producer and back-office for world capitalism and, in lock-step with this closer partnership with imperialism, emerged ever more openly as clients and satraps of Washington.

While the wealth of the bourgeoisie has grown exponentially, India’s “rise” has produced only increased social deprivation and economic insecurity for the mass of the workers and toilers. After 25 years of so-called reform, tens of millions are unemployed, under-employed or eke out a precarious existence as contract labourers, while hunger stalks rural India. Moreover, India now risks being embroiled in a catastrophic war, whether due to the bourgeoisie’s transformation of the country into a frontline state in American imperialism’s confrontation with China, or its reckless drive to assert itself as the regional hegemon of South Asia.

The Stalinist Communist parties, their names notwithstanding, have been an integral part of the bourgeois political establishment for decades. Since 1991 the CPM and CPI have supported a succession of governments at the Centre that have implemented the ruling elite’s neo-liberal “reform” agenda and pursued closer ties with Washington and Wall Street. And where they have led state governments, most notably in West Bengal and Kerala, the Stalinists have themselves pursued what they frankly call “pro-investor” policies, including banning strikes in IT and IT-enabled industries, and bloodily suppressing peasant opposition to the expropriation of their land for big business projects. Signaling that the Stalinists intend to work even more directly as errand-boys for big business, Kerala’s new Chief Minister and CPM Politburo member Pinarayi Vijayan has promised to develop “a new paradigm ...wherein an investor is welcomed with open arms.”

The Stalinists have justified their repeated electoral alliances with a host of right-wing, caste-based and regional parties and their support for the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government on the grounds that this is the only way to “block the right,” and especially the communalist BJP, from coming to power. In reality, the

Stalinists' systematic subordination of the working class to the parties of the bourgeoisie has greatly strengthened the Hindu right, opening the door for it to exploit the popular anger over the mounting social crisis produced by capitalist "development." In the 2014 elections the BJP stormed to power, as the first party to win a majority in the Lok Sabha (India's lower house of parliament) since 1984.

Now in the face of mounting outrage over the manifest failure of their phony election pledges of jobs and "development," Modi and his BJP are whipping up Hindu chauvinism with the aim of splitting the working class and mobilizing the most backward and reactionary elements. This goes hand in hand with the increasing resort to authoritarian forms of rule. Political opponents are routinely labeled as "anti-national," if not charged with sedition.

These developments point to the breakdown of democratic forms of rule—as the bourgeoisie seeks to make the workers and toilers pay for the gravest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression—and the urgency, therefore, of the working class intervening as an independent force in the fight for a socialist solution to the crisis.

The Stalinists' response, however, has been to redouble their efforts to subordinate the working class to the Indian bourgeoisie, its state and parties. In the name of defending "secularism" and "democracy" they are once again seeking to harness the working class to the Congress Party, which itself has a long history of adapting and conniving with the Hindu right. In the April-May West Bengal state assembly elections, the CPM forged, for the first time ever, an electoral alliance with the Congress, the bourgeoisie's traditional party of government and the party that during the past 25 years did most of the heavy-lifting in imposing neo-liberal restructuring and forging of an Indo-US "global strategic partnership." The Stalinists also continue to promote the creation of a Third Front comprised of a host of regional and caste-ist parties, like the JD (U), BJD and DMK, that not only support neo-liberal reform and India's hosting US warplanes, but also have repeatedly allied with the BJP.

While broad sections of the working class undoubtedly view a one-day national strike as a means of asserting their class interests, for the Stalinists it is political theater, a means of putting on a "left" face so as to bolster their political control on the working class. In virtually every year since 1991, including from 2004-2008, when they were in a de facto coalition with the Congress and daily contact with Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the CPM and CPI have mounted one-day protest strikes.

In recent years, in the name of "working class unity" they have enlisted the support of the Congress-affiliated INTUC and in Tamil Nadu, the Labour Progressive Front, the trade union wing of the big business DMK. The Stalinists, in a further maneuver that underscores their virulent opposition to genuine *class struggle*, have even appealed for the support of the BJP-aligned Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh or BMS.

A socialist-internationalist strategy

To assert their class interests, Indian workers urgently need to adopt a socialist-internationalist strategy based on the independent political mobilization of the working class against the bourgeoisie and in the struggle for workers' power.

The past quarter century has seen a massive growth in the size and social power of the working class. This class strength must now be

mobilized to rally the rural toilers and all the oppressed, in the fight for a workers' and peasants' government that would bring the decisive economic levers under public ownership and workers' control, so that production could be organized to meet social needs, not bloat the wealth of a tiny business elite. Such a government would also take radical measures to eradicate landlordism, caste oppression and otherwise complete the tasks historically associated with the democratic revolution, but which under the misbegotten rule of the Indian bourgeoisie have festered, serving as a bulwark of social reaction.

The September 2 strike is part of an international resurgence of the class struggle. Around the world, from this past spring's strikes in France and Belgium against the gutting of worker rights to the growing rebellion of American workers against the pro-capitalist unions that for decades have imposed wage and job cuts, workers are seeking a means to resist the corporate elite—

a means to oppose its never-ending austerity drive and its use of globalized production to pit worker against worker and site production wherever labour costs and taxes are the lowest. The objective unity of the working class must find conscious expression in the unification of the struggles of workers around the world. This must be combined with the building of a working-class led, global movement against war and imperialism.

The unions and Stalinist parties are mechanisms for politically suppressing the working class. They cannot be reformed or pressured to the left. To oppose the bourgeoisie, workers must build new organs of struggle, workplace rank-and-file action committees and above all a mass revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party must be an integral part of a world party of the working class. It must be based on the assimilation of the great strategic experiences of the international working class, above all the lessons of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the struggle subsequently led by Leon Trotsky, the revolution's co-leader with Lenin, against its Stalinist degeneration and in defence of the program of world socialist revolution. That struggle is carried forward through the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded under Trotsky's leadership in 1938, and now led by the International Committee and its international organ, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS).

Workers, youth and intellectuals who recognize the urgent need to blaze a new socialist path for the working class and toilers should join the fight to build the Indian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). As a first step, they should contact the ICFI and WSWS so as to initiate discussion on the program and principles upon which a genuine revolutionary socialist party can be built.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact