

# Indian Stalinists split over whether to openly ally with big-business Congress Party

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As opposition to India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government mounts within the working class and among the rural poor, India's principal Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, is deeply divided over whether to form an explicit electoral alliance with the Congress Party—the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government. So deep are the divisions, a party split cannot be excluded.

According to media reports, last month's three-day meeting of the CPM Central Committee revealed the party leadership to be "vertically split" over forging an election bloc with the Congress Party for the 2019 national elections.

Dissenting from the approach favored by the majority of the CPM Politburo, party General Secretary Sitaram Yechury submitted a "minority draft" of the main resolution for the party's upcoming congress. It advocated the Stalinists and their Left Front champion an electoral bloc of all "secular parties," including the Congress, against the Hindu supremacist BJP. A counter document that argued the Stalinists should work for an alliance of all "secular parties" except the "neoliberal" Congress was presented by an opposing faction, led by Yechury's predecessor, Prakash Karat.

Out of the 63 CC members who spoke at the meeting, 31 are said to have endorsed Yechury's call for an electoral bloc with the Congress, while 32 members backed Karat's stance. With the party leadership split down the middle and the CPM's two principal leaders arrayed against each other, the Central Committee ultimately opted to defer any decision. Under "a compromise formula," the Politburo was instructed to rework the draft resolution for the party's 22nd national congress to be held next April "on the basis of the Politburo outline and the discussions in the Central Committee."

Given the differences and the perceived stakes on both sides, there is every possibility that the dispute will rage until the party congress and beyond.

In arguing for his reactionary line of support for the big-business Congress, Yechury invoked the name of Leon Trotsky, drawing an utterly fraudulent parallel between Trotsky's call for a "united front" of working-class organizations and parties against the Nazis in the early 1930s to his advocacy of a Left Front-Congress-led electoral bloc

against the "Hindu fascist" BJP.

According to the *Hindu*, Yechury quoted Trotsky's famous distillation of the policy of the united front, "march separately, but strike together," to bolster his claim that as the BJP is in the "ascendant" there is "a need for all" anti-BJP "political forces to unite" in an electoral alliance.

The policy advocated by the CPM General Secretary today and that advocated by Trotsky are diametrically opposed. Trotsky's policy was aimed at mobilizing the independent class strength of the working class against fascist reaction, while Yechury, in the name of opposing the Hindu communalist BJP, seeks to shackle the working class to the Congress Party, the crisis-ridden Indian bourgeoisie, and its state.

Under conditions where the German Communist Party (KPD) was fatally underestimating the threat represented by the fascists, as exemplified by its claim "After Hitler, then us," and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was opposing working-class struggle and promoting the institutions of the bourgeois Weimar Republic as the bulwark against fascism, Trotsky urged the KPD systematically demand of the SPD that it join it in united actions—workers' defense guards, strikes, etc.—to fight the fascists, but without any political compromise with the Social Democrats. As Trotsky said, "No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike!"

Yechury's attempt to pass off the Congress as the prospective member of a united front as advocated by Trotsky is patently absurd. By the early 1930s the SPD had long betrayed its revolutionary origins and been transformed into a prop of bourgeois rule; but it was a *bourgeois workers' party*—a party with a mass working-class membership and millions of affiliated members in the trade unions.

The Congress is a decrepit bourgeois electoral machine, with a dynastic leadership. It has been the premier party of bourgeois rule during the seven decades of independent India; spearheaded the post-1991 the drive to make India a cheap-labor haven for global capital and a "strategic partner" of US imperialism; and, the Stalinists' promotion, of its "secular" credentials notwithstanding, has repeatedly connived with the

Hindu right.

Yechury is an arch opponent of Trotskyism. Like the rest of the CPM leadership he steadfastly defends the Stalinist bureaucracy's bloody suppression of the Left Opposition and the nationalist program of "socialism in one country" that culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism. That the CPM general-secretary should now cynically invoke the name of the founder of the Fourth International in an attempt to justify a further lurch right on the part of the CPM is a measure of the crisis of the Indian Stalinists.

For decades CPM leaders have waved red flags and used "anti-imperialist" and Marxist rhetoric while integrating themselves into the bourgeois establishment. This has included propping up a succession of rightwing "anti-BJP" governments at the Centre from 1991 to 2008 and implementing what they themselves call "pro-investor" policies in the three states where they have formed the government.

As a result, the CPM's support in the working class has hemorrhaged, with their representation in the Lok Sabha, the popularly elected lower house of parliament, reduced to less than a dozen MPs.

The policy advocated by Yechury's opponents within the CPM leadership is no less antithetical to the interests of the working class. Whereas Yechury wants the CPM to rush to the aid of the Congress, which is on life support in large swathes of the country, the Karat faction advocates the CPM forge an electoral alliance with a host of regional and caste-based parties that are viciously hostile to the working class and have repeatedly allied with both the Congress and BJP.

The differences are largely rooted in narrow electoral calculations, but as these are bound up with access to patronage networks, the wrangle over them is fierce. Yechury is backed by the CPM's West Bengal state unit. The CPM-led Left Front ruled West Bengal for 34 consecutive years, ending in 2011, but is now only the third-largest party in the state assembly. It is desperate for an alliance with the Congress Party to avoid being wiped out electorally, as politics in the state have become increasingly polarized between the rightwing, viciously anticommunist Trinamool Congress and the BJP.

In Kerala, where the Stalinists currently lead the state government, the Congress is the CPM's principal electoral rival. The Karat faction voices the apprehensions of the Kerala CPM leadership that an explicit electoral alliance with the Congress will undermine its support.

The Karat faction also fears that if the CPM enters into closer collaboration with the Congress it will further discredit itself in the eyes of workers, the rural poor and youth. At last month's CC, the Karat faction reportedly argued that the "effort should be to strengthen the mass movements against the BJP and this stand would be diluted if the CPM allied" with the Congress.

According to media reports, so angered is the Karat faction over Yechury's stand, they may seek to deny him the standard

second term usually accorded CPM general-secretaries.

However, it was under Karat's leadership that the CPM-led Left Front served as the principal prop of the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government from May 2004 to June 2008. Indeed, while the CPM formally stayed out of the government, it played a leading role in convincing other parties to join the Congress-led government and in writing the Common Minimum Programme that ostensibly underpinned the UPA.

Karat and his faction also turned a blind eye when the West Bengal CPM, with Yechury's support, violated a CC decision and formed the first-ever publicly declared electoral bloc between the Stalinists and the Congress Party for the 2016 West Bengal assembly election. Only after the election ended in a debacle for the CPM did the Karat faction turn on the West Bengal CPM leadership, insist it immediately end its alliance with the Congress, and publicly admit it had violated party policy.

Just as both CPM factions have supported the Indian bourgeoisie's drive to attract foreign capital, dismissing in the words of the late West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, "socialism as a far off cry"; so they have facilitated the Indian bourgeoisie's great power ambitions, including facilitating the development of a strategic partnership with Washington.

The CPM propped up the Congress-led UPA as it forged closer relations with the US under the war criminal George W. Bush and it has supported India's massive military expansion. When the BJP government launched illegal and provocative "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan in September 2016, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, a Karat ally, moved a resolution in the state assembly congratulating the Indian military.

The rise of the Hindu right is directly bound up with the Stalinists' decades-long suppression of the class struggle and active role in implementing the agenda of the bourgeoisie both at the Center and in the states. Now the Stalinists point to the crimes of the BJP under Narendra Modi, including its incitement of communalism and moves toward authoritarian rule, to promote the same line of subordinating the working class to the parties and institutions of the bourgeoisie that has paved the way for the growth of reaction.

The working class must blaze a new road: it must forge its political independence from all the political representatives of the bourgeoisie, advance its own socialist solution to the failure of Indian capitalism to lift the masses out of poverty and deprivation, and on that basis rally the toilers behind it in the struggle for a workers' government and international socialism.



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