

Indian Stalinists seek to divert discontent into an alliance with capitalist parties

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India's main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—are seeking to channel the mounting discontent of the working class and rural toilers behind their opportunist alliances with the bourgeois Congress and various regional capitalist parties. These political maneuvers were clearly seen in their calls for a bandh (general shut down) on September 10.

The CPM and CPI, and their allies in the Left Front they lead, called the bandh last Monday against fuel price hikes and other economic attacks by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Congress, the main official opposition party, had called a bandh on the same day.

An unprecedented fall of the Indian rupee and rising fuel prices, compounded by a steady decline in living standards, have created growing social opposition to Modi's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government.

However, there was only a partial response across the country to the bandh calls—an indication of the lack of working class trust in the Stalinists, Congress and the regional parties that joined the Congress call. All these parties are committed to the pro-investor neo-liberal economic “reforms” from which the Modi government's austerity measures flow.

The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) implemented similar policies while in office from 2004 to 2014. And it was a Congress government that initiated the neo-liberal economic policies in 1991. The Stalinist CPM-led Left Front has supported all the non-BJP governments, which have carried out similar economic policies, and implemented the “reforms” itself when in office in the states of West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala.

The bandh's biggest impact was in Guwahati, state capital of BJP-ruled Assam in northeastern India. Most shops, markets, petrol pumps and educational institutions were shut. Public transport was virtually paralysed. Police arrested hundreds of Congress party members who staged protests. In BJP-ruled Tripura, shops, markets, and business establishments were shut. The attendance at government offices and banks was reportedly low.

In southern India, Kerala state, ruled by the CPM-led Left Democratic Front, public transport vehicles were off the road, and schools, colleges and shops downed their shutters.

Similarly, several parts of Karnataka in the south, and some parts of Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Union Territory Chandigarh in the north, were hit by the bandh.

Although partial, the participation of workers and rural toilers indicates a readiness to fight. But the Stalinist parties called the action to try to defuse the unrest and head off the development of a political movement of the working class against the BJP government and the capitalist social order. Their aim has been to divert the mass opposition into safe political channels.

The Stalinists attempted to demonstrate some “independence” by making a separate bandh call. By making a call for the same day as Congress, however, they underscored their links to it. The CPM, at its party congress in April, proposed an electoral alliance with Congress.

Having suffered one electoral defeat after another following its humiliating debacle in the 2014 national elections, Congress is trying to associate itself with the mounting hostility to the BJP-led government in an attempt to return to power in 2019.

A September 5 “red flag rally” in Delhi organised by CPM-linked unions was part of a manoeuvre to prepare an electoral platform for the 2019 national parliamentary elections in alliance with right-wing regional and casteist parties, as well Congress.

Having been voted out in two of the three states it held office—West Bengal and Tripura—and confronted with a severe decline in its parliamentary numbers and support base, the CPM tried to exploit the discontent among workers and farmers to organise the rally.

K. Hemalata, president of the CPM-affiliated Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), told the rally that “intensified joint struggles” could ensure that the BJP did not retain power in 2019 “to implement its neoliberal and communal divisive agenda much more aggressively.” CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury said: “We will have to intensify our protest in the days to come... This government has to go.”

The Stalinists are silent about what should replace the BJP government. However, it is obvious that their alternative is another bourgeois government led by Congress. Such “alternatives” have carried out the program of big business, with Stalinist support—the Congress-led UPA government of 2004–14 and the United Front government led by Janatha Dal of 1996–98. The UPA government did much of the heavy lifting in terms of implementing neoliberal policies and cemented a close strategic partnership with US imperialism.

Immense class antagonisms exist due to the poverty and widening social inequality caused by the pro-investor measures implemented by successive governments since 1991.

Only a tiny minority of the big bourgeoisie and privileged sections of the upper middle class have benefited from more than a quarter century of economic reforms. The top one percent of the country’s population enjoys nearly a quarter of all income and owns 60 percent of the country’s total wealth, while about 70 percent of the population lives on less than \$US2 a day.

As the WSWS has warned: “Under conditions where the BJP government’s austerity measures, ‘big bang’ pro-investor reforms, and incitement of communalism are provoking ever-widening social opposition, India’s ruling elite is depending on the Stalinists to channel it into the dead-end of electoral politics and futile appeals

for the bourgeois establishment to adopt ‘pro-people’ policies. This includes, should the BJP prove unable to contain the mounting opposition, the CPM reprising its leading role in forming and propping up a ‘secular’ alternative big business government, and one preferably helmed by its ‘grand old party,’ the Congress.

“To break out of this dangerous impasse, India’s workers and toilers need an entirely new strategy—a strategy based on the independent political mobilization of the working class against all factions of the bourgeoisie and one that combines the fight against communal reaction and defence of democratic rights with the fight for a workers’ government and the socialist reorganization of society.”



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