

Indian workers need revolutionary socialist program to combat social devastation and political reaction

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Tens of millions of workers and young people will participate in this Tuesday's and Wednesday's 48-hour, all-India strike against the socially destructive, "pro-investor" economic policies of the BJP-led government—that is, against savage austerity, privatization, the promotion of precarious contract jobs, the shredding of environmental and workplace safety standards, lavish tax cuts for big business and the rich, and onerous tax rises for workers and the rural poor.

The *World Socialist Web Site* welcomes workers' readiness to make financial sacrifices and risk reprisals and even firing, to fight the BJP government.

Anil and Mukesh Ambani, Gautam Adani and other billionaire oligarchs propelled Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP to power in order to intensify the class war assault on the working class and more aggressively pursue the Indian bourgeoisie's great power ambitions. And they have done just that. The four-and-a-half-year old BJP government has stoked communal reaction, strengthened the repressive apparatus of the state (including arrogating the right to spy on all electronic communications and data), greatly expanded India's military-strategic alliance with US imperialism, and accelerated the ruling-class drive to make India the premier cheap-labor haven for global capitalism.

But workers must beware.

The Jan. 8–9 protest strike is politically led by trade unions and political parties that are an integral part of the Indian establishment, and that have played a pivotal role in implementing, and suppressing opposition to, the Indian capitalist elite's now more than a quarter-century old "pro market" agenda.

This is true not only of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), which is an adjunct of the big business Congress Party, and of the Labour Progressive Front (LPF), the trade union wing of the DMK, a key Congress ally and one of the Tamil bourgeoisie's two main parties. It is equally true of the twin Stalinist parliamentary parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI), and of their respective trade union affiliates, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).

When the Stalinists and the various central trade union bodies promote the Jan. 8–9 action as a "general strike," they are engaged in a cynical political deception.

The general strike will be forever associated with the revolutionary strivings of the Russian working class at the beginning of the last century—strivings which, through the development of the socialist workers' movement, led to the emergence of the working class as an independent political force, and culminated, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, in the conquest of workers' power.

But far from fighting for the independent political mobilization of the working class, the Stalinists and the union apparatuses are seeking to

smother it.

Their aim is to use the 2-day protest strike to contain the increasingly militant opposition of the working class and rural poor and divert it behind the drive of a section of the Indian ruling elite to bring to power an alternate right-wing government after the April-May general election.

For the Stalinists, the strike is entirely subordinate to the 2019 elections, or what the CPM calls "the big battle" ahead, and their efforts to muster votes to elect "an alternate secular government." That is to place in power in New Delhi a big business government, minus the BJP.

Such a government would be akin to the succession of "secular" governments, most of them Congress Party-led, that the CPM and its Left Front helped prop up in parliament between 1989 and 2008, and which invariably implemented the bourgeoisie's social incendiary, neo-liberal agenda, while forging closer ties with Washington.

Only today, a decade after the 2008 financial crisis, world capitalism is wracked by systemic crisis. Consequently, the next government will have to enforce the agenda of Indian and global capital even more ruthlessly. Whatever its composition, whether formed by the BJP or a Stalinist-supported "secular" coalition based either on the Congress or a "third front" of regional and caste-based parties, the next government will be tasked with dramatically intensifying the exploitation of India's workers and toilers, so as to attract foreign investment and capture overseas markets.

The Congress is already reaping the dividends of the Stalinists' efforts to promote it, the traditional governing party of the bourgeoisie, as a key ally of working people in the fight against the BJP. INTUC president and former Congress legislator G. Sanjeeva Reddy is shamelessly using the "general strike" to project Congress President Rahul Gandhi as a "friend" of the working class and future head of a "progressive government."

Why the CPM and the trade unions refuse to defend the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers

The real attitude of the Stalinists and all the unions to the class struggle is epitomized by their refusal to make any mention, let alone demand the immediate unconditional release, of the 13 Maruti Suzuki auto workers who have been jailed for life on frame-up murder charges. The only "crime" these workers committed was to have challenged the sweatshop conditions that prevail in India's new globally connected manufacturing industries. Yet the Stalinists are treating them like the pariahs of 19th century South India, even as employers routinely threaten workers with "doing a Maruti Suzuki" to stifle opposition.

The Stalinists shun the Maruti Suzuki workers because they fear their militant example, and even more importantly, because they recognize that a campaign linking the defence of the Maruti Suzuki workers to the struggle against poverty wages and precarious employment would blow up their alliance with the Congress Party and their unions' cozy, corporatist relations with big business.

The working class urgently needs to draw a critical balance sheet of the role of the Stalinist parties and trade unions and adopt an entirely new strategy—a strategy based on the independent political mobilization of the working class against all factions of the bourgeoisie and on that basis the rallying of the rural masses and all the oppressed in the fight for a workers and peasants' government and the socialist reorganization of society.

As they have for the past three decades, the Stalinists point to the crimes of the BJP and its Hindu right allies not to indict Indian capitalism and alert the working class to the ruling class' embrace of reaction and the malignancy of Indian democracy; but rather as a phony justification for their systematic subordination of the working class to the Congress and a host of right-wing regional and caste-based parties.

As the 2019 elections approach, the Stalinists are clamouring that working people must “save democracy” and “save the constitution” by supporting the establishment of a big business, non-BJP government.

There is no question that the BJP is a vile enemy of working people. But the claim that Indian workers can defeat reaction and defend democratic rights by clutching to the coattails of the parties of the bourgeoisie and by placing their trust in the putrefying “democratic” institutions of the Indian state—institutions that routinely violently repress workers' struggles and have connived in the perpetration and cover-up of one communal atrocity after another—is a monstrous lie.

Indeed, if the Hindu right has been able to grow into such a menace, it is due to the criminal policies pursued by the Stalinists. Their systematic suppression of the class struggle; their implementation of what they themselves concede are “pro-investor” policies in those states, like West Bengal, where they have held office; and their subordination of the working class to the Congress and other bourgeois parties in the name of opposing the Hindu right—fertilized the ground on which reaction could grow.

Because the working class has been prevented from advancing its own socialist solution to the social crisis, the BJP has been able to demagogically exploit popular anger over the ruinous impact of the neo-liberal policies pursued by the various Stalinist-backed “secular” governments.

The capitalist crisis and the collapse of bourgeois democracy

The Modi government is the Indian expression of a global phenomenon. World capitalism, mired in its most severe crisis since the 1930s, is vomiting up reaction. Led by the US, the imperialist powers are rapidly rearming. Everywhere the ruling elite is hurtling to the right, stoking national-ethnic and communal divisions, and turning to authoritarian forms of rule.

Not just the fascist-minded Trump, but the extreme-right Lega in Italy, the AfD neo-Nazi official opposition in the German parliament, and Brazil's ultra-right, pro-military president, Jair Bolsonaro, are all repudiating bourgeois democratic norms. So too are the ostensible votaries of liberalism.

In the US, the Democratic Party is leading a campaign to censor the internet so as to prevent the spread of oppositional, especially anti-war and socialist, views. And the Democrats are conspiring with the military-intelligence agencies to remove Trump through the methods of a palace

coup, because they want Washington to pursue a more belligerent policy against Russia. French President Emanuel Macron normalized “emergency” “anti-terrorism” powers, then used them to push through massive attacks on workers' social rights.

The only viable strategy to defend democratic rights and defeat reaction is one based on the international class struggle and the political mobilization of the working class against the decrepit capitalist social order.

In 2018, the working class began to break through the obstacles to struggle that had been erected by the CPM and INTUC's international counterparts, the pro-capitalist trade unions and social-democratic parties, and pseudo-left parties like Greece's Syriza. The Yellow Vest movement in France exemplifies this global upsurge against capitalist austerity and social inequality, and the fact that the opposition of the working class is developing outside and increasingly in open opposition to the establishment “left” parties and unions.

To assert their class interests, workers in India need new organizations of struggle, completely independent of the Stalinist parties and union apparatuses and subject to their own control. Indian workers should follow the example of plantation workers on the Abbotsleigh tea estate in Sri Lanka who in response to the unions' enforcement of employer attacks have established a rank-and-file action committee to prosecute the struggle for their basic rights.

Above all, the working class needs a revolutionary party to spearhead the struggle for workers' power and coordinate its struggles on a global scale. That party is the Fourth International and its national sections, including in South Asia, the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka).

Founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, the Fourth International has defended and developed the program of international socialism against imperialism and all its agencies, above all the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy—the political mentors of the CPM and CPI—which betrayed the 1917 Russian Revolution under the nationalist banner of “socialism in one country” and ultimately restored capitalism in the former USSR. Led since 1953 by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), it embodies all the strategic lessons of the struggles of the international working class, including its victories and defeats in the last century and the first two decades of the 21st.

Workers and youth: oppose social inequality, capitalist reaction and war. Take up the fight for international socialism. Build the Indian section of the ICFI.

The authors also recommend:

India's unions to hold two-day “general strike” next week
[5 January 2019]

Indian court dismisses Maruti Suzuki workers' bail application
[23 October 2018]



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