

# As class struggle sharpens, Indian Stalinists stump for right-wing bourgeois government

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The class struggle in India, as around the world, is dramatically intensifying, underscoring the urgency of the struggle for workers' power and the international unification of the struggles of the working class.

The Indian bourgeoisie, as exemplified by the rise to power of Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP and India's transformation into a frontline state in US imperialism's military-strategic offensive against China, is hurtling to the right—embracing communal reaction, authoritarian methods of rule, militarism and war.

But India's rulers face an increasingly rebellious working class, as well as mounting protests among the rural poor. The wave of strikes and farmer protests that has swept across India since 2017 is animated by opposition not only to the austerity policies implemented by the Modi government. It is challenging the pro-market, pro-investor agenda that all governments at both the all-India and state level have pursued for the past three decades, with the aim of transforming India into a cheap-labour production hub for global capital.

India's Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its older, smaller ally, the Communist Party of India—have responded to this intensification of class struggle by redoubling their efforts to politically subordinate the working class to the parties and putrid state institutions of the Indian bourgeoisie.

In the name of “saving democracy” and “saving the republic,” the Stalinists are seeking to divert the mounting working class opposition to the BJP-led government behind the drive of sections of the ruling elite to bring to power an alternate right-wing government following India's multi-phase elections, which conclude May 23. Such a government would be akin to the succession of big business governments—most of them Congress Party-led—that the Stalinists propped up in parliament between 1989 and 2008. These governments invariably implemented neo-liberal reform and pursued ever-closer relations with Washington.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM spells this out in black and white in its election manifesto. Declaring the current elections “the most crucial in the history of independent India,” the CPM says its campaign has three interconnected goals: to defeat the BJP-led alliance; to “ensure an alternative secular government is formed at the Centre”; and to increase the number of MPs from the CPM and the CPM-led Left Front.

The Stalinists are mounting an “Anybody but BJP” campaign. They are urging workers and toilers to support whichever party or multi-party alliance has the best chance of defeating the BJP and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners in a given state. This includes stumping for a host of regional and caste-based parties, many of them, like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) or the Odisha-based BJD, that have previously been allied with the BJP.

However, in much of India the CPM is openly stumping for votes for the Congress Party, till recently the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of

government. In Tamil Nadu, the CPM and the CPI (Communist Party of India) are in an electoral bloc that includes the Congress Party and is led by the DMK, a right-wing regional party that is arguably the Congress' closest ally.

The CPM had hoped to form a similar electoral alliance with the Congress Party in West Bengal. But the Congress snubbed its overtures, choosing instead to prioritize wresting seats from the Stalinists in Kerala (home to eight of the 11 current Left Front MPs) by standing Rahul Gandhi, the party's prime ministerial candidate, from a Kerala constituency.

Making clear that none of this will stand in the way of the Stalinists promoting the Congress Party as a “democratic, secular” alternative to the BJP or supporting a Congress-led government, an editorial in the CPM's English-language weekly *People's Democracy* lamented that the Congress' “ideological and political disarray” was hindering it from taking a “wider view” and “rally(ing) all forces to defeat the BJP at the national level.”

In an interview with Scroll.in, CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury noted that governmental coalitions have been formed by rival opposition parties after previous national elections. He then vowed that “in 2019 also, a new arrangement will emerge after the election,” all the while making clear that the Stalinists intend to be in the thick of organizing such an “alternate” big business government.

Yechury has previously crowed that from 1989 through 2008 the Stalinists played a pivotal role in forming and sustaining each and every non-BJP government. This included the Narasimha Rao minority Congress government that initiated the bourgeoisie's drive to forge a new economic and strategic partnership with world imperialism in 1991 and pushed through a spate of “big bang,” pro-investor reforms over the next five years; and the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, which was largely stitched together by the CPM after the BJP suffered unexpected losses in the 2004 election. Over the ensuing decade, the UPA pushed through further social incendiary neo-liberal “reforms,” while consummating India's “global strategic partnership” with Washington.

Workers must beware. For the past three decades, the CPM and CPI have justified their systematic subordination of the working class to the Congress and other right-wing bourgeois parties on the grounds this was necessary to block the rise to power of the Hindu supremacist BJP. The end result is that the bourgeoisie, despite mass opposition, has been able to dramatically intensify the exploitation of the working class, producing levels of social inequality on par with the British Raj at its height. And the BJP is more powerful than ever.

Due to the Stalinists' political suppression of the working class, the Hindu right has been able to seize the initiative and demagogically exploit

the social frustration and anger produced by rampant social inequality, endemic poverty, and gnawing economic insecurity.

The Stalinists point to the crimes of Modi and his BJP, not to indict Indian capitalism and summon the working class to struggle, but to shackle it to the bourgeoisie.

In this, the Stalinists' use of the term "secular" plays a particularly insidious role. To be sure, the BJP promotes toxic communalism and, along with its RSS mentor, is an incubator for fascistic forces. But the differences between the BJP and its purportedly secular opponents are of degree, not kind. Appeals to caste, communal and regional identities are the stock and trade of the cesspool that is Indian bourgeois politics, serving as a means whereby different bourgeois and petty bourgeois factions fight among themselves for pelf and privilege, and above all as a mechanism for diverting social tensions into reactionary channels.

The Congress Party has a long history of adapting to and conniving with the Hindu right. In the run-up to the 2019 election, it mounted a campaign that even the corporate media characterized as *Hindutva* or Hindu supremacism -lite. With consummate cynicism, the Stalinists routinely bestow their "secular" blessing on any party that finds itself on the outs with the BJP. When the JD (U), for some two decades the BJP's most important ally, was briefly estranged from the BJP and quit the NDA, the Stalinists rushed to promote the JD (U) as a vital part of the "secular" opposition.

### **The Stalinists cheer on Modi's "surgical strikes"**

Defenders of the Stalinist betrayal of the 1917 Russian Revolution and accomplices in the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy's ultimate betrayal, the restoration of capitalism in the former USSR, the twin Stalinist parties have functioned as an integral part of the bourgeois political establishment for decades.

Today their counterrevolutionary character is exemplified by their support for the Indian bourgeoisie's great power ambitions, including its reactionary military-strategic rivalry with Pakistan, and by their complicity—their verbal denunciations of US imperialism notwithstanding—in its anti-China alliance with Washington.

As in the 1930s, capitalist breakdown is engendering a resurgence of inter-imperialist and great power conflict that, absent the revolutionary intervention of the working class, will lead inexorably to a global cataclysm.

The Indian bourgeoisie is playing its own foul role in this process. Continuing down the path blazed by its Congress predecessors, the Modi-led BJP government has integrated India ever more fully into US imperialism's war preparations against China, encouraging US imperialism in its reckless drive to offset the erosion of its economic dominance through aggression and war. At the same time, the Indian bourgeoisie is seeking to leverage the support and strategic favours accorded it by Washington to pursue its own predatory aims.

The extreme dangers this poses for the people of South Asia and the world have been demonstrated by the three major war crises in which India has been embroiled since the fall of 2016—twice with Pakistan and once with China.

Far from alerting the working class and oppressed toilers to the war danger and educating them in the spirit of implacable opposition to the Indian bourgeoisie, its state and its "national appeals," the CPM and CPI have supported India's rapid military expansion, including its development of a nuclear triad and blue-water navy. The Stalinists celebrated the "surgical strikes" that the Indian military, on Modi's orders, carried out against Pakistan in September 2016, and which

precipitated months of cross-border firing in disputed Kashmir.

Similarly, the CPM and CPI hailed the airstrike the BJP government ordered deep inside Pakistan in late February. While CPM General-Secretary Yechury was attending a government-convened meeting to demonstrate "all-party support" for the strikes, tensions between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan were on the boil, bringing India and Pakistan closer to all-out war than at any time since the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. Subsequently—with Modi using the war crisis to whip up jingoism and support for his BJP, as it was obvious he would do ever since he declared Pakistan responsible for the February 14 Pulwama terrorist attack—the CPM bleated that Modi was politicizing the airstrike and "disrupting" "united India's" stand against "terrorism."

The CPM does criticize the government for "reducing India" to "a junior partner of US imperialism." But these criticisms have nothing to do with the mobilization of the working class against imperialism, to say nothing of the development of a global working-class movement against war and imperialism. They are directed at convincing the Indian bourgeoisie that it could better advance its own interests by maintaining "strategic autonomy" and promoting multilateralism, that is, by keeping its hands free to manoeuvre with the European and other imperialist and great powers, as well as Washington.

Even this professed opposition to US imperialism is entirely two-faced. It did not stop the CPM and CPI from propping up a series of governments in the 1990s and the first decade of the current century that pursued ever-closer relations with Washington; and when they made an issue of the US-India nuclear accord in 2008, their Congress allies called their bluff and effectively threw them out of the government.

More than a decade on, the CPM and CPI have made it abundantly clear that while they may engage in some ritualistic handwringing over New Delhi's partnership with a Trump-led America, they will help bring to power and prop up an "alternate" right-wing government that continues and expands the Indian bourgeoisie's reckless and reactionary military-strategic alliance with US imperialism.

### **State Parties: The Stalinists and the Indian Republic**

The CPM and CPI use their affiliated trade union apparatuses, respectively the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), to contain, divert and suppress working class social opposition, and thereby stake their claim for influence within the bourgeois political establishment.

Tens of millions of workers across India joined the January 8-9 general strike to voice their opposition to the BJP government's savage austerity and pro-investor policies. But for the Stalinists the strike was a manoeuvre aimed at burnishing their oppositional credentials, the better to tie the working class to their campaign to bring to power an alternate big business government. Thus the CPM's *People's Democracy* unabashedly declared the strike merely preparatory to "the big battle" ahead—that is defeating the BJP in the general election.

With their claims that "democracy" is at stake in the elections, the CPM and CPI seek to terrorize workers and youth into voting for the Congress and other discredited anti-working class parties.

But as the past three decades have palpably demonstrated, the democratic rights of working people cannot be secured and the Hindu right vanquished by replacing the BJP with another big business government, whether led by the Congress or some "federal" or "third front" combination of right-wing regional parties.

Should such a government come to power after May 23, it will be tasked by its bourgeois masters to accelerate the pace of economic "reform,"

increase military spending and strengthen India's alliance with Washington. Moreover, to force through these measures in the face of mounting working-class opposition, it will invariably turn toward authoritarian methods of rule, following in the footsteps of the national Congress government that used the army to smash the 1974 railway strike, then imposed two-years of emergency rule and the Haryana state Congress government, that in 2012 orchestrated the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers.

Meanwhile, the BJP and the Hindu right will batten off the mounting popular anger against the "left" and trade union-supported big business government

The Indian bourgeoisie's turn to social reaction and authoritarianism is its response to capitalist breakdown. Its solution to that crisis—the further intensification of capitalist exploitation, great-power aggression and war—is inimical to the interests of the vast majority, making it increasingly impossible for it to abide by even traditional bourgeois democratic and constitutional constraints.

Similar processes can be seen the world over, with the bourgeoisie and military-intelligence apparatuses promoting far-right forces, including the AfD, the neo-Nazi party that is now Germany's official opposition, and the Lega in Italy. This is true in even the most privileged imperialist countries, with long bourgeois-democratic traditions, such as France and the United States. In the former, the "liberal" Macron has used authoritarian "emergency" powers to push through sweeping austerity, while lauding General Petain, the head of the fascist Vichy regime that ruled southern France during the Nazi occupation. In the US, the billionaire president Trump is openly seeking to build up a fascist movement by stoking xenophobia and racism, while the Democrats conspire with the military-intelligence apparatus to unseat him so as to pursue an even more aggressive policy against Russia.

The only progressive answer to the growth of capitalist reaction is the independent political mobilization of the working class in the fight for workers' power.

In the 1930s, when—like today—bourgeois democracy was visibly rotting on its feet, the Stalinist political ancestors of the CPM and CPI suppressed, in the name of the Popular Front with the "democratic bourgeoisie," the revolutionary strivings of the working class and emerged as implacable defenders of the capitalist social order. This paved the way for the triumph of reaction and fascism in France and Spain and for the second imperialist world war.

Today the CPM and CPI function as state parties that strive to subordinate the working class to the political parties of the bourgeoisie and shackle it to its state.

The Stalinists promote the Indian state and its institutions, from parliament to the judiciary, police and army, as "democratic" bulwarks against the BJP and Hindu right. What the Stalinists laud as India's "secular democratic republic" was in fact founded through the suppression of the mass anti-imperialist movement that convulsed South Asia in the first half of the twentieth century—through the communal partition of the subcontinent into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu-dominated India, and the transfer of control over the state machine that had been created by South Asia's departing British colonial overlords to the native bourgeoisie.

Indian "democracy" was not just stunted; it was deformed at birth. The subsequent nearly three-quarters of a century have demonstrated that under the rule of the bourgeoisie and its republic none of the burning problems facing the masses could be resolved, from the eradication of caste oppression and landlordism to vanquishing communalism and religious obscurantism and establishing genuine equality among India's myriad ethnic and religious groups.

India attests in the negative to Leon Trotsky's programme of Permanent Revolution. In the countries historically oppressed by imperialism, the

basic tasks of the democratic revolution can only be resolved through a working-class-led socialist revolution and as an integral part of the world struggle for socialism.

The Stalinists' much-vaunted Indian Republic is characterized by the rapaciousness and criminality of its capitalist ruling elite, the incendiary role it is playing in world politics as a satrap of US imperialism, and its perpetuation of colonial divide-and-rule politics through the noxious promotion of communal and casteist politics.

The Stalinists' promotion of the Indian state must be taken as a warning. Under conditions of a mass upsurge of the working class, the Stalinists will not flinch at supporting state violence and repression, just as the CPM-led West Bengal government did when it faced mass protests in 2007 against its plans to expropriate peasants on behalf of the multinational Salim Group.

After decades in which the class struggle was artificially suppressed by the pro-capitalist trade unions and Stalinist and social-democratic parties, workers around the world, including the globally connected Indian working class that has emerged as the result of the past decades of rapacious capitalist development, are striving to assert their opposition to social inequality, austerity and war. But if Indian workers are to become an independent political power rallying the rural and urban toilers behind them in the fight for a socialist solution to the capitalist crisis—and they must—a political reckoning with the CPM and the CPI and the disastrous consequences of Stalinist politics for the working class in India and around the world is urgently required.

This means a turn to the Fourth International. Founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, the Fourth International has defended and developed the programme of world socialist revolution, which animated the Russian Revolution against imperialism and against all its agencies, above all Stalinism. 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. Alone it strives to arm the working class with a revolutionary socialist programme and unify its struggles in a global offensive against capitalism.



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