Indian Stalinists got huge “donations” from right-wing party to fund election campaign

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India’s principal Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM—received the gargantuan sum of 250 million Rupees ($3.6 million) from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a right-wing Tamil Nadu-based party, to fund their campaigns for India’s April-May 2019 general election.

A regional-chauvinist party, the DMK headed an electoral alliance in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu that included the CPI and CPM, as well as the Congress Party, till recently the Indian bourgeoisie’s preferred party of government. The DMK’s funding of the Stalinist parties was revealed in an election expenditure affidavit that the DMK filed, as required by law, with the Election Commission of India (ECI).

According to the DMK affidavit, the payments to the two Stalinist parties represented about a third of its total election spending.

This largesse from the DMK, a corrupt regional-chauvinist party that has accumulated immense wealth through its patronage, control and ownership of numerous Tamil Nadu businesses, was nothing but a payment for services rendered by the Stalinists.

These services include promoting the pro-big business DMK as a friend of the working class and using their trade union apparatuses, the CPM-aligned Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the CPI-affiliated All-India Trades Union Congress (AITUC), as an industrial police force to contain and smother the repeated eruptions of worker opposition to their brutal exploitation by the transnational corporations and Indian big business.

Over the past three decades the DMK and the state’s current ruling party, the AIADMK, have expended a great deal of political energy to transform Tamil Nadu into a haven for the transnationals, while relying on the Stalinists to contain worker resistance to poverty-level wages and precarious contract jobs.

Late last year for instance, the CITU abruptly shut down militant two-months-long strikes by workers against the motorcycle manufacturers Yamaha Motor India and Royal Enfield and auto parts producer Myoung Shin India Automotive (MSI), telling the workers to put their faith in the AIADMK-appointed District Labour Commissioner and go back to work.

Of the Rs. 250 million the DMK doled out to its Stalinist allies, three-fifths, Rs. 150 million ($2.2 million), went to the CPI, the older but smaller of the two Stalinist parties. The CPM, which broke away from the CPI in 1964, received Rs. 100 million ($1.4 million).

Both Stalinist parties have functioned as an integral part of the bourgeois establishment for decades, repeatedly propping up right-wing capitalist governments at the Centre and serving as parties of government in West Bengal and Kerala, respectively India’s fourth and thirteenth largest states.

Nevertheless, the Stalinist parties’ acceptance of direct cash payments from the DMK is politically significant. First and foremost, because it makes a mockery of the Stalinists’ claim to speak in the name of India’s workers and oppressed toilers. But also because of what it reveals about the decrepit state of these parties, which as a result of their role in implementing the Indian bourgeoisie’s pro-investor, pro-market “reform” program, have hemorrhaged popular support.

When the corporate media publicized the contents of the DMK affidavit, the CPI baldly defended its acceptance of a cash handout from the DMK as a normal part of “coalition politics”—i.e., of the sordid horse trading of votes, power and pelf that is the stuff of bourgeois parliamentary politics. “It is a fact,” declared CPI General Secretary D. Raja, “that funds were taken by the party from (the) DMK in Tamil Nadu. There is nothing unethical about it. Everything was transparent and through bank transfer. Everything will be clear when we submit our accounts to the EC. This is part of coalition politics in the state.”

The CPM’s Tamil Nadu State Secretary, K. Balakrishnan, was more circumspect. But he did not challenge the veracity of the DMK affidavit. “We collected money throughout the

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state and spent the amount for the election," he told the *Hindu*. "We have not suppressed anything. Everything is done in a transparent manner."

Subsequently, the CPM Politburo issued a statement that lashed out at media reports "regarding the election funding and expenditure of the CPM." It denounced these reports as "nothing but disinformation designed to discredit the Party."

But the CPM statement was itself "disinformation." It was carefully written so as to conflate two separate issues: whether India's principal Stalinist party had received a cash handout from the DMK; and whether, as media outlets aligned with India's Hindu supremacist BJP government were suggesting, the CPM had broken the law by not acknowledging the DMK payment in either its July 10 or Sept. 13 affidavits to the EIC.

"Contrary to the allegation," insisted the CPM Politburo, "all donations and funds received during the period of Lok Sabha elections have been reflected in the statement of election accounts submitted to the Election Commission. … Nothing is hidden as falsely alleged."

Given that the CPM statement did not acknowledge the receipt of the DMK funds and declared the media reports "nothing but disinformation," and the CPM's publicly available EIC filings made no mention of a contribution from DMK, the implication—and this was transparently the Politburo's intention—was that the claims the CPM had received a DMK handout were a lie.

But this web of deception was untenable, since by insinuating the DMK affidavit was false, it risked compromising the Stalinists' alliance with the DMK.

Thus in the days after their issuing the CPM statement, various Politburo members gave interviews in which they frankly acknowledged that their party had in fact received DMK cash. Ramachandran Pillai told The Print website there was nothing "shady" in the CPM's relations with the DMK. "Our Tamil Nadu unit accepted the money and it's all in the public domain," Pillai claimed. "It was from a friendly party for overall election activities."

G. Ramakrishnan, a Tamil Nadu-based CPM Politburo member, told *The Hindu*, "We have not hidden the fact that we received funds from the DMK. We have submitted our accounts to the election commission and they are going to put them on their website." Ramakrishnan lamely defended the CPM's acceptance of funds from the big-business DMK with the claim that the Stalinists "do not take money from corporate entities."

There is one further aspect of this affair that merits consideration. According to the CPM's Sept. 13 affidavit to the ECI, its total expenditure on the Lok Sabha election and the state elections in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, which were held concurrently, was just Rs. 72 million.

This strongly suggests that the CPM pocketed much, if not all, of the Rs. 100 million ($1.4 million) gifted it by the DMK and that it used this money to finance its large apparatus. In a development that speaks volumes about the corrupt and politically degenerate character of the CPM, in West Bengal, where the CPM-led Left Front held power for 34 consecutive years ending in 2011, a significant part of its apparatus has defected in recent years to the BJP (see: Stalinist CPM faces debacle in its West Bengal "bastion").

That the Stalinists swim in the vile cesspool of Indian bourgeois politics should come as no surprise. As CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury once boasted, from 1989 through 2008 the Stalinists played a leading role in forming and sustaining every non-BJP Indian government—that is a succession of governments, most of them Congress-led, that implemented socially incendiary pro-investor reforms and forged ever closer relations with Washington.

The end result of the Stalinists' rotten politics is that they stand discredited in the eyes of India's workers and toilers. That is why they have suffered a string of electoral debacles. Whereas from 2004-9, the Stalinist-led Left Front was the third largest bloc in the Lok Sabha with more than 60 MPs, in the 2019 general election, the CPM and CPI won a grand total of 5 seats. Of these, four, two each for the CPM and CPI, were won on the coattails of the DMK, whose alliance swept the polls in Tamil Nadu.

Prior to the DMK election-funding revelations, the faction of the party that favours an explicit electoral alliance with the Congress Party was touting the partnership the CPM has formed with the DMK as a model for the party nationally.

A CPM Central Committee meeting in April 2018, summarizing the findings of a report on party organization, conceded that the CPM is "a mass party without any revolutionary content." A more truthful description would be that it and the CPI are parties beholden to the Indian bourgeoisie and its state, and that are increasingly being kept afloat by direct patronage from the ruling class so they can continue policing and politically suppressing the working class.

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