

Indian workers need a revolutionary socialist program to fight Modi, capitalist austerity, and communal reaction

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Tens of millions of workers, youth, and rural toilers throughout India are participating in the one-day general strike called for today by ten central labour federations.

They are doing so to voice their determined opposition to the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, its “pro-investor” policies (sweeping social spending cuts, privatization, the promotion of “hire-and-fire” contract jobs, and massive corporate tax cuts), and its systematic promotion of Hindu supremacist reaction.

Big business and the corporate media hailed Modi’s re-election last May, asserting with the aim of intimidating all popular opposition that he had won an unprecedented mandate and irreversibly changed Indian politics. Yet just seven months later, his government has been staggered by the eruption of mass opposition.

In the past month, millions have taken to the streets, often in defiance of vicious state repression, to oppose the BJP’s anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and its plans to use the National Register of Citizens to harass and intimidate the Muslim minority. The anti-CAA protests have spread to all regions of the country, cutting across the communal, caste, and ethno-linguistic divisions that the Indian elite has long cultivated so as to divide and split the working class.

This mass upsurge is part of an explosion of class struggle that has swept the globe. 2019 saw strikes and sustained mass protests against capitalist austerity, rampant social inequality, and state repression around the world, from Ecuador, Chile, and Mexico, to the United States, France, Britain, Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Iran, and Hong Kong.

But workers and youth must beware. The unions that have called today’s strike are pro-capitalist organizations, entirely beholden to India’s ruling elite. Their principal function is to contain, defuse, and systematically suppress the class struggle.

They have called today’s strike not as part of the fight to mobilize the working class as an independent political force to bring down the Modi government and the malignant capitalist social order of which he is the product. Rather their aim is to channel the burgeoning mass opposition to Modi and his neoliberal and communalist policies behind the big-business

Congress Party, an array of ethno-chauvinist and caste-ist parties like the DMK, and the Indian state.

This is certainly true of the largest union organization participating in today’s strike, the Indian National Trades Union Congress. The INTUC is the union adjunct of the Congress Party—until recently the Indian bourgeoisie’s preferred party of government, and the party that, till 2014, spearheaded the ruling elite’s drive to make India a cheap-labour haven for global capital and to forge a “global strategic partnership” with US imperialism.

But it is equally true of the Stalinist parliamentary parties that are providing the strike’s political leadership—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—and their respective union affiliates, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trades Union Congress (AITUC).

Like the more overtly right-wing unions, the CITU, AITUC and the Stalinist parties have callously abandoned the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers jailed for life on frame-up charges for the “crime” of leading a militant struggle against precarious contract labour jobs and a brutal work regime.

The role of the CPM and CPI as parties of the capitalist establishment is epitomized by their role in bringing to power and sustaining in office a succession of right-wing, pro-US governments, most of them Congress Party-led, between 1989 and 2008, and their support for the India ruling elite’s massive military build-up and its reactionary military-strategic conflict with nuclear-armed Pakistan. In the states where they have held office over the past three decades, West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura, the Stalinists have implemented what they themselves term “pro-investor” policies.

Today, under conditions where the bourgeoisie is demonstrably breaking with democratic-constitutional forms of rule, the Stalinists are redoubling their efforts to shackle the working class to the putrefying parties and institutions of the Indian state.

Once again, the CPM and CPI are promoting the Congress Party as an ally of working people in defending “democracy” and “secularism.” No matter that Congress has a notorious and

ever-lengthening record of aiding and abetting the Hindu right and trampling on democratic rights.

Bowing to the consensus view of India's business and military-security establishments, the Congress quickly abandoned its "opposition" to Modi's August 5 constitutional coup against Kashmir. In November, in an action supported by the CPM, the Congress ensured the coming to power in Maharashtra, the country's second most populous state, of a coalition government led by the Mahratta-chauvinist and Hindu supremacist Shiv Sena, long the BJP's closest ally.

Modi and the BJP government have not fallen from the sky. In implementing socially incendiary pro-investor "reforms" and integrating India into Washington's anti-China war plans they have only travelled further down the road blazed by previous Congress Party-led governments.

Fearing its "window of opportunity" to transform India into a "great power" is rapidly closing, the Indian bourgeoisie has turned to Modi on the gamble that the BJP can provide it the "strong government" needed to dramatically intensify the exploitation of the working class, and boldly assert its predatory interests on the global stage.

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 AfD neo-Nazi official opposition in the German parliament, and Brazil's ultra-right, pro-military president, Jair Bolsonaro, are repudiating bourgeois democratic norms. So too are the ostensible votaries of liberalism like Emmanuel Macron. The French President has moved to rehabilitate the Vichy Nazi collaborator Marshal Pétain and has repeatedly ordered the violent repression of social opposition in order to impose massive social cuts and revive aggressive French militarism.

Modi and the BJP are vile enemies 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 supremacist right has been able to grow into such a menace, it is because the Stalinists fertilized the ground on which reaction could grow, by systematically suppressing the class struggle. 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 only viable strategy to defend democratic rights and defeat communalist and fascist reaction in India, and around the world, is one based on the international class struggle and the independent political mobilization of the working class against the decrepit capitalist order.

The Indian working class must constitute itself as an independent political force in opposition to the bourgeoisie and all its political representatives. It must define itself as a detachment of the international working class and adopt a socialist internationalist program in opposition to global capital—that is, in opposition to the transnational corporations that scour the globe for the best investor returns, and to the nationally based cliques of capitalists that vie for markets, profits, and resources, and pools of labour to exploit through trade war, intrigues, aggression and war.

The fight to unite India's workers and toilers across the sectarian and caste lines must go hand in hand with the fight to unite their struggles with workers around the world. A key element in such a struggle must be the building of a working class-led, global anti-war movement, in opposition to imperialism and to South Asia's communally partitioned nation-state system and the reactionary Indo-Pakistani inter-state conflict to which it has given rise.

This requires the building of new organizations of working-class struggle, through an organizational and political break with the pro-capitalist unions and the Stalinist parties—workplace committees of action and, above all, a revolutionary workers' party, to spearhead the fight to politically mobilize the working class and rally behind it all the toilers in the fight for a workers' and peasants' government committed to socialist policies.

Such a party can only be built as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, (ICFI) the world party founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 in opposition to the Stalinist betrayal of the October 1917 Russian Revolution and the internationalist program of world socialist revolution that had animated it.

We urge all Indian workers and youth who want to take up the fight for socialism, in opposition to capitalist reaction, communalism and war to immediately contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and ICFI.



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