

The Indian general strike and the global fight against communalism and war

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11 January 2020

Tens of millions of workers, youth and rural toilers participated in Wednesday's all-India one-day general strike. They did so to voice their anger and opposition to the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, its pro-investor, pro-market policies—austerity, privatization, the promotion of “hire and fire” contract jobs, and massive corporate tax cuts—and its relentless promotion of Hindu communal reaction.

Broad sections of the working class joined the strike. They included workers in India's globally connected auto industry, coal miners, jute plantation workers, and bus, truck and rickshaw drivers; bank and power workers, and much of the extremely poorly paid, largely female workforce of the state-funded rural child care network (Anganwadi Services).

The strike's strength, as would be expected in a diverse country of more than 1.3 billion people, varied across states and economic sectors. However, its overall impact was massive and demonstrated, albeit only in embryonic form, the immense social power of the working class.

Under conditions where the Modi government and its Hindu supremacist allies have been mounting one communal provocation after another, whipping up bellicose nationalism with war threats against Pakistan, and stoking all forms of reaction, the strike demonstrably united workers across all communal, caste and ethno-linguistic divides.

The strike underscored that when workers enter into struggle they do so as a class, cutting across the racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual “identities” promoted by the bourgeoisie and other privileged layers of the affluent upper-middle class.

The strikers specifically demanded the repeal of the BJP's anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the rescinding of the government's plan to force all of India's residents to “prove” their citizenship, which is transparently aimed at intimidating and harassing India's Muslim minority.

Mass protests against the CAA have convulsed India since it was rushed through parliament last month. Pushed onto its backfoot, with its corporate media-cultivated image of

invincibility shattered, the Modi regime has responded to the anti-CAA agitation with lethal violence. Across large swathes of India, it has repeatedly imposed blanket bans on all public gatherings of more than four people and suspensions of internet service.

Last Sunday, in an action clearly orchestrated by the BJP and its RSS allies, masked vigilantes brutally attacked students at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University while police stood down.

The eruption of mass opposition to the BJP government is part of a global working class upsurge against austerity, rampant social inequality, the suppression of democratic rights, rearmament and war—that is, against the policies that are being pursued by the various nationally-based capitalist elites and their political representatives, whatever their party label, throughout the world.

The past year has seen major strikes and sustained and in some cases insurrectionary protest movements around the globe: from Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, the US, Mexico, Britain and France to Algeria, Sudan, Iran, Lebanon, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka.

During the last week, millions took to the streets in Iraq and Iran to protest Washington's assassination of Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Qassem Suleimani and US imperialism's plans to wage all-out war on Iran and the people of the entire Middle East.

On Thursday, millions of workers in France took strike action and marched in mass protests amid a month-long transport strike to protest the across-the-board attack on pensions and other social rights being mounted by President Emmanuel Macron.

It is this global working class counteroffensive that constitutes the objective foundation for the struggle against the Modi government, the Indian bourgeoisie, and austerity, reaction and war around the world.

Indian big business—led by its newly minted cohort of more than a 100 billionaires—propelled Modi to power in 2014 and massively financed his re-election last May. They did so on the calculated gamble that the Hindu supremacist

BJP could provide the “strong” government needed to push through socially incendiary pro-investor reforms and aggressively assert India’s great power ambitions on the world stage.

In the face of a rapidly unravelling economic situation, the BJP has dramatically accelerated the assault on the working class and its push to transform India into a Hindu *rashtra*, or state, in the first seven months of its second term.

In early August, the BJP government illegally stripped Jammu and Kashmir, India’s lone Muslim-majority state, of its special semi-autonomous status. Modi then transformed it into two Union territories, thereby placing the region under permanent central government rule. Since then, the Kashmir Valley has effectively been under a state of siege.

Modi’s aim in systematically ratcheting up communalism is to mobilize the Hindu right as shock troops against mounting social opposition, channel social tensions behind reaction and militarism, and divide the working class.

But to the shock and dismay of the BJP and the bourgeoisie, it now confronts mass defiance, with working class anger over austerity and joblessness intersecting with the opposition to the government’s authoritarian and communalist measures.

Modi is the Indian expression of a universal phenomenon. In all the imperialist countries and aspiring great and regional powers, bourgeois governments are frantically rearming, turning to authoritarian methods of rule, and cultivating reaction.

This is true not just of the likes of US President Donald Trump, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, but also of French President Macron. The former Socialist Party minister has moved to rehabilitate the Nazi collaborator and former Vichy president Marshal Pétain, normalized “emergency powers,” and authorized state violence against the Yellow Vest protests.

The only viable strategy to oppose austerity, imperialist war and reaction is the systematic unification of the struggles of the working class across state boundaries and continents and its mobilization as an independent political force in the struggle for workers’ power and socialism.

This requires a tenacious struggle against the pro-capitalist trade unions and the establishment “left” parties and pseudo-left organizations, which seek to keep the working class trapped within the reactionary framework of capitalist politics and to divide it on national, racial, gender and other identity politics lines.

In India, this means a struggle against the Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI) and their Left Front—which for decades have functioned as

an integral part of the capitalist political establishment.

The Stalinists politically led Wednesday’s strike, which was called by their union affiliates (the CITU and AITUC) and eight other overtly pro-capitalist central trade unions, including that of the Congress Party—the historic party of the Indian bourgeoisie and the party that until Modi’s ascension in 2014 spearheaded neo-liberal reform and India’s strategic alignment with Washington.

The Stalinists called the January 8 strike with aim of tying the burgeoning mass opposition to the BJP to the Congress Party as well as a host of right-wing caste-ist and ethno-chauvinist parties, and the putrefying institutions of “democratic India.”

For the past 30 years, the Stalinists, in the name of blocking the Hindu right from power, have systematically suppressed the class struggle, as epitomized in their support for a succession of right-wing governments from 1989 to 2008 and their imposition of what they themselves call “pro-investor” policies in the states where they have held office. By so doing, they fertilized the political ground for the BJP to grow, enabling the Hindu supremacist right to cynically exploit mass discontent and frustration over endemic poverty and mounting social inequality.

In India as around the world, the cutting edge of the struggle for the international unity of the working class is the struggle against war. This requires 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 conflict to which it has given rise.

The transformation of the growing global working class upsurge into a conscious struggle for socialism is above all a question of revolutionary program, perspective and leadership. In India, as around the world, mass parties of the working class must be built based on the program of world socialist revolution that animated the October 1917 Russian Revolution and the subsequent struggle, led by Leon Trotsky, against the usurpation of workers’ power by the Stalinist bureaucracy, which ultimately restored capitalism.

Today that struggle and its lessons—above all the imperative of the working class defining itself as an international revolutionary force and basing itself on a world strategy—are embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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