

Indian Stalinists use Bihar elections to deepen their alliance with big-business Congress Party

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India's main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—are using the Bihar state assembly elections to deepen their reactionary alliance with the big-business Congress Party. Until recently, the Nehru-Gandhi family-led Congress Party was the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government.

The Bihar state elections are being held in three regional phases, the last of which is today. All the votes are to be tabulated next Tuesday, November 10.

With a population of 124 million, Bihar is India's second biggest state. It is also among its most impoverished.

Bihar is currently ruled by a coalition between the Janata Dal (United) [JD (U)], whose leader, Nitish Kumar, is the state Chief Minister, and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads India's Union or national government.

The JD (U)-BJP coalition is facing mounting popular anger due to the central government's disastrous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw millions of migrant workers forced to return to Bihar and unemployment, and its recent passage of a farm "reform" bill that will boost agribusiness at the expense of impoverished small farmers. The BJP has responded by whipping up bellicose Indian chauvinism, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself frequently leading the charge at election rallies.

The CPM and CPI are formal partners in the *Mahagathbandhan* (Grand Alliance), an electoral and prospective governmental bloc. It is led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), a Bihar-based casteist party, with the Congress Party the RJD's leading partner.

The *Mahagathbandhan* has also been joined by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. It is the most prominent of the many Indian Maoist groups that in the 1970s and 1980s renounced their politically disastrous attempt to establish a "New Democracy" through peasant-based "people's war" and integrated themselves into bourgeois parliamentary and protest politics.

Because of its role in supporting and organizing struggles of sections of Bihar's brutally oppressed Dalit agricultural labourers, the CPI (ML) Liberation has a larger electoral base in Bihar than either the CPM or CPI. Like the older Stalinist parliamentary parties, which it long denounced as "reformist" and even "social fascist," the CPI (ML) Liberation is using whatever credibility it has as a "leftist" and "communist" force to corral working people

behind the right-wing parties of India's venal ruling elite.

The CPM and CPI long had frosty relations with the CPI (ML) Liberation. But due to their role in supporting and facilitating the bourgeoisie's drive to make India a cheap-labour haven for global capital, their base of support in the working class has hemorrhaged over the past decade, resulting in a series of electoral debacles. Consequently, the mainline Stalinist parliamentary parties have responded amicably to political overtures from the CPI (ML) Liberation, and the latter is now increasingly allied with the CPM and CPI in what is being called the "extended Left Front."

Whatever their previous differences, all three Stalinist/Maoist parties have responded to the dramatic sharpening of class conflict—epitomized by the bourgeoisie's embrace of Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP—by shifting sharply to the right.

After imposing an ill-prepared COVID-19 lockdown that left hundreds of millions of India's masses without jobs or income, the Modi government turned to implementing a murderous policy of "herd immunity." With the support of opposition-led state governments, it has allowed the pandemic to spread virtually unchecked so Indian big business can resume raking in huge profits.

While infections have soared and India has become second only to the US in the number of COVID-19 cases, the Modi government, in the name of reviving the economy, has rammed through a series of neoliberal labour and agricultural "reforms" and accelerated a sweeping privatization drive—all with the aim of making India a magnet for global investment. With the enthusiastic support of India's ruling elite, the BJP has also integrated India even more closely into US imperialism's military-strategic offensive against China. This month, for the first time ever, India is hosting a joint naval exercise with the US and its principal Asian-Pacific treaty allies, Japan and Australia.

The CPM, CPI, and their Maoist-Stalinist brethren in the CPI (ML) Liberation justify their craven support for the Congress and a host of right-wing regionalist and caste-based parties, such as the RJD and, in Tamil Nadu, the DMK, by arguing that such alliances are necessary to combat the Hindu supremacist BJP and its far-right allies. However, rather than weakening the political right, the "left" parties' systematic suppression of the class struggle and subordination of the working class to parties of the Indian bourgeoisie only serves to strengthen and encourage it.

Blocking the BJP from power by rallying the so-called “democratic” and “secular” forces—that is their factional opponents in the other parties of the Indian bourgeoisie—has been the CPM and CPI’s stated principal immediate or “tactical” goal for the past three decades. Yet the BJP and the Hindu right are stronger than ever.

This is because the Stalinists have politically paralyzed the working class, subordinating it to right-wing governments that have pursued pro-market policies and a strategic partnership with US imperialism. With the working class prevented from advancing its own socialist solution to the social crisis, the BJP has been able to demagogically exploit widespread social anger over mass joblessness, stagnant incomes and rampant social inequality.

None of this has given the Stalinists or their new Maoist allies pause.

Addressing a press conference jointly with CPI National Secretary D. Raja and CPI (ML) Liberation Polit Bureau Member Kavitha Krishnan, CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said, “Weakening and ultimately dislodging the Modi government is essential for democracy in the country. A victory (of the *Mahagathbandhan*) in Bihar will pave the way.”

CPI National Secretary D. Raja, in an interview with the *Hindu* on October 23, insisted that “the primary objective must be to defeat the BJP and its allies.” He added, “All secular democratic forces need to come together for this goal. Now, the BJP-RSS combine has posed a grave threat to the Constitution, democratic polity of our country and secular fabric of our society. Our country and the Constitution need to be saved.”

The Stalinists have systematically promoted the lie that the institutions of the Indian capitalist state—“our constitution,” parliament, the courts, and army—are a “democratic” bulwark against the BJP. In fact, these state institutions, which were taken over wholesale from the British colonial regime, have time and again ruthlessly suppressed the working class. Moreover, reflecting the Indian bourgeoisie’s evolution ever rightward, they have become ever more deeply communalized, as demonstrated by the Supreme Court’s stamp of approval for the building of a temple to Lord Ram on the site of the razed Babri Masjid, and the continuing repression in Kashmir.

The CPI (ML) Liberation is playing a similarly pernicious role. General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya fraudulently claimed while releasing his party’s election manifesto, “Left ranks are getting united to reclaim the fighting legacy of the Left” to “defeat the forces of corruption, nepotism, communalism, feudal reaction and autocracy.”

This is a shameless fraud. The allies of the Maoists and Stalinists are themselves steeped in reactionary ethnolinguistic, communal and casteist politics. All of these parties—the Stalinist CPM and CPI included—have implemented socially incendiary “pro-investor” policies that have resulted in deepening poverty and economic insecurity in a country where three quarters of the population struggles to survive on less than \$2.50 per day.

In their search for “secular” allies among reactionary bourgeois parties, the Stalinists have been ready to embrace all manner of communalist forces and fellow travellers. They have given their blessing to the Congress Party’s current governmental coalition

with the fascist Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. During the four years between 2014 and 2017 when the JD (U) was estranged from the BJP, the Stalinists courted it as an ally and proclaimed it a “secular” party—no matter that it had been a pivotal BJP ally for 17 years.

Were the *Mahagathbandhan* to come to power it would form a right-wing capitalist government.

Not only did the Congress Party initiate and long spearhead the Indian bourgeoisie’s “pro-market” agenda, it has a long history of conniving with the Hindu right. It hailed the Supreme Court’s judgment on the Babri Masjid and its only complaint when Modi inaugurated the building of the Hindu temple last August was that it was not invited. During the current border standoff with China, the Congress Party has repeatedly attacked Modi from the right, accusing him of not pursuing a sufficiently aggressive policy against Beijing.

As for the RJD, it is notorious for its corruption and base casteist appeals. While claiming to champion “social justice,” it upholds the interests of a narrow caste-based elite. In exchange for access to pelf and power through reservations (affirmative action in educational opportunities and state sector jobs) this elite is more than happy to police social misery, as the RJD did when it led Bihar’s state government for most of the period from 1995 to 2005.

In a further indication that the Stalinist’s electoral alliance in Bihar with the Congress and the RJD is part of a broader effort to consolidate their partnership with Congress and other regional bourgeois parties at the national level, the CPM Central Committee issued a statement after its October 30-31 meeting laying out the party’s plans for the elections to be held in four states next year.

The statement confirmed that in West Bengal, where it led the state government for 34 years ending in 2011, the CPM will contest the polls in tandem with the Congress Party. It will also join forces with the Congress and other “secular parties” in the northeast state of Assam. In Tamil Nadu, the CPM will contest the elections as a member of the DMK-led opposition alliance. As in Bihar, the Congress is the number two in this alliance.

Only in Kerala, where the Congress is the main opposition to the CPM-led Left Democratic Front government, will the Stalinists even be formally in opposition to the traditional governing party of the Indian bourgeoisie.



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