

Indian Stalinists stump for big business Congress Party and ethno-chauvinist DMK in Tamil Nadu phase of national election

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The principal Indian Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—have joined forces with the big business Congress Party and the DMK, a Tamil ethno-chauvinist party, to contest India’s general election in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Voters in all 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in Tamil Nadu will go to the polls this Friday in what is the first round of a seven-phase national election ending June 1.

With a population of some 77 million, Tamil Nadu is India’s seventh-largest state. It is also the most industrialized. Chennai, its capital and metropolis, and the adjacent industrial belt are known as the “Detroit of India,” because of their large concentration of globally-integrated auto production facilities.

In the name of “defending democracy” and defeating India’s far-right, Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, the CPM and CPI have helped patch together a ramshackle all-India electoral coalition of more than three-dozen opposition parties. Dubbed the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), this election coalition is led by the Congress Party, till recently the Indian bourgeoisie’s traditional party of government.

INDIA’s aim is to provide the Indian ruling class with a right-wing alternative government to the Hindu supremacist BJP. One no less committed than Modi’s to “pro-investor reform”—that is, the intensification of the exploitation of the working class—and to the Indo-US Global Strategic Partnership, under which India has been transformed into a frontline state in Washington’s military-strategic offensive against China.

In Tamil Nadu, the INDIA electoral bloc is led by the DMK, which has formed the state’s government since 2019, and is contesting the elections under the banner of the Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA).

Among India’s major regional parties, the DMK is arguably the Congress Party’s closest ally. In addition to the Congress and the two Stalinist parliamentary parties, the SPA includes more than a half-dozen right-wing religio-communal, caste-ist and Tamil chauvinist parties.

The DMK is itself contesting 21 of the 39 Tamil Nadu Lok

Sabha seats. Of the remaining 18, it has allotted nine to the Congress Party, two each to the CPM and CPI, two to the VCK (which postures as a defender of the oppressed Dalit minority), and one each to the Indian Union Muslim League, the KMDK and the MDMK.

With the polls fast approaching, the Stalinists, including CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, have been active on the hustings promoting the DMK and the Tamil Nadu government under DMK supremo M.K. Stalin as bulwarks of democracy and secularism.

This is a monstrous political fraud. The DMK is a loyal defender of the Indian ruling class and its state. Within that framework, it champions the interests of the Tamil regional capitalist elite, including in conflicts with the central government over revenue and with neighbouring states over water resources.

As a member almost continuously between 1998 and 2014 of Union governments, under the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and then the Congress Party’s United Progressive Alliance, the DMK played a major role in the Indian ruling class post-1991 drive to implement “pro-investor,” “pro-market” reform and to forge its anti-China strategic partnership with US imperialism.

If Tamil Nadu has become India’s most industrialized state, it is because the DMK and its arch-rival, the AIADMK, have rolled out the red carpet for domestic and global capital. This includes establishing 54 special economic zones (SEZs), giving the state the highest concentration of SEZs in all India.

Last year, the DMK government rammed through a vicious anti-worker law, the Factories (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2023, that would have allowed an extension of the workday from eight to 12 hours per day and without overtime pay. Later, in the face of worker calls for strike action against the new law and fearing the legislation’s potential impact on the 2024 elections, the DMK government heeded the counsel of its Stalinist allies and rescinded it.

The DMK government has welcomed the emergence of Chennai’s shipyards as repair facilities for US warships in the Indo-Pacific as part of India’s ever deeper integration into

Washington's plans for war against China. When Modi recently appealed to Tamil chauvinism by denouncing a Congress Party government for ceding a tiny Palk Strait islet to Sri Lanka in 1974, Chief Minister Stalin responded by attacking the BJP prime minister and would-be Hindu strongman for being "soft" on China. This under conditions, where the US has egged New Delhi on in its border conflict with China and both countries have forward-deployed tens of thousands of troops, tanks and warplanes.

The DMK promotes Dravidian, that is Tamil, ethno-nationalism, with the aim of dividing the working class and mobilizing popular support of the agenda of the Tamil bourgeoisie. In doing so, it exploits popular fears and resentments against the BJP's fascistic Hindu nationalist agenda, which includes giving Hindi a privileged status within the Indian Union.

With the Stalinists' support, the DMK claims to be fighting for "social justice." In fact its "social justice" agenda is the opposite of a struggle for social equality, that is for radical anti-capitalist measures that encroach upon the fortunes, power and private property of the ruling class. Under conditions where there is burning popular anger over the lack of jobs and endemic poverty, the DMK advocates that the social misery produced by Indian capitalism be distributed more "equitably" through a further expansion of India's reservation (affirmative action) policy. As decades of experience have demonstrated, the guaranteeing of a portion of university places and public sector jobs to various historically oppressed lower-caste groups serves only to promote caste and communal struggle, at the expense of the class struggle and the unity of all the oppressed workers and toilers against capitalism. It has also served the ruling class by cultivating a privileged petty bourgeois elite among the lower castes that tenaciously propagates caste-ism and is otherwise hostile to working people's democratic and social aspirations.

The Stalinist-DMK alliance

Unlike in the neighbouring state of Kerala or in West Bengal where the CPM led the state government for 34 consecutive years ending in 2011, the Stalinists have never been a major force in the electoral politics of Tamil Nadu.

However, they have wielded considerable political influence, especially through their respective trade union federations, the CPM-affiliated Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the CPI-aligned All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).

The DMK recognizes the important role the Stalinists have played in suppressing the class struggle. The state has seen numerous militant worker struggles in recent years including by Ford autoworkers in Chennai opposing the shuttering of their

plant, Motherson and other auto parts workers, public school teachers, sanitation workers, electricity workers and Neyveli Lignite workers. Invariably, the Stalinist-led CITU and AITUC have isolated these struggles and directed workers toward pressuring the state government and its district collector or labour office to intervene on their behalf.

The DMK and Congress also value the Stalinists' support as their endorsement lends credibility—although with increasingly less effect given the CPM and CPI's own record of enforcing the dictates of big business—to their phony claims of sympathy for the plight of working people.

The Stalinists for their part have become increasingly dependent on the right-wing DMK to maintain a role in the parliamentary politics of the Indian ruling class.

In the 1990s and the first decade of this century, as the Indian bourgeoisie was carrying out a major strategic reorientation, abandoning its failed state-led development strategy in favour of full integration into the US-led imperialist order, the Stalinists played a crucial role in propping up a series of right-wing governments, most of them Congress-led.

In 2004, at the high-water mark of their parliamentary influence, the CPM held 54 Lok Sabha seats and the CPI 10, and their Left Front constituted the third-largest bloc in parliament. Since then, as a consequence of their support for the big business Congress-led UPA government and imposition of what they themselves called "pro-investor reforms" in West Bengal and the other states where they led the government, the Stalinists have gone from electoral debacle to electoral debacle.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the CPM and CPI won just five seats combined, with four of them coming from Tamil Nadu, where they were—as today—junior partners in an electoral alliance led by the DMK and the Congress Party.

So eager was the DMK to prop up the Stalinist CPM and so weak was the CPM politically and organizationally, the DMK had to fund from its own pocket the CPM's entire election campaign nationwide.

It is thus not surprising that when the DMK announced last month that it wanted the CPM MP elected in 2019 from the industrial city of Coimbatore to step aside so it could run one of its own in a high-profile contest against the BJP's Tamil Nadu leader, the CPM quickly obliged.



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