

India's Cockroach Janata Party: A political safety valve aimed at diverting India's deprived youth

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Last Saturday, June 6, thousands of students, unemployed youth and young professionals gathered at Jantar Mantar in central Delhi, India's capital, for a protest led by Abhijeet Dipke—the founder of the recently established Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), which claims to be “a political movement for the people the system forgot.”

The demonstrators demanded the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over recently revealed systemic fraud in the highly competitive, government-administered college entrance examinations, NEET and CBSE. This fraud has directly impacted the prospects of millions of young high school graduates.

Saturday's protest marked the CJP's first public event, as it seeks to transition from a viral social media phenomenon into a political party. It underscored the explosive anger and frustration among a generation condemned to unemployment and low-wage, precarious gig- and contract employment.

The CJP is casting itself as an anti-establishment force and representative of Generation Z, clearly seeking to identify itself with the “Generation Z protests” that have erupted in Nepal, Kenya and elsewhere. It describes itself as “India's first political movement built for the young, the unemployed, and the chronically online.”

Nevertheless, what stands out with the CJP is that its founder, Dipke, is no spontaneous citizen-activist. He traveled to the demonstration from Boston where he lives after having obtained a Master's Degree in “Public Relations” at Boston University. He is also a trained communication strategist with years of experience in the social media and election campaign apparatus of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)—a right-wing capitalist party that governed the Delhi National Capital Territory for over a decade and currently forms the government in the northwest Indian state of Punjab.

Dipke's background goes to the heart of what the CJP is and what political purpose it ultimately serves.

Dehumanisation from the Bench

The CJP emerged on social media following the repugnant remarks that India's Chief Justice, Surya Kant, made from the Indian Supreme Court bench on May 15. This supposed constitutional guardian of fundamental democratic rights denounced the tens of millions of Indian youth who cannot find employment as “parasites” and “cockroaches.” As *The Wire* observed, this was not a slip of the

tongue. It was a stark revelation of the utter contempt with which the ruling class views the masses of socio-economically deprived and struggling educated middle-class youth who cannot find employment, even as the corporate media celebrates India's capitalist “rise.”

Dipke, deploying his professional skills in political communications, responded the following day with a social media meme that transformed the cockroach into a symbol of defiance and survival, while simultaneously poking fun at the ruling, far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by partially appropriating its name. At this point, as Dipke readily admits, the Cockroach Janata Party was simply satire, but his intervention struck a chord. Within a matter of days, the CJP's Instagram following crossed 22 million, surpassing that of the BJP, the Congress Party and every other registered political party in India.

The response of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist government was characteristically authoritarian: the CJP's X account was blocked in India on May 21, with India's Intelligence Bureau claiming that its contents “posed a threat to national security and the sovereignty of India.” This action reveals not only the utterly autocratic character of the Modi regime, but also the depth of its fear that the social crisis will engender mass opposition. When mass worker protests erupted in Delhi's industrial suburbs in April, the BJP authorities responded with state violence and mass arrests.

India's unemployment crisis is a structural feature of its capitalist development, not a temporary dysfunction. The government's own Labour Force Survey recently found that India's unemployment rate is the highest it has been in 45 years—a figure so damaging that the Modi government initially suppressed it. Of the over 10 million young people who enter the labour market annually, only a small fraction are finding employment in the formal sector. Government figures boast of a major rise in the labour force, but they are inflated by a huge increase in self-employment—most of which consists of people scrambling to eke out a living as hawkers or small farmers.

The establishment-promoted promise of “meritocracy”—that a high NEET score or a stellar competitive exam—result would secure at least a livable future has been exposed as a cruel fiction, doubly so now that even those examinations are riddled with corruption and paper leaks. Meanwhile, India's 229 billionaires, who have a combined net worth exceeding \$1 trillion, squander tens of millions on wedding parties and other extravagancies, as in the celebrations to mark the 2024 marriage of the youngest son of Mukesh Ambani.

The AAP: From “Anti-Corruption” to a pro-imperialist establishment party

To grasp the full significance of the CJP, one must understand what its founder’s parent organization, the AAP, has become. Launched from the Anna Hazare anticorruption agitation of 2011, the AAP marketed itself as the cleansing force that would sweep away the corrupt political establishment and the cash nexus tying it to big business. That promise collapsed with remarkable speed. When Kejriwal resigned Delhi’s chief ministership in early 2014 after barely 49 days in office, he was already openly urging big business “to tell us what to do.”

The AAP subsequently returned to power in Delhi in 2015, on a wave of popular anger with India’s two major national bourgeois parties, the BJP and the Congress. But for all its claims to be a party for the “common man,” it predictably proved to be yet another capitalist party—implementing “pro-investor” policies, supporting the Indian ruling class’s anti-China “global strategic partnership with US imperialism and joining in bellicose denunciations of arch-rival Pakistan.

Ultimately, the AAP itself became embroiled in corruption scandals—most notoriously the Delhi liquor policy case—which the BJP exploited for its own reactionary ends. Having destroyed its anti-corruption brand, the party turned to a more durable instrument of Indian bourgeois politics: communalism. In its 2022 Punjab Assembly campaign, the AAP systematically utilized “soft”-Hindutva messaging, projecting Kejriwal’s personal religiosity and his temple visits, calibrating its cultural identity to compete with the BJP on its own communalist ground.

Against this backdrop, the credible claims that the CJP is a covert AAP front deserve to be taken seriously. Before departing for Boston University in 2024, Dipke posted a photograph of himself with the Manish Sisodia, long Kejriwal’s chief lieutenant and the deputy chief minister of Delhi from 2015-2023. It was accompanied by a public declaration that “no distance will ever weaken my commitment to AAP.” Sisodia subsequently endorsed the CJP by name in a social media post. Former civil servant Ashish Joshi, formerly with the CJP, resigned from the movement after Dipke refused to answer a direct question about the CJP’s independence from the AAP.

Dipke has since denied that the CJP has any ties to the AAP, but he has said nothing of substance to distance himself from the AAP’s reactionary record. At present he is trying to leave what the CJP stands for as amorphous as possible, hiding behind the demagogic claim that unlike the political establishment, he wants to listen to his youthful followers. The five demands posted as the CJP’s Manifesto are limited to tweaks to the parliamentary-electoral system, like banning legislators from defecting to rival parties. None even try to address mass unemployment, the deplorable state of education, or endemic poverty, let alone call into question the “right” of a tiny handful of capitalists to monopolize India’s wealth.

Even if the CJP is not a surreptitious AAP front, it is clear that this movement’s aim is to absorb the rage of India’s youth and direct it back towards capitalist politics, specifically pressuring the establishment for meagre reforms; while deflecting attention away from the root cause of mass unemployment, corruption and the myriad ills that blight Indian society and deny its youth a decent future—the capitalist social order.

The Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM has

condemned the Modi government’s authoritarian suppression of the CJP’s social media presence and noted that the online support for the CJP “reflects the prevailing discontent against the BJP government on issues such as unemployment.” But the CPM’s response to the CJP is also deeply revealing of its own political bankruptcy. General Secretary M. A. Baby carefully stated that the phenomenon “needed to be studied with all seriousness” as it reflected “changing forms of political expression in the younger generation.” This is the language of a party keeping its options open—not principled opposition to a bourgeois maneuver, but a calculation about whether the CJP can be useful. The CPM, which has spent decades propping up right-wing bourgeois governments in the name of opposing the BJP, has no interest in exposing the CJP as a political trap. It is more interested in whether the CJP can breathe new life into its decaying political fortunes and the parliamentary manoeuvring that passes for “left” politics in India.

At most, the Dipke-led CJP is calling for a slightly reformed and cleaner version of the same state apparatus and capitalist socio-economic system that is producing ever-worsening social misery and an expanding imperialist global war—from the Middle East and Russia to the US military-strategic offensive against China.

India’s youth are not alone in their frustration and anger. The same structural unemployment, the same grotesque inequality, the same institutional rot afflicts young workers across Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. This universality points toward the only genuine conclusion: the enemy is not this minister, this Chief Justice, or even simply Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP. The enemy is a global capitalist system normalising these conditions. The only genuine solution is the building of an independent international movement of the working class and youth, grounded in the perspective of world socialist revolution—the reorganisation of society in the interests of those who produce its wealth, not those who extract it. It is to this perspective India’s youth should turn.



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