

India's Cockroach Janata Party suspends student agitation after Modi government makes token concession

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Fearing that a weeks-long student protest was becoming the flashpoint for an eruption of mass social anger, India's Narendra Modi-led, far-right government grudgingly accepted the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday, July 25.

Pradhan's resignation had been the main demand made by leaders of a student agitation initiated on June 20 by the newly-founded, satirically-named Cockroach Janata Party (CJP).

With the encouragement of forces allied with India's Congress Party-led parliamentary opposition, the CJP leadership responded to Pradhan's resignation by quickly moving to shut down the agitation. They sought to pass off what was manifestly a modest tactical retreat on the part of Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government as a signal of "victory."

Speaking Saturday to the crowd at the Jantar Mantra—the site in the heart of New Delhi where students and their supporters were in the 36th day of a continuous sit-in—CJP leader Abjheet Dipke declared, "Dharmendra Pradhan has resigned, and this is proof that if you don't get scared, you can win." He continued, "You should not be scared to speak in a democracy. Only if you raise your voice will they stay in line because they are sitting in power because of us."

Joined by other CJP spokespersons, Dipke, who until recently was an operative for the right-wing, pro-capitalist Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party, then urged the protesters to disperse in a show of "good faith" to the Modi government. In justifying their decision to shut down the agitation at the very point that it was beginning to galvanize popular support across India, the CJP leaders claimed to have secured additional verbal pledges from the Modi regime. Chief among these were that it would withdraw all charges (First Information Reports) laid against those involved in the student agitation, financially compensate the families of youth who committed suicide as a result of the criminal leaks of government-supervised university entrance exams, and formally respond to the CJP's demands for educational reform within four weeks.

This "agreement" now appears to be unravelling. The authorities have apparently reneged on a promise to put the additional points in writing by Tuesday and are insisting that they never agreed to the dropping of charges against those involved in what a news report, citing unnamed government officials, called "social miscreancy" or who have prior criminal convictions.

True to its authoritarian playbook, the Modi government has repeatedly tried to smear the protesters as "anti-national" and violent. In reality, it was the Delhi Police, acting on the orders of the government, that brutally attacked those congregated at the Jantar

Mantra protest site on the evening of July 19, and then used lathi charges, tear gas and pellet guns to attack a peaceful but defiant 50,000-strong march to the parliament complex the next day.

In social media posts, CJP spokespersons have accused the authorities in multiple states of launching a legal vendetta against those involved in the student agitation. In an X post Monday, CJP national spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka said there has been a "complete breach of the agreement regarding no police action against the protestors." "Hundreds of students" had been arrested in Bihar and Bengal, he said, and hundreds more were being harassed and detained in Delhi.

Facing growing anger among their student supporters, CJP leaders have been forced to threaten that they will resume the agitation starting as early as Wednesday, if the government does not live up to its "promises." "If the government does not honour its word and the agreements, we will be forced to again call for a big protest, not just in Delhi but nationwide," CJP representative Saurav Das told the Press Trust of India Tuesday.

The immediate trigger for the protest movement was the leak of the NEET-UG medical entrance examination paper, which forced nearly 200,000 students to retake the test. The latest in a series of such fiascos, it pointed to the endemic corruption of India's centralized examination system.

But the student agitation has been animated by much broader and deep-rooted grievances, from the punishing competitive entrance-examination process and the shortage of university places, to the lack of jobs, endemic poverty, and the indifference of Indian capitalism and its governmental institutions to Generation Z youth.

And last week, after the Modi government sought to brutally suppress the agitation, it spread like wildfire, with sympathy demonstrations and protests held in cities across India.

Confronted with this sudden flare-up of opposition, Modi and his government made a series of tactical shifts. The would-be Hindu strongman broke his five-week long silence on the protest, feigning concern for the students in a social media post. His government announced that when parliament resumed on Monday, July 27, it would introduce legislation to establish "fast-track" courts to speedily prosecute those who leak exam papers. It subsequently fired a number of NEET staff, resumed talks with the CJP leaders, and finally gave Pradhan, whom it had hitherto backed to the hilt, his marching papers.

The government's principal fear is that the student protests will become a catalyst for an eruption of working class opposition. The

student agitation unfolded only weeks after an uprising of tens of thousands of brutally exploited workers in the industrial townships of Noida and Manesar on the outskirts of Delhi, just a dozen kilometers from the Jantar Mantar protest site. These protests were savagely repressed, with hundreds of workers, many of whom remain in jail, arrested.

In the first half of 2026, the BJP government, it need be added, dramatically intensified its class war assault. It pushed through an anti-worker reform of labour laws to further restrict the legal right to strike and promote precarious contract labour employment, and, with the express aim of lowering wages for super-exploited agricultural workers, it rescinded India's "rural employment guarantee" program.

A second concern for the government is that many of the student protesters are drawn from middle class social layers that have previously constituted an important electoral base of support for Modi and his BJP. Yet these layers are becoming increasingly disillusioned as the fruits of India's so-called capitalist rise have been monopolized almost exclusively by the rich and super-rich.

The punishing competition for university places is itself a product of a malign social order. Families feel compelled to make large financial sacrifices to secure tutors for their children, in the hopes that they will be able to lift them out of a grim life of constant financial pressure and anxiety in a country without a state-financed social-safety net.

Even then, a university degree provides no guarantee of well-remunerated employment. According to a *State of Working India* report issued by Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment in March, unemployment among university and college graduates under the age of 25 currently stands at nearly 40 percent, and 11 millions of India's 63 million degree-holders aged 20-29 are jobless.

Modi's determination to retain Pradhan as his Education Minister was not simply out of fear that any concession to the student protesters, however token, would encourage broader opposition. Like Modi himself, Pradhan is a lifelong member of the RSS, the shadowy Hindu supremacist "cultural" organization and militia which mentors the BJP, and with whose leadership Modi routinely consults over cabinet choices and government policy.

In the five years he served as Education Minister, Pradhan led a multi-pronged attack on education, spearheading a push to set up private universities, reduce education spending, and impose RSS-inspired curriculum changes.

A significant feature of the student protest movement is that it has united students across the communal divides that have been incited by the BJP and the Indian ruling class as a whole.

That the CJP leaders would respond to the sudden surge in support for the student agitation after it challenged the Modi government in the streets of Delhi is, to say the least, not surprising. As the WSWs previously explained, from the outset they sought to limit the protest to the narrowest demands, as if the ouster of one reactionary BJP minister, however warranted, will change anything. The CJP is not even calling for a vast expansion of funding for all levels of the education system and a living wage to be paid university students, let alone raising demands that would challenge the domination of socio-economic life by India's capitalist elite or encroach on the massive sums expended on India's military.

At a press conference Monday, the CJP leadership revealed that it has been receiving advice from a senior Congress Party leader and former cabinet minister, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal.

The Congress, no less than the BJP, is anxious to contain the student

protest within the sterile framework of establishment politics and prevent it from becoming an impetus to class struggle. The Congress' "oppositional" theatrics, including last week's brief arrest of party leader Rahul Gandhi outside Modi's official residence and denunciations of police violence, are aimed at diverting attention away from the fact that, like Modi and his BJP, it is committed to "pro-investor" policies and the anti-China Indo-US Global Strategic Partnership.

The most pernicious role is played by the various Stalinist parties, which in the name of opposing the Hindu supremacist BJP, have systematically suppressed the class struggle and serve as anchors of the Congress-led INDIA electoral bloc.

Within hours of Pradhan's resignation, the two traditional Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—and the Maoist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and its student wing, the All India Students' Association (AISA), all rushed to proclaim it an "historic victory." In what was couched as praise for the undoubted self-sacrifice of the students, they all promoted politically fatal illusions in the possibility of the students—and more broadly India's workers and rural toilers—to advance their interests through appeals to the capitalist establishment, as it lurches, in India and globally, toward dictatorship and war. Thus the CPM Politburo declared, "The courage and determination shown by the youngsters augers well for Indian democracy."

None of these ostensibly "Communist" organizations called for the students to turn to the working class, beginning with the Noida and Manesar workers, and to assist it in mobilizing its immense social power in opposition to the BJP government and India's venal capitalist elite and in the fight for a workers' government, leaning on the support of the rural masses, to implement socialist policies.

The situation remains explosive. Despite the best efforts of the CJP leaders and the opposition parties, the student protest movement may erupt anew. Socialist-minded students must fight for the understanding that none of the major problems blighting the lives of their peers—from the lack of university places and economic opportunities, to communal reaction, state repression and war—can be resolved outside of a working-class-led struggle for international socialism.



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