

The goon attack at Kolkata's Jadavpur University—The BJP's war on student dissent

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This article was submitted by R.A. Vasikh (name changed to protect anonymity), a university student from West Bengal, India, and a regular reader of the World Socialist Web Site. It documents how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in West Bengal is using the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the fascist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to unleash violence against students.

These attacks come within the context of massive protests by youth and workers across India against the deepening social crisis produced by the BJP's pro-corporate, authoritarian rule.

A mob of Hindu supremacist thugs attacked students at Jadavpur University in Kolkata, West Bengal, on the night of August 19–20, just days after India's far-right prime minister, Narendra Modi, called for left-wing opponents of the government to be “identified and isolated.”

The attackers—members of the ABVP along with outside goons—entered the campus through Gate 4 at approximately 12:37 a.m. on August 20. They vandalized university property, burned flags and posters of left-wing student organisations, and targeted students sheltering inside the Aurobindo Bhavan administrative building. Video footage shows fires, stone-throwing, and attempts to force entry into university buildings. Students were trapped inside as the mob attempted arson.

Jadavpur University is one of India's leading public institutes of higher education, and has a long history of left-wing student political activity.

The immediate background to the far-right assault was a confrontation at a General Body meeting of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology Students' Union (FETSU), which ABVP supporters tried to disrupt and shut down on the trumped up claim that it was illegitimate because no elections have been held in recent years to fill FETSU leadership posts.

The ABVP is the student organisation of the RSS, the fascist paramilitary organization that is the ideological mentor of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP. It functions as the BJP's shock troops on university campuses, using violence, intimidation, and the smear of “anti-national” to stamp out political dissent.

Only after a public outcry did the university administration lodge a police complaint over the August 19-20 goons. Although the ABVP's role in the attack was manifestly evident, Vice Chancellor Chiranjib Bhattacharjee's complaint charged “unknown outsiders/persons” for rioting, vandalism and criminal intimidation.

As of last Friday, no arrests had been made. On August 26, some six days after the attack, police entered the university and took away CCTV footage.

Earlier, the *Times of India* had reported that the CCTV footage showed the mob entering without resistance, raising questions about whether individuals inside the university facilitated their entry.

The Calcutta High Court declined an urgent hearing on a petition seeking judicial intervention. A retired academic appointed to head a university investigative committee has already withdrawn.

The BJP's conquest of West Bengal

The Jadavpur violence must be understood in the context of the BJP's “historic” victory in West Bengal's May 2026 state assembly election, when it won 208 of 294 seats, ousting the 15 year-long Trinamool Congress (TMC) government and captured power in India's fourth most populous state for the first time ever.

Immediately upon taking office, the newly installed Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari—a former TMC leader who defected to the BJP—unleashed widespread police violence against poor slum-dwellers, especially Muslims and other minorities.

The West Bengal BJP government is using its shock troops, including the ABVP and other Hindu supremacist groups, to suppress any form of opposition, most of all from the youth and the working class. The violent attack by the ABVP at Jadavpur is part of this pre-emptive strike against mounting social opposition.

The fraudulent pretext of ABVP

The ABVP's claim that the FETSU General Body meeting was illegitimate because no FETSU elections have been held is utterly fraudulent. The ABVP is well aware that the TMC government, which ruled West Bengal for three consecutive terms from 2011 to 2026, had suppressed student union elections since 2013. The TMC then passed the West Bengal Universities and Colleges (Administration and Regulation) Act, 2017, which essentially outlawed student body elections in the state. The TMC passed this legislation to ban any political expression by students, with the party arguing that students were at university to “study” and not to participate in political activities. Having benefited from the TMC's suppression of democratic student elections, the ABVP now cynically invokes the absence of elections to justify mob violence against students when they attempt to organise.

The persecution of Umar Khalid

The attack at Jadavpur is not an isolated incident. Attacks on left-wing students and faculty—who are frequently derided as “anti-national”—have occurred throughout the BJP's now 12-year-long national government.

Perhaps the most notorious case is that of the activist and student leader Umar Khalid. In 2018, Khalid was shot at by an unidentified gunman in New Delhi while attending a program titled “Khauf se Azaadi” (Freedom

Without Fear) at the Constitution Club, organised to highlight the increasing attacks on minorities, students and rationalists. Khalid survived the assassination attempt. But in September 2020, under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), he was arrested for leading peaceful protests against the religiously discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Khalid's continued incarceration remains one of the most abhorrent acts of the Indian state in targeting student and worker solidarity.

Just four days before the Jadavpur attack, on August 15, Modi used his Independence Day address to call for action to be taken against those he called "dimaagi Naxals"—"intellectual Naxals." Modi boasted that the Indian state has largely succeeded in suppressing the armed Naxalite Maoist insurgency, but claimed that people with a "Naxal mentality"—that is, who oppose the government from a left-wing perspective—remain and must be "identified and isolated."

The term "dimaagi Naxals" is deliberately vague—akin to the Trump administration's targeting of the non-existent *antifa* movement—and is meant to legitimize state surveillance of, and vigilante attacks, on left-wing students, intellectuals and other political opponents. It echoes the BJP's established use of "urban Naxal" as a label to criminalize dissent.

The connection was made explicit by West Bengal Minister Arjun Singh in the wake of the August 19-20 goon attack. He declared on August 23 that ABVP members would have to adopt "stricter measures" to drive "dimaagi Naxals" out of Jadavpur University.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Dilip Ghosh threatened a "surgical strike" against "anti-national" activity at the university. Coming in the wake of events of August 19-20, such statements are clear incitements to violence from the highest levels of the state.

Who paved the BJP's road to power in West Bengal?

The BJP's conquest of West Bengal did not come out of nowhere. It is the direct product of the right-wing, pro-capitalist politics of the very "left" forces that claim to oppose the BJP.

For 34 years, until 2011, West Bengal was governed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM)-led Left Front. The CPM is a Stalinist party that long ago abandoned any pretense of fighting for socialism. Its government pursued "pro-investor" policies: closing public sector units, setting up Special Economic Zones and expropriating peasant lands for big business projects. In 2007, the Left Front government used police and party goons to violently suppress peasant opposition to land expropriation in Nandigram, killing at least 30 villagers.

At the national level, the CPM propped up the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government, which pressed forward with "pro-investor" economic restructuring while entering a "global strategic partnership" with US imperialism. The Stalinists justified subordinating the working class to the Congress Party in the name of blocking the BJP. This policy did not block the BJP. It disarmed the working class and created the political vacuum that the Hindu supremacist right has filled.

The TMC, which governed West Bengal under the premiership of Mamata Banerjee from 2011 to 2026, intensified the right-wing socio-economic policies pioneered in the state under Left Front rule. A former BJP ally and anti-communist demagogue, Banerjee postured as "pro-poor" while presiding over a corrupt, pro-big-business government that routinely used violence against political opponents.

It was in this political morass—produced by decades of Stalinist betrayal and right-wing rule—that the BJP was able to advance. A significant section of the CPM's patronage-fed apparatus, including its network of thug enforcers, has defected to the BJP since the mid-2010s. The political

distance between the Stalinists and the Hindu right has proven negligible because both serve the same class interests.

The Students' Federation of India (SFI), the CPM's student wing, has dominated student politics at Jadavpur for decades. It presents itself as a defender of democratic rights against the BJP. But the SFI cannot be treated as an independent representative of student or working-class interests. It is an appendage of a party that implemented the very pro-corporate, anti-worker policies that have fuelled the social crisis upon which the BJP feeds. Its politics have historically subordinated students and workers to parliamentary alliances with the Congress Party, long the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of national government, and other capitalist parties. It is incapable of leading a genuine fight against the Hindu supremacist right, which must be based on class struggle, not electoral combinations.

For an independent political movement of the working class

The violence at Jadavpur University must be unequivocally condemned. Students, educators and workers have a common interest in defending freedom of speech, political association and education from the BJP's authoritarian assault. But this defence cannot be entrusted to the Stalinist organisations or to any section of the Indian bourgeoisie. The CPM, the TMC and the Congress Party have all, in different ways, paved the road that led to the BJP's ascendancy.

The fight against the Hindu supremacist right requires a decisive break with all forms of bourgeois nationalism and Popular Front politics. The working class must be mobilised as an independent political force, united across communal and caste divisions, on the basis of an internationalist socialist program. Only through the development of such a movement—fighting for a workers' government and world socialist revolution—can the growing authoritarianism of the Indian ruling class be defeated and the democratic and social aspirations of hundreds of millions of workers and young people be secured.



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