

Protests against Modi government's purge of voter rolls continue despite mass repression

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Despite massive state repression, India's Narendra Modi-led, far-right BJP government has failed to stamp out a wave of youth-led protests against its purge of millions of rural poor and working-class voters from the electoral rolls.

Last Friday, thousands defied the authorities' sweeping security crackdown and demonstrated in the heart of New Delhi, India's capital, in response to a call from the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP)—a recently-formed, “Generation Z” youth protest movement—to unfurl the national flag, “Lehra Do Tiranga,” as part of its campaign to force the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

The BJP-led central and Delhi governments mobilized thousands of police at or near the two protest sites, Jantar Mantar and the Connaught Place park, while, according to press reports keeping tens of thousands of Delhi police and para-militaries in reserve. At least 150 people were arrested at the protests. Earlier in the day, the two most prominent protest leaders—CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke and Nehra Bora, the president of the All India Students' Association (AISA)—were taken into “preventive custody.”

Dipke and Bora were effectively “disappeared.” For well over 12 hours, they were denied any contact with their lawyers, organizations, or families, with police refusing to confirm where they were being held. Ultimately, it was learned that Bora was being detained alone at an Anti-Narcotic Task Force office in Manglapuri, some 20 kilometers from central Delhi.

The BJP government has gone to extraordinary lengths to criminalize the burgeoning protest movement. It has deployed state power to quash political opposition on a scale not seen since Indira Gandhi deployed the military to crush a national railway strike in 1974 and then, a year later, imposed the Emergency.

The great fear of Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP is that the protest movement will serve as a catalyst for an eruption of working class opposition to endemic poverty, social inequality on a scale not seen since the height of the British Raj, intensifying worker exploitation, authoritarianism and communal reaction. In April, tens of thousands of workers who took to the streets of Manesar and Nodia, industrial suburbs on Delhi's outskirts, to protest sweatshop wages and long hours were met with brutal police repression.

In an attempt to prevent the “national” protest demonstration that the CJP, the Maoist-led AISA and the Stalinist parliamentary parties called at Delhi's Jantar Mantar for the previous Saturday, October 10, the government mobilized tens of thousands of

security forces; closed much of the subway network; cancelled 45 trains; screened people entering the capital region by car and bus; and made thousands of arrests.

As the WSWWS has previously documented, the protests have been triggered by an *Indian Express* investigation exposing how the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls has struck tens of millions of names—overwhelmingly poor people, migrant workers, Dalits and Muslims—from the voter lists, a gargantuan campaign of disenfranchisement aimed squarely at sections of the population that oppose the BJP.

The state repression directed at the October 16 “Lehra Do Tiranga” protest and the detentions of Dipke and Bora triggered a deluge of critical statements from the entire spectrum of the parliamentary opposition. Former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee declared that “this is nothing short of an undeclared Emergency,” adding that these were the actions of “a fascist regime that cannot tolerate a voice it cannot control.” Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, DMK leader M.K. Stalin and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal all demanded the immediate release of the two leaders and the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

The theatrical outrage of these opposition leaders cannot conceal the essential character of their politics. They are seeking to shackle the growing rebellion of students and jobless university graduates to the politics and institutions of India's capitalist establishment, of which they themselves are an integral part.

Neha Bora was finally released by the police Saturday morning. Dipke, who faces more serious charges, was released on conditional bail Saturday afternoon by an unelected special administrative magistrate. As a condition of his release, Dipke was required to swear an oath that he would not engage in any activities that might “breach the peace or create law-and-order problems” for a period of one year—a catch-all prohibition meant to muzzle the CJP's founder and best-known spokesperson.

That last Saturday's protest was promoted in the name of unfurling India's tri-colour flag is indicative of the nationalist, establishment-orientated political framework in which the CJP and Stalinist leaders are seeking to confine the protest movement. “Lehra Do Tiranga” is a nationalist appeal that cedes the ideological ground to the BJP's own Hindu-chauvinist flag-waving. In response to a government that is mounting an open assault on democratic rights, they are wrapping themselves in the

symbols of the very state that is carrying out the repression. Arvind Kejriwal's demagogic retort—"If we don't wave the Tiranga in our own country, will we wave it in Pakistan?"—reveals the bankruptcy of a so-called "secular" opposition that competes with the BJP on the terrain of nationalism and anti-Pakistan chauvinism.

With the full support of the leaders of the CJP, AISA and the various "left" parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and AISA's parent organization, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation—the militant youth agitation has been confined to the narrowest possible demands: the removal of a single official, Gyanesh Kumar and a halt to SIR.

None of the organizations leading the movement is calling for the bringing down of the Modi government, which rules through police repression and autocratic methods. All are bitterly opposed to any turn to the working class, the mobilization of its social power in a general strike, and the linking of the struggle to defend democratic rights to the fight against the capitalist oligarchy that stands behind the Modi government.

The demand for Kumar's resignation is a dead end. He is nothing but a henchman of the Modi government. Under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act of 2023, pushed through by the BJP government, the selection of election commissioners was stripped of even a nominal independent process and handed to a panel of the Prime Minister, Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Effectively, this setup hands the Modi government the means to stuff the election commission with its sycophants. In addition, Section 16 of the 2023 act grants blanket immunity to the commissioners stating that "no court shall entertain or continue any civil or criminal proceedings against any current or former CEC or EC for any actions, things done, or words spoken in the discharge—or purported discharge—of their official duties."

The official opposition Congress Party stood aloof from the October 10 CJP-Left initiated demonstration, not wanting to associate itself too closely with a youth-led movement defying the state authorities. Instead, it organized its own protest last Monday, a march to the site of the Supreme Court, which the BJP allowed to go ahead.

However, the past week has seen intensified efforts, backed by Dipke and the other CJP leaders and the Stalinist parties, to harness the protest movement more tightly to the Congress Party-led INDIA opposition electoral bloc. In this Neha Bora of the Maoist AISA is playing a particularly conspicuous role.

Bora was given great prominence at last Monday's Congress/INDIA bloc protest, with Rahul Gandhi, the Congress' dynastic leader, shepherding her through crowds, and handing her the microphone at an INDIA bloc meeting where she declared "We are united."

The INDIA bloc aims not to defeat the BJP's assault on democratic rights but to replace Modi at the next election, due in 2029, with a right-wing capitalist government committed to continuing the BJP's "pro-investor" policies and India's military-strategic partnership with US imperialism. The Stalinist parties—the CPM, CPI and CPI-ML Liberation—are all active

participants in this bloc.

The Congress Party's hostility to the development of a movement from below to drive the Modi government from power was laid bare in Karnataka, where the state's Congress government banned the October 16 protests—demonstrating that the "opposition" is fully prepared to deploy the same repressive apparatus against the protest movement when it suits its interests. The Supreme Court has likewise revealed itself—yet again—as a rubber stamp for the government's authoritarianism. It approved the SIR process itself, and when the scale of the deletions became undeniable, it merely handed the final stage of the revision to judicial officers while leaving the purge intact. Chief Justice Surya Kant—who denounced unemployed youth as "parasites" and "cockroaches"—has made clear that the court's concern is not democratic rights but the "undue hardship" that protests cause commuters and businesses.

That concern is shared by Delhi's business organizations, which are demanding compensation from protest organizers for the disruption caused by the demonstrations.

The suppression of democratic rights in India is not an isolated phenomenon. It is part of a global offensive by the capitalist ruling classes against the working class. In the United States, the Trump administration is seeking to rig the 2026 midterm elections, openly praising India's voter purge and SIR as a model. In France and across Europe, governments are deploying police repression against workers and youth protesting austerity, war and the assault on democratic rights. The ongoing genocide in Gaza and the drive toward world war are the most extreme expressions of the same crisis of capitalist rule.

The struggle against the voter purge and the defense of democratic rights cannot be separated from the struggle against the entire capitalist order. Only the building of a mass political movement of the working class in India—one that unites with its working-class brothers and sisters across South Asia in the fight for a United Socialist States of South Asia, as an intermediate step toward world socialism—can find a way out of poverty, war and dictatorship. The enemy is not this minister, this election commissioner, or even simply Modi and his BJP. The enemy is the global capitalist system itself.



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