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The fight against communal reaction in India is the fight for socialism

India has been convulsed by a growing wave of mass protests since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi rammed its anti-Muslim Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) through parliament on December 12.

The CAA makes religion a criterion in determining citizenship for the first time in the history of independent India. It is an important step toward realizing the avowed central aim of the BJP and its ideological mentor, the shadowy, fascistic RSS—to transform India into a Hindu *rashtra*, or state, in which the Muslim minority is “tolerated,” but only in so far as it accepts Hindu supremacy.



Indians shout slogans during a protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act in Nalbari, India, Friday, Dec. 20, 2019 (AP Photo/Anupam Nath)

Muslim students and youth have been in the forefront of the anti-CAA protests. But the protests have cut across religious-sectarian, ethnic and caste divides, and engulfed all parts of India.

The demonstrations against the citizenship law follow a wave of strikes in India and Sri Lanka that are part of a global upsurge of the class struggle, spanning from the Americas to Europe, Asia and Africa.

A shaken BJP government has responded to the anti-CAA protests with mass repression. At least six people were killed Friday in clashes with security forces in northern India. In large swathes of the country, including all of Uttar Pradesh (population 230 million) and Karnataka (65 million) and parts of the national capital Delhi, the government has invoked Section 144 of the Criminal Code, making all gatherings of more than four people illegal. Tens of millions have been deprived of internet and, in some cases, cell phone service.

Under the CAA, all people—except Muslims—who migrated to India from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh before 2015 are effectively granted citizenship. This is preparatory to an even more sinister communal scheme: forcing all of India's 1.3 billion people to prove to the authorities' satisfaction that they are entitled to Indian citizenship.

Passage of the CAA makes clear that the sole purpose of the BJP's National Register of Citizens (NRC) will be to intimidate, harass and victimize Muslims—for they, and they alone, will be under threat of being declared "stateless," thereby losing all citizenship rights and subject to detention and expulsion.

The CAA and NRC are only the latest in a long series of communalist provocations mounted by the BJP government.

On August 5, it illegally abrogated the unique semi-autonomous status of India's lone Muslim-majority state, Jammu and Kashmir, and placed the region under permanent central government control. This constitutional coup has been enforced by the deployment of tens of thousands of additional security forces, the detention without charge of thousands, and a months-long suspension of cellphone and internet access.

Bowing to the demands of the Modi government and the RSS, the Supreme Court ruled last month that a Hindu temple must be built where the Babri Masjid (mosque) stood in

Ayodhya, until Hindu fanatics demolished it in 1992, at the instigation of the BJP leadership.

Among masses of workers, students and professionals in India—Muslim and Hindu alike—there is anger and revulsion at what “secular democratic” India has become and a determination to resist.

But to prevail they must be armed with an internationalist and socialist strategy. The bourgeoisie’s turn to ultra-nationalism, fascism and authoritarianism can be successfully countered only through the independent political mobilization of the working class against the capitalist elite and all its political representatives and in the struggle for workers’ power.

A global phenomenon

The Modi government and its communalist offensive are the Indian expression of a universal phenomenon.

Under conditions of ever deepening social inequality, growing global class struggle, and a frenzied inter-capitalist struggle for markets, resources and geostrategic advantage, the bourgeoisie everywhere is turning to authoritarian methods of rule and cultivating ultra-right and fascist forces.

This is true of the imperialist “democracies” no less than countries of belated capitalist development like India, Turkey and Brazil.

In the US, Trump is mounting a sweeping assault on democratic rights and, with his appeals to the military and police and rabid denunciations of socialism, seeking to develop a fascist movement.

French President Emmanuel Macron has moved to rehabilitate the Vichy Nazi collaborator Marshal Pétain and repeatedly ordered the violent repression of social opposition in order to impose massive social cuts and revive aggressive French militarism. In Germany, the intelligence agencies and ruling elite have promoted the neo-Nazi AfD, making it the official opposition in the Reichstag.

Modi was propelled to power by Indian big business in 2014 in order to more aggressively assert its predatory interests on the world stage and force through socially incendiary pro-investor policies.

During the first six months of the BJP’s second term, it has simultaneously accelerated its drive to implement the supremacist agenda of the Hindu right and impose neo-liberal

reform, including through a fresh wave of privatizations and massive tax cuts for big business.

Modi and his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, are acutely aware that the much vaunted “rising” capitalist India is a social powder keg with a lit fuse. They are whipping up anti-Muslim communalism with the aim of mobilizing their Hindu fascist base as shock troops against an increasingly restive and militant working class, and channeling the social tensions produced by vast social inequality and a rapidly deteriorating economy behind reaction and a bellicose foreign policy.

In India, as around the world, it is the working class—globally united by capitalist production and increasingly self-conscious of its international character—that constitutes the social base for a counter-offensive against capitalist reaction, authoritarianism and war. But the immense social power of the working class can be mobilized only in so far as it organizes itself separately and in opposition to all the political representatives of the bourgeoisie.

The Congress Party, until relatively recently the bourgeoisie’s premier party of government, and a cavalcade of regional-chauvinist and caste-ist parties are seeking to both politically exploit and contain the mass opposition to the Modi government.

An especially reprehensible and dangerous role is being played by the twin Stalinist parliamentary parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

Today, as in 1992 after the razing of the Babri Masjid; in 2002 after Modi presided over the Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom; and in 2014 when Modi came to power at the head of the first-ever majority BJP government, the Stalinists rail against “Hindu fascism.” But they do so only as part of their efforts to chain the working class to the parties and institutions of the Indian bourgeoisie and its state.

In the name of fighting the Hindu right, the Stalinists have systematically suppressed the class struggle and helped implement the Indian bourgeoisie’s neo-liberal agenda. This is epitomized by their role in bringing to power and sustaining in office a succession of rightwing, pro-US governments, most of them Congress-led, between 1989 and 2008. Moreover, in the states where they have held office, West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura, the Stalinists have implemented what they themselves term “pro-investor” policies.

Just as the pro-war, pro-austerity measures of the establishment "left" parties in the advanced capitalist countries helped pave the way for the growth of the far-right; so the Stalinists, by politically suppressing the working class, have fertilized the political soil for the growth of communal reaction.

Thus, after three decades in which the Stalinists claimed that defeating the Hindu right was their main objective and guiding principle, Modi and his BJP wield unprecedented power. Today, the CPM and CPI are once again calling for unity with the big business Congress Party to defend "democracy and secularism." No matter that the Congress has a notorious record of aiding and abetting the Hindu right. Just last month, in an action supported by the CPM, it ensured the coming to power of a coalition government in Maharashtra, India's second most populous state, led by the Shiv Sena, a Hindu supremacist and Mahratta-chauvinist party that until just weeks ago was the BJP's closest ally.

Permanent Revolution and the fight against communalism

The Stalinists urge working people to look to the Supreme Court and other decrepit right-wing institutions of the capitalist state to oppose the anti-democratic and illegal actions of the Modi regime. In reality, the Supreme Court has for decades greenlighted one communalist and authoritarian outrage after another.

The Stalinists justify their attempt to harness the working class to the Indian state with the claim that the Indian Republic and its institutions are the product of the mass anti-imperialist struggle that convulsed South Asia during the first half of the 20th century.

This is a lie. The state of India was founded on the suppression of the revolutionary strivings of South Asia's workers and toilers through a sordid deal between British imperialism and its local bourgeois clients. Betraying its own program for a united democratic secular India, the Indian National Congress joined hands with South Asia's departing British colonial overlords and the Muslim League to implement the communal partition of South Asia into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India.

The Congress, under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and representing the Indian bourgeoisie, were anxious to get their hands on the British colonial capitalist state machine under conditions of a growing upsurge of the working class. They were organically incapable and hostile to the only means of countering the divide-and-rule tactics of the British and their Hindu and Muslim communalist allies—the

mobilization of South Asia's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh workers and toilers based on an appeal to their common class interests in the struggle against imperialism, landlordism and capitalist exploitation.

The immediate impact of Partition was mass communal violence that left more than a million dead and uprooted close to 20 million from their homes. But more than that, it created a reactionary communal state system that has served imperialism as the means for continuing to dominate the region. It has given rise to reactionary inter-state rivalries that have led to numerous wars and today threaten the region with a conflict fought with nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan, and it has been used by South Asia's reactionary ruling elites to incite communalism and divide the masses.

Seventy-two years on, the nominally secular and supposedly non-communal state that emerged with Indian independence is unraveling. This is another demonstration of the urgency of India's workers taking up the lessons of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, and making the strategy of Permanent Revolution the axis of their struggle. In countries of belated capitalist development, not a single fundamental task of the democratic revolution can be secured without a socialist revolution led by the working class in alliance with the rural toilers.

The struggle against communal reaction must be animated by a socialist internationalist perspective. The fight to unite India's workers and toilers across all sectarian and caste lines goes hand in hand with the fight to unite their struggles with those of workers around the world.

The defence of democratic rights is inseparable from the fight to mobilize the working class against social inequality, precarious employment, the Indian bourgeoisie's military-strategic alliance with Washington, and its massive military build-up

It requires the intensification of class struggle. The working class must forge its political independence in opposition to the bourgeoisie and all its political representatives, and rally the rural poor and oppressed masses behind it in the struggle for a workers and peasants' government, as part of the development of an international working-class offensive against world capitalism and imperialist war.

We urge all Indian workers, students and others who want to take up this fight to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and International Committee of the Fourth International.

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