

India: CPI-ML congress pledges to deepen people's resistance

Sunday 12 May 2013, by [BOLTON Sue](#) (Date first published: 4 May 2013).

Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) Liberation activists have played a central role in the the campaign against rape culture

May 4, 2013 — *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* — Politicians often describe India as “the world's biggest democracy”. When I attended the 9th congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) Liberation (CPI-ML) on April 2-7, 2013, I found that the reality was somewhat different.

Two CPI-ML members were killed in the lead-up to the congress. Gangaram Kol, a tea garden worker and party leader from Assam who was organising among tea garden workers, was killed by the tea garden mafia on March 25. It is common for big landlords to have their own private armies who kill and beat up workers and peasants campaigning for their rights. Another CPI-ML activist, Vikas Bhulyan, was only 25 when he was killed by police firing in Arhwa. As well as the CPI-ML activists, a student activist was killed by the police in Kolkata on April 8.

Many CPI-ML congress members have been jailed for participating in protests, sometimes for long periods.

The CPI-ML congress was attended by around 1100 delegates representing more than 100,000 members from all over India. The last congress was in 2007. The congress theme was “Stop the corporate plunder: People's resources, people's rights”.

With the congress being held in Ranchi, the capital of the state of Jharkhand, this theme was especially appropriate. In Jharkhand, there have been many struggles against the corporate plunder of resources and evictions of Indigenous adivasis since the state was formed in 2000.

Delegates held a rally and march on the first morning of the congress to salute the legacy of Birsa Munda, who led an independence struggle against the British from the mid-1890s until he was killed in jail in 1900. Birsa Munda was from Ranchi.

At the rally, CPI-ML secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya slammed the proposal to turn the historic jail where Birsa Munda was killed into a shopping mall, and demanded that it be converted into a museum of adivasi struggles and a memorial to Birsa Munda and his legacy.

International guests

The opening session of the conference was addressed by the leaders of a number of left parties - the Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI-M), Lal Nishan Party (Leninist), Forward Bloc, CPM Punjab, Communist Party Revolutionary Movement (CPRM), Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Marxist Coordination Committee and representatives of the Jharkhand movement. The CPRM is based in Darjeeling and is fighting for an independent state in

that area.

International parties represented were the Bangladesh Workers Party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and Socialist Alliance of Australia. Greetings were received from Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

In his address to the opening session, Dipankar Bhattacharya gave prominence to the role of Hugo Chavez and Venezuela:

“At a time when socialism was sought to be discredited and declared dead in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Hugo Chavez had rekindled the socialist imagination by tapping the storehouse of people’s strength and energy to take on US imperialism and project a vision of socialism pulsating with the spirit of participatory democracy.”

The entrance to the park where the congress was held, had a huge picture of Hugo Chavez.

Delegates from 20 states discussed and debated the International and Indian political situations, updated the party program and assessed the party organisation.

Resolutions

A wide range of resolutions relating to particular areas of work were also discussed and adopted on agrarian and rural struggles, intervention in Panchayati raj institutions (similar to local councils), urban work, working-class politics, the women’s movement, student-youth movement activity, environmental protection and people-centred development.

The CPI-ML is a very dynamic party which has a solid Marxist theoretical framework while being deeply rooted in struggle.

It has been involved in many campaigns to take back land and block corporate land grabs. The party also has a trade union base and is actively engaged in workers’ struggles. CPI-ML student activists at Jawaharlee Nehru University initiated the first protest of the woman who was gang raped on a bus in Delhi in December. This protest sparked a big campaign against rape culture.

In some areas, CPI-ML members are involved in struggles for an independent state such as Karbi Anlong, which is currently part of the state of Assam. The CPI-ML has supported the campaigns for independent states as long as they are based on a common language and not based on religion.

The congress was conducted in Hindi and English with state delegations organising translations into other languages, including tribal languages.

The discussion was very frank and democratic with many views expressed, many of which were incorporated into the resolutions.

Change to characterisation of Indian society

The congress voted for an important change to its General Program. Since the 1970s, the CPI-ML has characterised Indian society as a “semi-feudal, semi-colonial”.

The congress voted to change the description of Indian society. The amended program defines India as a “predominantly agrarian backward capitalist society, retarded by, and yet reinforcing stubborn feudal remnants”.

This change is in response to the tremendous growth of Indian capitalism in the last 20 years. India

now exports capital. The term “semi-colonial” used to be used to indicate that India wasn’t 100% independent, but this is no longer the case now that India exports capital, the party decided.

While the agricultural share of gross domestic product has declined steadily in the first decade of the 21st century, around 60% of the population still depends on agriculture for a living, therefore it is still correct to call India an agrarian society.

In his summing up of the discussion, Dipankar Bhattacharya said that “there is a strong semi-feudal imprint on capitalism in India. The capitalists are taking advantage of the feudal remnants so that feudalism has been modified to suit capitalism in India. The feudal remnants aren’t only in Bihar.”

The program defines the stage of revolution as a “people’s democratic revolution” because the first task would be to sweep away the feudal remnants.

Bhattacharya said that in that the revolution would be a people’s democratic revolution because “we aren’t in a position to confiscate and completely abolish capitalism overnight. There will be a protracted democratic revolution to combat capitalism and set the stage for a socialist revolution.”

International politics

In his summing up, Bhattacharya said that “there is no definite socialist model in the world. Latin America is important for us. Whatever was practised as socialism in the 20th century won’t come back. It will be different and better.”

He also said that “we are in a period of transition. Some people say that you don’t need communist parties, that you just need loose coalitions. But capitalism remains a very concentrated power. If we’re to take on this concentrated power, we need to concentrate the working-class forces in a communist party. It doesn’t mean no democracy. It has to be based on very sound robust democracies.

“The best way to develop the communist party and the best way to develop socialism is an open question.”

The congress recognised that “the socialist spirit is missing” in China, describing China as a kind of “controlled capitalism”. Bhattacharya said that “while China is following a capitalist trajectory, it isn’t following a neoliberal model”.

The International resolution described the massacre of the Sri Lankan Tamils as “a genocide” and that “reconciliation in Sri Lanka cannot proceed on the basis of subjugation of the Sri Lankan Tamil community”.

However, it opposed Indian sanctions on Sri Lanka, including the cricket boycott. This is because the party is also opposed to anti-Sinhala chauvinism. There have already been instances of Buddhist monks being beaten up.

The CPI-ML regards the question of an independent Tamil Eelam as a question for the Sri Lankan Tamils. “The problem now is that the movement is decimated. Now the issue is the fight for justice. An independent Tamil Eelam is not on the cards right now”, said Bhattacharya.

On Kashmir, the CPI-ML has a strategic position of support for national self-determination but its main campaign focus is on the denial of democracy to people in Kashmir and against the criminalisation of Kashmiris fighting for freedom.

This was the first congress where the CPI-ML congress has debated resolutions specific to areas of work other than the agrarian struggle.

The CPI-ML is deeply rooted in the struggles of the rural poor — agricultural labourers and poor peasants. It is involved in critical struggles by peasants and adivasis against the corporate takeover of land for special economic zones, hydroelectric power stations and other corporate projects.

The key agenda for the peasant movement across the country is to “save agricultural land from the clutches of the corporatesector”.

The agrarian resolution calls for the “legal protection of agricultural and forest land and nationalisation of all mineral resources.

Urbanisation

While the agrarian struggle is still key for the CPI-ML, this congress marked an increased focus on working-class and urban struggles. The composition of the Indian working class is changing, with fewer workers dependent on agriculture, and an increase in contract, casual and temporary workers.

In 2010, the CPI-ML lost all of its parliamentary positions. This would have been a massive blow if it was solely focused on elections, but it is a party that is focused on struggle so this setback didn't affect it too much. The CPI-ML intends to campaign vigorously in the next general elections.

However, the party has a lot of members elected to the panchayat institutions (local councils), with a couple having a majority of CPI-ML members.

The congress adopted a resolution on work in Panchayat institutions that stated clearly that the party needs to “use the panchayats as a platform of class struggle, as organs of service to the people, of struggle for people's rights and resistance to the dominant feudal power and the state led by the big bourgeoisie”. The focus is on using the panchayats to build the struggles outside the panchayat.

Women's struggle

Coming through the conference was an emphasis on involving more women members and developing more women members as leaders of the party.

The CPI-ML played a leading role in the campaign against rape culture, broadening the demands of the movement against marital rape, against army and police rapes, against sexist culture and for the police to treat reports of sexual assault seriously.

The congress ended with a big rally of around 20,000 people in Ranchi, which was a rousing call for people's resistance to pro-corporate policies.

Sue Bolton, Ranchi

P.S.

* <http://links.org.au/node/3332>

* Sue Bolton is a Socialist Alliance municipal councillor on the Moreland Council in Melbourne. She attended the CPI-ML congress as a representative of the Socialist Alliance of Australia.