

India: Important step towards left realignment and unity

All India Left Coordination's `Delhi Declaration'

Saturday 4 September 2010, by [AILC](#), [BHATTACHARYA Dipankar](#) (Date first published: 11 August 2010).

Contents

- [India: Important step towards](#)
- [All-India Left Coordination](#)
- [All India Left Coordination's](#)

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By Dipankar Bhattacharya, CPI (ML) Liberation general secretary

September 2010 — *Liberation* — Four fighting organisations of the left -- the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation [CPI (ML) Liberation], the Communist Party Marxist (Punjab) [CPM (Punjab)], Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) [LNP (L)] of Maharashtra and the Left Coordination Committee (Kerala) [LCC] -- formed the All India Left Coordination (AILC) at a joint convention held in New Delhi on August 11, 2010.

The convention adopted the "Delhi Declaration" [text below], with a 12-point agenda which will serve as a guideline for coordinated action and intervention by the four organisations. In its declaration, the AILC rejected both class collaboration/parliamentary cretinism and left adventurism/anarcho-militarism and resolved to strengthen the left movement by all means, while exploring opportunities for broader left unity and cooperation with democratic forces. As its first all-India action, the AILC observed August 20 as a national day of solidarity with the people of Kashmir and protest against state repression.

The AILC was certainly not formed overnight, it was the upshot of years of mutual cooperation and a shared quest for a united platform to radicalise and rejuvenate the left movement in India. The CPI (ML) Liberation and LNP (L) have had a history of working together for nearly two decades. Ever since the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) split in Punjab in the wake of the Thiruvananthapuram plenum in 2000 — leading to the formation of CPM Punjab — the CPI (ML) and the CPM Punjab have had close ties of cooperation. The LCC (Kerala) came into existence only recently, but it was preceded by years of ideological struggle inside the CPI (M); since it started as an independent organisation, it has had a keen interest in becoming part of an all-India process of realignment and radicalisation of the left.

This united move marks a first step towards fulfilling a long-felt need. For much of the last three decades, the CPI (M) and [the orthodox pro-Moscow] Communist Party of India (CPI) had virtually monopolised the left space in the dominant media and naturally also in the laymans' perception. The CPI had a bigger presence than the CPI (M) in the Hindi belt, while the CPI (M) dominated the show in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Over the last few years, the CPI has been reduced to a pale

shadow of its past in the Hindi belt, and now increasingly the CPI (M) too is facing a similar situation in West Bengal and Kerala. This marks both an opportunity and challenge for all sincere and radical forces of the left to step up their role and dispel all notions of a “terminal crisis” and “irrelevance” of the left in India. The AILC has its role cut out in this context.

The other significant feature regarding the AILC is that it is not yet another proverbial case of “birds of the same feather flocking together”, neither is it an attempt at unity of Marxist-Leninist forces. Nor is it a case of erstwhile CPI (M) forces reuniting among themselves. Rather it is a case of historically diverse and to an extent geographically separated streams of the left seeking a common all-India ground in today’s critical situation. A closer look at the constituents of the AILC will bring out this important aspect.

Evolution of left forces

For example, the LNP (L) of Maharashtra, which had branched out of the CPI in the 1940s after questioning the CPI’s “1942 line”, played an active and important role in subsequent years in many worker/peasant/general democratic movements in Maharashtra, from the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement to the historic textile strike of the 1980s, and moved away again in the late 1980s from the parent Lal Nishan Party’s increasingly pro-Congress party reformist stance to reiterate its Leninist moorings. This is what paved the way for close cooperation between the LNP (L) and the CPI (ML) Liberation.

The CPI (ML) too has evolved in two different directions – while CPI (ML) Liberation has emerged as an all-India revolutionary communist party rooted in militant mass struggles, the People’s War Group (PWG) of Andhra Pradesh has moved away from the CPI (ML) stream to acquire a “Maoist” identity by merging with the Maoist Communist Centre. As far as the CPI (M) is concerned, in the later years of 1970s, it had benefited considerably from the first phase of the CPI (ML) movement – the CPI (ML) base in many areas had returned to the CPI (M) and in states like West Bengal and Kerala, it was the CPI (M) that succeeded in appropriating much of the impact of the CPI (ML)-led struggles and the people’s desire for democracy following the dark years of semi-fascist terror of Congress party rule.

Yet the CPI (M) promoted a hostile attitude to the CPI (ML) and tried to suppress every voice of ideological dissent within the party as a sign of “Naxalism”. The CPI (ML) Liberation on the other hand always stressed left unity on the basis of independent assertion, and today, left forces coming out of the CPI (M) find a warm welcome from the CPI (ML) Liberation precisely on this common ground.

As noted in the Delhi Declaration, the AILC marks only a modest beginning. As of now, it is just a platform of coordination with a shared approach and understanding on most urgent issues of the day. But as representatives of all the four organisations remarked in the convention, it is a modest first step, which nurtured properly, may well grow into an important long march; a small beginning hinting at great possibilities of realignment and radicalisation of the Indian Left. Let us carry it forward in this desired direction.

Dipankar Bhattacharya

All-India Left Coordination convention held in New Delhi

September 2010 — *Liberation* — A day-long All India Left Convention was held on August 11, 2010 at the Speaker's Hall, Constitution Club, New Delhi, jointly sponsored by CPI (ML) Liberation, CPM(Punjab), Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) of Maharashtra and the Left Coordination Committee (Kerala). With more than 300 activists from across the country attending, the Speaker's Hall was packed to capacity.

The convention was chaired by a four-member presidium comprising comrades Ramji Rai, Bodh Singh Ghuman, KS Hariharan and Bhalchandra Kerkar. The secretaries of the four parties -- Comrade Mangat Ram Pasla, of the CPM Punjab, Comrade Bhimrao Bansode, of the Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) Maharashtra and Comrade MR Murali, of the Left Coordination Committee Kerala (LCC), and CPI (ML) general secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya -- were also present on the dais.

Inaugurating the convention on behalf of the four parties, Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya welcomed the gathered activists and leaders, and also briefly introduced each of the four parties. Outlining the ruling-class assaults on people's rights and democracy, and the range of people's resistance movements, he said that real forces of the left were naturally committed to championing these movements. The convention aimed to address these issues and advance these struggles by launching the All India Left Coordination to forge a closer unity and coordination among left forces. As a broad guideline for this coordination and unity, he said, the four parties had prepared a "Delhi Declaration" to be discussed and adopted by the convention.

Following the inaugural address, the Delhi Declaration was read out -- in English by Comrade Harkanwal Singh of the CPM Punjab and in Hindi by Comrade Ramji Rai of the CPI (ML) Liberation. More than a dozen leaders and activists expressed their views on the various issues, challenges and perspectives outlined by the declaration.

Addressing the convention, All India Students Association general secretary Ravi Rai said that if peasants' land was being grabbed for corporate looting, similarly students' education was a victim of corporate looting, and the students' movement would resist the assaults on democratic rights -- not just on campuses but in the whole of society. Comrade Kumarankutty of the LCC Kerala drew a shocking portrait of the Kerala CPI (M)'s growing forays into business and the blurring of the line of demarcation between communist politics and bourgeois commerce.

CPM Punjab leader Comrade Harkanwal Singh highlighted the need for an assertion of the revolutionary left agenda at a time when the official left had jettisoned that agenda. LNP (L) leader Comrade Uday Bhat spoke of the working-class movement in Mumbai and Maharashtra, especially the revival of textile workers' struggles against the corporate grab of mill land. Comrade V Shankar of the CPI (ML) expressed the hope that the emerging unity of fighting left forces would facilitate the independent assertion of the revolutionary left over the capitulationist politics of parliamentary opportunists.

CPM Punjab leader Comrade Raghvir Singh spoke about farmers' resistance to imperialist agricultural policies imposed in the name of World Trade Organization. Comrade Uddhav Shinde of the LNP (L) and Comrade Bauke spoke of the acute agrarian crisis in Maharashtra and other parts of the country where farmers were committing suicide. Comrade Inderjeet Singh Grewal (leader of the CPM Punjab's trade union organisation, the CTU) spoke of the struggles against power privatisation in Punjab, and called for struggles to be intensified against the repressive anti-people and pro-imperialist policies of the governments at the federal and state levels.

Comrade Kavita Krishnan, national secretary of All India Progressive Women's Association, spoke about the assaults on women's rights and freedoms in the name of "honour", and also of how women were bearing the brunt of state repression in the areas targetted by the Indian government's "Operation Green Hunt". Comrade Malleswar Rao of the CPI (ML) Liberation spoke about the recent police shootings in Sompeta, Andhra Pradesh, and the struggles against land grabs and the looting of mineral resources in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

After detailed discussion, the convention adopted the Delhi Declaration enthusiastically. Comrade Swapan Mukherjee of the CPI (ML) Liberation presented a series of resolutions which were also adopted. The convention adopted a resolution condemning the brutal repression and bloodshed of civilians in Kashmir, demanding a democratic political solution to the Kashmir issue and calling for a "National Day of Solidarity with the Kashmiri People" to be observed all over the country on August 20, 2010. Other resolutions included one against the Indian government's utter failure and callous attitude towards price rises, a demand for a probe into the corruption surrounding India's hosting the 2010 the Commonwealth Games, and another demanding scrapping of the Nuclear Liability Bill. Another resolution adopted extended full support to the Central Trade Unions' call for a general strike on September 7, 2010. Comrade Swapan Mukherjee also outlined the plans for the All-India Left Coordination to hold state conventions in several state capitals and other centres, and also to send solidarity/fact-finding teams to various centres of people's resistance.

The convention culminated with the address by top leaders of the four parties. Comrade Mangat Ram Pasla, general secretary of the CPM Punjab, said that the All-India Left Coordination marked a small beginning, but one that was destined to grow big. He said the four organisations were aware of their mutual differences but were determined to unite on the basis of the essential points of agreement. He called upon comrades to implement the Delhi Declaration with the commitment and courage that Bhagat Singh epitomised. LNP (L) secretary Comrade Bhimrao Bansode gave a brief account of the historical evolution of the LNP (L) and said it had been overly preoccupied with trade union struggles but was determined to play a more active political role. Comrade Unnithan, leader of the LCC Kerala, presented a speech on behalf of his party, observing the degeneration of the official left, and calling upon the All-India Left Coordination to take up the banner of the heroic struggles of Punnapra Vayalar and Kayyur and the sacrifice of hundreds of communists -- a banner that was being abandoned by the revisionist leadership of the CPI (M) today.

The concluding speaker at the convention, Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, said that the convention and the All-India Left Coordination just launched represented a ray of hope for unity of the Indian left movement. "Just as communists part ways at some turning points", he said, "they can also unite at other junctures". "Naxalbari was very much a product of the revolutionary tradition of the Indian communist movement -- it was an attempt to resurrect Telangana when the ruling classes faced their gravest crisis after 1947 and Charu Mazumdar always described the CPI (ML) as the same Communist Party that produced the heroic martyrs of Kayuur and Telangana, Tebhaga and Punnapra-Vayalar. Today as circumstances around us are changing radically, we need to take a bold and forward-looking step towards realignment of all sincere, struggle-oriented and mass-based left forces and rejuvenation of the left movement to meet the challenges of the day."

All India Left Coordination's `Delhi Declaration'

Adopted at the All-India Left Coordination convention sponsored by the CPI (ML) Liberation, the CPM Punjab, the Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) Maharashtra and the Left Coordination Committee Kerala, held at Constitution Club, New Delhi on August 11, 2010.

Recent years have been witness to an aggressive US imperialism pushing the world into renewed war and occupation as well as an unprecedented financial crisis. In the name of globalisation, imperialism has intensified attempts to appropriate and exploit the natural and human resources of the developing world, but while accentuating exploitation and disparities, globalisation has also led to intensification of all the inherent contradictions of global capitalism and new waves of popular anti-imperialist resistance the world over.

The Indian ruling classes have adopted a strategy of integrating India into this US-led imperialist order on economic as well as strategic plane. Reckless implementation of pro-imperialist, pro-corporate policies -- coupled with the pro-landlord agrarian strategy being pursued since Independence -- by the Indian ruling classes has pushed the country into alarming depths of an all-round crisis marked by relentless rise in prices, chronic mass hunger, widespread unemployment and rampant corruption. Even as tens of millions of the country's poorest people reel under starvation, the debt-trap turned death-trap continues to claim the lives of crisis-ridden peasants in their hundreds and thousands. Amid systematic looting and siphoning of the country's wealth and precious resources, the working people are being relentlessly exploited, displaced and dispossessed in the name of "development".

The recent farcical verdict on the world's biggest industrial genocide, which happened a quarter century ago in Bhopal, has unmasked a most reprehensible and thoroughly corrupt nexus among state power and corporate power undermining every principle of justice and human and national dignity. Meanwhile, the growing incidence of oppression of dalits and women, and the shocking spectacle of "honour killings" in the National Capital Region and its surroundings, point to an ugly social reality beneath the gloss of glamourised and globalised development.

While the Indian people are seeking answers to these maladies and alternatives to these disastrous anti-people policies and the corrupt and criminalised political culture, the ruling classes and their parties, whether in power or in opposition, are making a clamour for greater liberalisation to give more concessions to capital and a harder state to unleash more repression and restrictions on the people.

Against this backdrop, four fighting organisations of the left, viz., the CPI (ML) Liberation, the CPM Punjab, the Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) Maharashtra and the Left Coordination Committee, Kerala, have resolved to come together and form an All-India Left Coordination with a view to strengthening the left movement in the country.

While pursuing the goal of a countrywide left resurgence, the AILC will focus on the following key areas of a democratic agenda:

- * Resisting the whole gamut of neoliberal, pro-corporate, pro-imperialist policies being followed almost without exception by all governments at the centre and in the states, and fighting for an immediate halt to the ongoing spree of disinvestment/privatisation measures and for curbing penetration of foreign direct investment in key sectors of our national economy and other sectors of strategic/national importance.

- * Opposing the Indo-US strategic partnership and growing subordination of Indian foreign policy to

the global hegemony of imperialist forces, US imperialism in particular; promoting friendly relations, especially people-to-people ties, with neighbouring countries, and uniting with the struggles of the peoples of the world against globalisation, war and imperialist machinations.

* Fighting for an alternative path of self-reliant and people-centred development as against the present imperialist-dictated, corporate-driven and big capital-led “profit-centred development” resulting in relentless increases in prices, growing hunger and unemployment, sharp regional and social inequalities, land grabbing, displacement, resources grabbing/deprivation and serious environmental degradation -- an alternative that would promote relatively more egalitarian and employment-intensive and less energy-, resources- and capital-intensive path of development.

* Fighting for a comprehensive policy regime ensuring fundamental rights to food, shelter, education, health care, basic amenities, work and social security for all.

* Fighting against every facet of agrarian crisis, for adequate protection of Indian agriculture from the adverse World Trade Organization diktats, for scrapping of the Special Economic Zone Act 2005 and the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, for thoroughgoing implementation of land reforms and promotion of small peasant-centred agricultural development.

* Launching struggles for the nationalisation of wholesale trade of foodgrains and for creation and strengthening of a Universal Public Distribution System for essential commodities of daily use as well as for subsidised agricultural inputs and automatic inclusion of all agricultural and other rural workers, small peasants, artisans, unorganised and contract workers in the below poverty line category.

* Resisting the growing state-led assault on democracy, fighting for a democratic political solution of the long-standing problems of Kashmir, the north-east and the Maoist insurgency, for scrapping of draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, disbanding of Salwa Judum, and halt to Operation Green Hunt and the anti-minority witch-hunt in the name of combating terrorism.

* Resisting communal violence and caste and gender oppression, and fighting for minority rights and affirmative action for development of deprived sections within minority communities, and the rights and dignity of dalits, adivasis [tribal peoples], women and all marginalised sections.

* Fighting for labour rights for all sections of workers, especially the right to living wages, job security, universal health and social insurance, trade union rights including mandatory recognition through secret ballot, democratisation of workplace/industrial relations, adequate protection for migrant workers and unorganised workers including agricultural labour, and against contractualisation, outsourcing, hire and fire and indiscriminate privatisation which are hallmarks of the neoliberal offensive.

* Promoting the women’s movement against patriarchy and oppression, to struggle for gender equality, justice, and women’s dignity, as well as equal rights and opportunities in society as well as in the workplace; resisting violence both within and outside the home; challenging obscurantist practices that demean women; resisting all attempts to curb women’s freedom in the name of upholding tradition or culture; demanding speedy legislation against sexual harassment in workplaces, “honour” killings and sexual violence, as well as for reservation of 33% of seats in assemblies and parliament [for women].

* Promoting the student-youth movement to secure “right to education and employment”, demand a common school system to ensure schooling of high quality for all, and resist commercialisation and

pro-imperialist restructuring of education and denial of democratic rights to the student community.

* Promoting people's cultural awakening against the corporate cultural invasion that denigrates women and working people, the feudal culture of "honour killing" and various retrograde social and cultural practices that seek legitimacy in the name of tradition, fighting for democratisation of social, professional and interpersonal life and supporting the progressive democratic aspirations of the intelligentsia.

The AILC will strive to build a countrywide movement over these issues while also fighting for the resolution of various pressing local problems.

The AILC rejects all kinds of fundamentalism, terrorism and national/sub-national chauvinism and upholds the values of democracy, secularism and social progress in every sphere of national life.

Within the left movement, the AILC will fight against the trend of class collaboration and rightward drift and degeneration while rejecting the line of left adventurism/anarcho-militarism.

To advance the left-democratic agenda and strengthen the left and democratic movement, the AILC will work consistently for broader left unity and seek cooperation with various democratic forces including individual activists.

The formation of the AILC marks only a modest beginning and we appeal to all activists and well wishers of the left and democratic movement to join and help us in this endeavour.

P.S.

* From the September 2010 issue of Liberation, the monthly magazine of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation.