

# **India: on the CPI(M) and the Retreat of CITU in the coming General Strike**

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## **Class Struggle versus Serving the Rulers and Becoming Regional Linguistic Chauvinist: The Retreat of CITU in the coming General Strike**

The media has praised the wisdom of the CPI(M) and the CITU. The taming of the Bengal CPI(M) takes one more step forward. Taken in conjunction with the interview of the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, to ABP Ananda, it marks an important stage in the transition of the CPI(M). From a Stalinist party, it had long been converted into a party with Stalinist organisational structures but wedded to social liberalism. However, it had so far been compelled to accept the pressure from its working class electoral base to a larger extent than the so-called modernisers wanted. In course of the long period of being a government party, however, certain changes had occurred, and now they have caught up. On one hand, the CPI(M) in government had protected strikes and bandhs when called by itself or its controlled mass organisations. As a result, the habit of really fighting militant battles, even militant economic battles, had given way to mock battles on the part of the CITU leaders. On the other hand, the party, serving the ruling class for years, even while extracting small prices, had been gradually transformed. This was becoming evident in the last years of the left front government. Buddhadev Bhattacharjee had already been stressing the need for greater labour discipline, the need for industry in the interests of the working people, and similar themes.

What, at this point a CPI(M) supporter will get up to say, are we to do then? Should we not have industries? What will happen to us? Where will we get jobs? How will we eat? Certainly, we need jobs. We need a living wage. Is that not what the general strike is all about? There is profit galore. Tax breaks make sure that capitalists do not lose out. The argument that we must first ensure that the capitalists make a profit and only then can we make a living wage, however, leads us to only one possible end. There is an international competition among capitalists. If "our" capitalists are to make profits at above the average rate of profit, then the solution lies in the use of superior technology which will mean an increase in relative surplus value, or in driving down our wages more and more. The Chinese "socialist" model upheld by Bhattacharjee and his friends is based on years of bureaucratic control that ensured that capitalist restoration went apace while trade union rights were ignored. If Chinese workers have received anything extra, that is because from 2010, there have been important working class struggles, not because of saviours from above.

The CPI(M)'s pressure and the CITU's retreat tells us, first of all, that the CITU is a bureaucratic trade union more responsive to the CPI(M) than to the workers who are supposedly its members. Secondly, it shows that the relationship between CPI(M) and CITU, is not just bureaucratic, but that even over core labour issues, nowadays, the pressure of "greater" interests prevail. One formal reason for cutting down the strike is particularly significant, for it shows the triumph of petty bourgeois "national" identity over class. The strike will be restricted on 21 February because it is Bhasha Divas, says bhattacharjee. Note, this means transport workers, who are parts of the working class, are being asked not to go on strike. To say that means, to argue that the Bengali national identity, remembered only as a reflex (given that it was in East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh that the battle over language was fought, while the reality of petty bourgeois

Bengal is that apart from this one day, it is hardly concerned with Bengali), and given further that a large part of the working class is not Bengali speaking, in whose interest and why is the strike being restrained ?

It could be argued that the decision to call a general strike cum bandh was erroneous, that the working class struggle had not peaked where such a struggle becomes really viable. That would take us into other areas. The point is, these are not the reasons why the CPI(M) has pressurized the CITU. As long as the CITU commands the support of a considerable part of the working class, the CITU cannot be ignored. But when this allegiance of workers is used to betray them in the interests of the ruling class, and in the interests of electoral support from the Bengali speaking petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia who had turned to the TMC in 2009 and 2011, it is essential that militant workers become aware of the reality.

**Kunal Chattopadhyay**, 7 February 2013

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<http://www.radicalsoci alist.in/blog/522-class-struggle-versus-serving-the-rulers-and-becoming-regional-linguistic-chauvinist-the-retreat-of-citu-in-the-coming-general-strike>