Arm Pakistani workers with a revolutionary socialist program

Build the Pakistani section of the International Committee of the Fourth International!

Part 1

Marxist Voice
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The World Socialist Web Site *is publishing here the first part of a statement from Marxist Voice, a Pakistani group that has expressed political agreement with the perspectives of the International Committee of the Fourth International and undertaken to work with the ICFI to build it as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.*

The Marxist Voice statement represents an important advance in the elaboration of a revolutionary perspective for the workers of Pakistan and South Asia. Based on a review of the essential strategic experiences of the working class in South Asia, it demonstrates the necessity for Pakistani workers to base their struggles on the strategy of permanent revolution.

The WSWS appeals to our Pakistani readers to study and distribute the Marxist Voice statement and participate in the elaboration of the perspectives and program for the development of a revolutionary socialist party of the Pakistani working class by forwarding us your comments and questions.

The second and third parts of the statement by Marxist Voice will be published on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Pakistan is passing through an acute political, social and economic crisis. This crisis is part and parcel of the world capitalist crisis that is rapidly unfolding on a global scale and is having a devastating impact on the lives of billions of ordinary people. The world capitalist system is beset by the same insoluble contradictions that produced the 20th century horrors of two world wars, fascism and a nearly endless series of regional military conflicts and brutal police-military dictatorships. The basic contradictions are between the global economy and the nation-state system and between socialized production and private ownership of the means of production. From these contradictions emerge not only the danger of another disastrous world war, but also the objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism—the socialization of industry and finance, the globalization of economic life, and the social power of the world working class.

With this statement, Marxist Voice is initiating the struggle to build the Pakistani section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Leon Trotsky—the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the protagonist of the struggle against the privileged bureaucracy that usurped the power of the Soviet workers and ultimately restored capitalism in the USSR.

The urgency of building the ICFI is underscored by the fact that under the impact of the global capitalist crisis the working class is being propelled into struggle, yet everywhere it immediately comes up against the fact that the organizations that once claimed to speak in its name—the remnants of the Stalinist parties, social democracy and the trade unions—uphold the capitalist profit system and seek to split the working class along national lines.

63 years of “independent” bourgeois rule: The balance sheet of a social disaster

After 63 years of independent bourgeois rule, Pakistan is characterized by horrific poverty and deprivation, grotesque social inequality, a dilapidated infrastructure, national-ethnic and sectarian strife and the continuing political predominance of the US-sponsored military.

More than 45 million people in Pakistan live below the official subsistence-level poverty line, and almost two thirds of the population lives on the equivalent of less than US$2 per day. According to the United Nations, 60 percent of Pakistani children under five are moderately or severely stunted. Meanwhile, a tiny venal ruling class—comprised of big businessmen, landlords, top bureaucrats, officers and their business cronies—plunder the country’s wealth in league with foreign capital.

Because of poverty and the state’s failure to provide a basic infrastructure, tens of millions have no access to schools, health care, sanitation or electricity. Electricity load shedding has become a chronic disruption to socioeconomic life. Education and health care are especially neglected, forcing even the poor to turn to private institutions and Islamic fundamentalist charities and madrassas. The Pakistani state’s combined spending on education and health care is equivalent to less than 4 percent of the country’s gross national product (GNP).

Migration from rural areas to urban centers has increased due to the lack of basic facilities in the countryside and the difficulty rural people have in eking out a livelihood. Seventy percent of the rural population owns no land, surviving as sharecroppers, tenants and agricultural laborers. In the cities, the population also must contend with a lack of basic public and social services and jobs.

Unable to provide a progressive solution to the problems of the masses, the Pakistani bourgeoisie has increasingly fomented anti-Indian

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chauvinism, Islamic fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism to divert mounting social anger into reactionary channels and split the working class. Pakistan has become an incubator for sectarian hatreds and religious obscurantism.

The claim of the proponents of Pakistan that a Muslim national homeland would provide safety and security for the Muslims of South Asia has proven to be a cruel hoax. Pakistan has been at war or on the brink of war for much of its existence, and most of its people live in acute economic insecurity, if not extreme poverty.

As a direct consequence of the Pakistani ruling class' logistical support for the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, Pakistan's military has been waging civil war in ever-widening swaths of northwest Pakistan since 2004, using its full arsenal of antidemocratic methods—carpet bombing, collective punishment, disappearances and summary executions. Washington has been given carte blanche to mount drone missile strikes to execute opponents of the US occupation of Afghanistan and kill large numbers of civilians in the process.

The AfPak War is but the latest stage in a three-decade intervention by Washington and Pakistan's ruling elite in Afghanistan that has proved ruinous for the Afghan and Pakistan people alike. As in the earlier stages, the current war is strengthening the stranglehold of the military and US imperialism over Pakistan's politics and governance and nourishing Islamic fundamentalism.

Pakistani democracy was stillborn. The US-supported military has directly ruled the country for half of its existence. But even in the periods of so-called civilian rule, the military wields vast power. The crisis-ridden Pakistani bourgeoisie depends on the military to protect its property and uphold the territorial integrity of the Pakistani state. It has made the military the pivot of its reactionary geopolitical rivalry with India and its mercenary alliance with US imperialism.

The current crisis

Long riven by profound class antagonisms and national-ethnic and communal frictions, Pakistan has been further destabilized by its decade-long participation in the US's criminal drive to subjugate Afghanistan. With the eruption of the global capitalist crisis in the fall of 2008, the ground has been cut from under the Pakistani bourgeoisie's schemes to grow the economy by wooing foreign investors and offering up the country's impoverished workers as cheap-labor producers for the world market.

The popular enthusiasm for the Pakistan Peoples Party-led coalition government that came to power two-and-a-half years ago following the unraveling of the Musharraf dictatorship has rapidly dissipated.

Defying the wishes and aspirations of the population, the PPP-led government has continued and intensified the policies of the military regime that preceded it. It has provided pivotal support for the Afghan war, pressed forward with privatizations and other pro-market "reforms," imposed the austerity diktats of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and repeatedly hiked the military budget.

With the support and encouragement of Washington, the military, now led by General Kiyani, General Pervez Musharraf's former second-in-command, has increasingly asserted its political predominance. In recent weeks, President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani have issued repeated warnings of unconstitutional plots to unseat the government, while granting Kiyani an unprecedented three-year post-retirement extension of his army command and otherwise ceding to pressure from the military. But all to no avail. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* report that the US is actively considering joining the military in demanding a "reorganization" of Pakistan's government.

This summer's Indus Valley floods have provided a chilling demonstration of the corruption, callousness and incompetence of the Pakistani bourgeoisie. Two months after the floods began, the majority of the more than 20 million people affected had received no help from the government relief effort.

The devastation the floods wrought was largely man-made. Not only was the flood-control infrastructure woefully inadequate—a consequence of the ruling elite's failure to develop the economy in a coherent, rational way and its prioritizing of military expenditures. Millions were displaced as the result of the manipulation of the barrage network in the interests of the US and Pakistani militaries and their AfPak war and of various big landowners and their political allies.

The floods have exacerbated an already profound economic crisis, the burden of which the bourgeoisie is determined to place on the backs of Pakistan's workers and toilers. Living standards have been ravaged in recent years by rising food and energy prices. But the government and the IMF are insisting that all electricity, gasoline and natural gas price subsidies be eliminated in the current fiscal year and, so as to contain the burgeoning budget deficit, social spending be cut yet again.

As in the case of last January's devastating earthquake in Haiti, international capital, as attested by the pronouncements of the IMF, the World Bank and the Pakistani elite, intends to use the floods as an opportunity to speed up capitalist restructuring. The PPP-led government has declared that the infrastructure destroyed by the floods will be rebuilt through Private-Public Partnerships, a ploy that has been used the world over to provide big business with a means of leveraging state funds and securing guaranteed profits at the expense of essential services.

Last year saw mounting popular protests, sporadic food riots and strikes across Pakistan. Now there are daily protests over the lack of flood relief, load shedding, price rises and a host of other socioeconomic and political grievances. The entry of the Pakistani workers into struggle, presaged in the mass protests in Faisalabad against load shedding and the repeated militant strikes of the PTCL (telecommunications) workers, promises to decisively transform the political situation.

For its part, the ruling class is increasingly apprehensive. Leading newspapers and politicians have repeatedly issued warnings about an impending social explosion. This danger from below only causes the Pakistani bourgeoisie to clutch more tightly to the bosom of the army and US imperialism and to foment ethnic and communal divisions.

Fulfillment of the elementary democratic and social aspirations of the Pakistani people—from guaranteeing basic civil liberties and the equality of women, to providing education, sanitation and jobs, to eliminating child labor and bonded labor—requires the liquidation of landlordism, the dismantling of the US-sponsored military-security state, and the placing of the banks and basic industry under the democratic control of the workers and toilers. These measures will be realized only through the bringing to power of a workers' and peasants' government that consciously links the fate of the toilers of Pakistan and South Asia to the international working class' struggle to put an end to capitalism.

A new revolutionary working class party must be built to spearhead this struggle. Such a party must base its program and perspective on the lessons of the strategic experiences of the world working class, including those of the workers of Pakistan and all of South Asia.

Partition and the suppression of the democratic revolution

The establishment of India and Pakistan in 1947 constituted not freedom, but the suppression of the democratic, anti-imperialist revolution

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by the communally organized bourgeoisies of India and Pakistan, working in concert with British imperialism.

The immediate outcome of partition was an orgy of violence, which resulted in some 2 million deaths and turned 12-14 million people into refugees. The living body of the subcontinent was cut by what were, in effect, multiple partitions—the division of the Bengalis, Punjabis, Kashmiris, etc.—and state borders were imposed that defied and continue to defy economic, historical and cultural logic.

Far from resolving the "communal problem," partition has compounded it by enshrining communal divisions in the state structure of South Asia. Partition has given rise to a reactionary geopolitical struggle between India and Pakistan that has resulted in three declared wars and countless war crises, squandered vital economic resources, and today threatens the people of South Asia with a nuclear conflagration, which would have catastrophic consequences for world civilization.

Partition has facilitated imperialist dominance of South Asia by frustrating rational economic development, including the use of water resources, and by providing a political mechanism for the US and other great powers to play one state and ruling elite against the other. Today South Asia is the least economically integrated region in the world.

The communal Pakistani national project represented the venal class interests of sections of the Muslim zamindars and capitalists of South Asia who had obtained privileges within the British colonial order by serving as its "Muslim representatives" and by promoting the use of various Muslim groups as cannon fodder for the British Indian Army (the martial races).

The Muslim League was an elite organization, notorious for its disdain for the workers, peasants and artisans who comprised, then as now, the vast majority of South Asia's Muslims. It openly sought and received the patronage of British imperialism.

The ultimate responsibility, however, for the success of British imperialism's divide-and-rule strategy and partition lies first and foremost with the Indian National Congress, the principal party of the emerging Indian bourgeoisie. While it espoused Hindu-Muslim unity, the Congress, because of its class position, was utterly hostile to the struggle to unite the masses of South Asia on the basis of an appeal to their common class interests in the struggle against colonial-zamindar-capitalist oppression.

Fearing the rising tide of worker-peasant struggles in post-World War II India and the increasingly insurgent character of the anti-imperialist movement, the Congress grew desperate to get its hand on the state machine built by British imperialism so as to stabilize bourgeois rule. Thus it rapidly abandoned key tenets of its program, such as the demand for a constituent assembly elected on the basis of universal suffrage and its opposition to Dominion status, and chose to unite with the Muslim League and the British in dividing the subcontinent. Indeed, the Congress became the most vehement and consistent protagonist of partition, insisting that the communal division of South Asia also required the communal partition of Bengal and Punjab.

This betrayal was greatly facilitated by the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI). Under the influence of the bureaucratic caste that had usurped power from the Soviet working class, the CPI in the two decades that preceded independence and partition pursued an opportunist course that greatly strengthened the Congress' hold over the anti-imperialist movement. On the basis of the Menshevik-Stalinist theory of the two-stage revolution, the Stalinists opposed any challenge to the Congress' leadership of the struggle against British colonialism, and in the final years of British rule followed a similar line in respect to the Muslim League. This included providing legitimacy to the communal Pakistan demand and sending CPI cadres into the Muslim League to build it. Between 1945 and 1947, when the Congress and the League faced each other with daggers drawn, the CPI pleaded to the rival bourgeois parties to join together and fulfill their "responsibility" to lead the national revolution.

Partition defined—and continues to define—the "freedom" and "independence" incarnated in bourgeois India and Pakistan. Far from being an aberration, it was only the most bloody and immediately apparent consequence of the abortion of the anti-imperialist revolution.

The new state defended the wealth of the zamindars, princes and big businessmen and otherwise protected property and privilege. It retained the key institutions and laws of the British colonial state, adopting at most a handful of meager, piecemeal reforms aimed at facilitating capitalist development.

Six decades on, none of the burning democratic and social problems of the masses have been resolved. On the contrary, they have grown ever more malignant as landlordism, caste oppression and other feudal vestiges have become increasingly intertwined with capitalist exploitation.

Half of the world's poor live in the subcontinent. In no region of the world is a greater proportion of the population malnourished. Neither the Indian nor Pakistani state spends more than 5 percent of its gross domestic product on education and health care.

In keeping with the reactionary logic of partition and the Indo-Pakistani rivalry, no region of the world is less economically integrated than the subcontinent.

The working class must draw far-reaching conclusions from the experience of partition and six decades of "independent" bourgeois national rule in South Asia. Imperialist oppression and the legacy of colonial rule and South Asia's belated capitalist development will be overcome only through a working class-led socialist revolution, one that of necessity will have to challenge the reactionary state structure of South Asia.

To be continued

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