

May Day 2016: The political tasks facing the workers and toilers of the Indian sub-continent

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The following speech was delivered by Wije Dias, general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, to the International May Day Online Rally held on May 1, 2016.

The workers and toilers of the Indian subcontinent must assume, alongside their class brethren around the world, a frontline role in the struggle against imperialist war.

Since the US seized on the never-explained events of September 11, 2001 to invade Afghanistan, South Asia and the Indian Ocean region have been drawn ever more deeply into the maelstrom of imperialist geopolitics and global great-power struggle.

From the standpoint of the strategists of US imperialism, South Asia is the soft underbelly of Eurasia—crucial to projecting US power toward the energy-rich Middle East and Central Asia, and across the Himalayas at China.

The Pentagon war-planners view dominance of the Indian Ocean—which a recent US-Naval War College study emphasised has “replaced the North Atlantic as the central artery of world commerce”—as pivotal to US global hegemony. First and foremost, because it is at the heart of US plans to impose an economic blockade on China, through strategic “chokepoints,” in the event of war or a war-crisis. But also because the Indian Ocean is considered essential to US military operations in the Middle East and East Africa.

Washington’s drive to expand its military-strategic presence across the region is now a mighty factor in the internal political life and class dynamics of every country in South Asia, from the tiny Maldives to the rival nuclear-armed states of India and Pakistan.

The US occupation of Afghanistan is now in its

fifteenth year.

Pakistan’s military, with Washington’s encouragement and blessing, has once again muscled aside the country’s civilian government and is waging war in the country’s tribal regions, occupying its principal city, Karachi, and now embarking on military operations in the Punjab, its most populous province.

Last year, Sri Lanka’s president Mahinda Rajapakse fell victim to a regime-change operation made in Washington. The US orchestrated the defection of a leading minister in Rajapakse’s government, Maithripala Sirisena, and his subsequent nomination as the so-called common opposition candidate for the presidency. The US had backed Rajapakse to the hilt as he waged civil war against the country’s Tamil minority. What it would not tolerate was his attempt to balance between Washington and Beijing. Within months of Rajapakse’s ouster, John Kerry was making the first ever visit of a US secretary of state to Sri Lanka and soon after Colombo agreed to a US-Sri Lanka Partnership Dialogue.

But it is India that is the linchpin of the US drive to harness South Asia to its drive for world hegemony. By virtually any measure India is a poor country, with three-quarters of the population eking out an existence on less than \$2 per day. But for Washington it is a “strategic prize.”

The head of the US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris recently declared himself “moonstruck ... by the opportunities a strategic partnership with India” provide US imperialism. He then went on to call for joint US-Indian naval patrols in the South China Sea.

In the Indian bourgeoisie Washington has a willing accomplice. The venal Indian bourgeoisie hopes to

realise its own great powers ambitions by serving as a US satrap.

The two year-old government of Narendra Modi and his Hindu-supremacist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is transforming India into a frontline state in the US war-drive against China. It parrots Washington's false narrative that China is the aggressor in the South China Sea; has begun to co-develop new weapon-systems with the Pentagon; and is expanding bilateral and tri-lateral ties with the US's principal allies in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan and Australia.

Last month, the BJP government announced its "agreement in principle" to a pact with Washington that will throw open India's military bases and ports to US planes and ships for refuelling, resupply and recuperation.

In South Asia, as around the world, US imperialism is acting with extreme recklessness, throwing gasoline on a region that is riven by ethnic, communal and caste conflicts—the bitter legacy of colonial rule and of the bloody, communal partition of the subcontinent into a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India that the rival wings of the emerging national bourgeoisie implemented in 1947.

Buoyed by Washington's support, the Modi government is aggressively asserting India's longstanding claim to be the regional hegemon, imposing a five-month blockade on Nepal, bullying the Maldives into declaring India its "most important friend," and instructing the Indian military to make Pakistan pay for alleged border violations with incommensurate losses.

Pakistan, for its part, has repeatedly warned that the US's lavishing of weaponry and weapon-systems on India has overturned the region's balance of power. With Washington blithely ignoring these warnings, Islamabad is now deploying tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons.

Among the masses of South Asia, as around the world, there is mass opposition to war, but no anti-war movement.

In Sri Lanka, the pseudo-left supported the US regime change operation, touting the lie that Sirisena, who had been a crony of Rajapakse until only weeks before the presidential election, was the candidate of democracy.

The Indian Stalinists have played the pivotal role in

politically suppressing the rapidly expanding Indian working class. Over the past quarter-century, the Communist Parties and their Left Front have supported a succession of governments intent on making India a cheap-labour haven for world capital and a "strategic partner" of Washington.

Now the Stalinists are using the crimes of the BJP—its promotion of communal reaction and the US basing agreement—as the excuse for subordinating the working class even more completely to the Indian bourgeoisie and state. To argue for an even more explicit alliance with the Congress Party—that is with the Indian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government and the party that over the past quarter-century has done most of the heavy-lifting in implementing pro-investor restructuring and forging an Indo-US alliance.

The entire history of South Asia over the past century demonstrates the utterly reactionary character of all such alliances with the supposed progressive or democratic faction of the bourgeoisie and the urgency of the working class adopting the program of Permanent Revolution. Imperialist oppression, chronic poverty, caste and communal discrimination—none of the burning problems facing the masses—can be resolved other than through a working-class led socialist revolution.

Social opposition is growing. Last week, a leading Indian newspaper expressed alarm at the sudden eruption of mass protests by poorly-paid garment workers in Bangalore. What so shocked and troubled the commentator was that this militant protest erupted outside the existing trade union and political structures.

The crucial question is to arm the incipient rebellion of workers around the world with a program and perspective that articulates their objective interests as a global class and protagonist of a new social order, free of want and war.

On this May Day, I urge workers and youth across South Asia and around the world to join us in this great task.



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