

Modi's assault on Kashmir and the Indian working class

Keith Jones

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Today marks exactly three months since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his henchman Home Minister Amit Shah and a cabal of senior military and intelligence officers mounted a constitutional coup against Jammu and Kashmir.

By executive fiat, Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government have stripped India's only Muslim-majority state of its unique, semi-autonomous constitutional status and divided it into two Union Territories, thereby placing the politically-turbulent region under permanent central government control.

New Delhi is enforcing its flagrantly illegal constitutional changes through a state of siege, unprecedented in scope and breadth in a region already among the most intensely militarized and policed in the world.

Ten of thousands of Indian army troops and paramilitaries have been deployed to impose blanket curfews, brutally suppress any signs of opposition and intimidate and harass the population.

Thousands of "potential stone-pelters" have been detained indefinitely without charge. So isolated is the government and so fearful of mass opposition, it has also taken into "preventive detention" the region's pro-Indian Muslim political elite, including three former chief ministers and dozens of elected officials.

Security forces have spread terror, staging night raids in villages and using loudspeakers to broadcast the anguished cries of torture victims.

A principal aim of New Delhi's repression has been to prevent J&K's 12.5 million residents from communicating with each other, and from alerting the rest of India and the world to the crimes being committed by the Indian state. For more than two months, all cellphone service was suspended in J&K. Ninety-two days after the crackdown's launch, Kashmiris continue to be barred from sending text messages and making prepaid cellphone calls, and most are still denied all access to the internet and social media.

Modi's Kashmir coup is a provocative and reckless geostrategic power play. It is aimed at strengthening India's hand against Pakistan—its arch-rival since the two states were created through the 1947 communal partition of South Asia—and against China, with which the Indian elite is competing for markets, investment, resources and global influence.

To ensure that the Indian military can conduct its operations, including realizing its plans to massively expand logistical and border infrastructure, free from any public scrutiny or criticism, the Modi government has decreed that the new Union Territory of Ladakh, which borders China's Xinjiang region, will not even have a token legislature.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly warned that Modi's drive to compel Islamabad to acquiesce to India's regional

domination threatens to trigger all-out war between South Asia's rival nuclear powers.

Led by the US, the Western imperialist powers have blithely ignored these warnings. They have declared the change in the governance of Indian-held Kashmir an internal Indian matter, and kept conspicuously silent on New Delhi's sweeping repression.

Tensions between India and Pakistan remain on the boil. New Delhi and Islamabad continue to exchange blood-curdling threats—Indian Army Chief Bipin Rawat has boasted his forces are primed to "liberate" Pakistan-held "Azad Kashmir"—and they continue to trade lethal artillery barrages across the Line of Control that separates Indian and Pakistani-held Kashmir.

Whatever the immediate course of events in the weeks and months ahead, Modi's Kashmir coup, sanctioned by Washington, has accentuated South Asia's polarization into rival military-strategic blocs. Building on the Indo-US "global strategic partnership" forged by the previous Congress Party-led government, Modi has integrated India ever more fully into the US war drive against China, while using Washington's strategic "favours" to ratchet up military pressure on Pakistan. Beijing and Islamabad have responded by doubling down on their longstanding military-strategic partnership.

The India-Pakistan conflict, which has already exploded in three declared wars and resulted in numerous war crises, has thus become inextricably entwined with the contemporary world's most important geostrategic conflict, that between US imperialism and China. The Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir has assumed global strategic dimensions, because parts of Kashmir held by Pakistan and claimed by India are central to China's Belt Road Initiative.

Communalism, authoritarianism, and the assault on the working class

As critical and ominous as these developments are, the ramifications of Modi's Kashmir coup for the class struggle in India are no less significant.

The BJP's Aug. 5 constitutional coup and state of siege target not just the Kashmiri people, but the entire Indian working class.

They are aimed at strengthening the arbitrary power of the state, acclimatizing the population to the suspension of fundamental democratic rights, inciting the Hindu supremacist right and whipping up anti-Muslim communalism. Elimination of J&K's special status has long been advocated by the BJP and its Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh (RSS) Hindu-supremacist mentors as a key step in transforming India into a Hindu *Raj* or state.

As exemplified by US President Donald Trump, Brazil's Bolsonaro, and the emergence of the neo-Nazi AfD as Germany's official opposition, bourgeois elites the world over are breaking with democratic-constitutional forms of rule and propelling to prominence and power chauvinist and outright fascist forces, so as to ram through policies deeply inimical to the vast majority—intensified exploitation of the working class, militarism and war.

Modi, his BJP and the Indian ruling class are acutely aware they sit atop a social powder keg. Three decades of rapacious capitalist development have led to an exponential growth in India's billionaire class, from just two in the mid-1990s to some 120 today. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Indians remain mired in poverty and want. The 2019 Global Hunger Index found just 9.6 percent of Indian children aged 6–23 months receive adequate nutrition.

This social polarization and the myriad problems that beset India's economy—agrarian distress, falling investment, declining consumer demand and mass joblessness—are fueling mounting working class opposition. The past year has seen waves of strikes in India's globally-connected auto sector, and against the BJP government's plans to privatize Coal India and public sector banks. Last January, tens of millions of workers joined a two-day all-India strike to protest the Modi government's class war agenda, including the gutting of labour standards and the promotion of the casualization of work.

Thanks to a craven, right-wing opposition that adapted to Modi's militarist and Hindu communalist appeals and the full-throated support of corporate India, the BJP was returned to power in last spring's election.

With the assault on Kashmir serving as its spearhead, the BJP government has dramatically intensified its across-the-board attack on the democratic rights and social position of the working class in the first five months of its second term. The government has slashed corporate taxes, accelerated privatization, and is pressing forward with plans to expand throughout India the National Citizens Register, under which two million people in Assam, almost all of them Muslims, have been targeted for deportation.

The response of India's Supreme Court and the opposition parties to Modi's assault on Kashmir and his government's incitement of Hindu communalism underscores that the only force upon which the defence of democratic rights can be based is the working class.

The opposition quickly gave its stamp of approval to Modi's illegal rewriting of the Constitution, providing just hours later the votes needed to formally approve Jammu and Kashmir's bifurcation.

For weeks, India's highest court refused to listen to cases challenging the suppression of democratic rights in J&K, admonishing the plaintiffs to have faith in the claims of the government and security services that “normalcy” would soon be restored. Finally, as the state of siege in Kashmir was nearing its 50th day, the Supreme Court issued an order that explicitly green-lights holding the region's population hostage indefinitely.

Emboldened by the Indian ruling elite's embrace of authoritarianism, Telangana's state government arbitrarily fired 48,000 Telangana State Road Transport Corporation workers just hours after they walked out on strike.

The working class must oppose New Delhi's assault on Kashmir, its war threats against Pakistan and reckless war alliance with Washington. It must reach out to workers in Pakistan—whose reactionary ruling elite has similarly abused and manipulated the

people of Kashmir and likewise stokes bellicose communal-laced nationalism—to build a working class-led movement against war, reaction, and imperialism across South Asia and around the world.

For the working class to develop a political offensive against the Modi regime, social inequality and the entire malignant capitalist order it must be freed from the ruinous influence of Stalinism. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI) prepared the political ground for the rise of Modi and the Hindu right. They propped up a succession of big business governments dedicated to making India a cheap-labour haven for global capital and lent their support to the Indian bourgeoisie's great-power ambitions, including its military build-up and reactionary conflict with Pakistan.

The CPM and CPI have responded to the Indian bourgeoisie's embrace of Modi not by indicting it and summoning the working class to fight moribund Indian capitalism. Rather they have redoubled their efforts to subordinate the working class to the Supreme Court and the other putrefying state institutions of “democratic” India, and to harness it to a parade of right-wing parties that connive with the Hindu right and promote casteism and various forms of ethno-regional and Indian chauvinism.

Thus the CPM has just struck an electoral alliance with the Congress Party in its former West Bengal bastion, even as the Congress is maneuvering in India's second largest state, Maharashtra, to form a governmental alliance with the fascistic Shiv Sena, which only recently had a falling out with the BJP.

A political reckoning with Stalinism requires that the most class-conscious Indian workers and youth turn to the Fourth International, led since 1953 by the International Committee, and apprise themselves of its history. Founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 in struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped power from the Soviet working class and transformed the various Communist Parties into tools of its maneuvers with imperialism, the Fourth International has alone defended and developed the program of world socialist revolution that animated the 1917 October Revolution and provides the only viable strategy for the working class to confront the contemporary breakdown of world capitalism.



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