

# Millions in South Asia react with shock and horror at ruling elite's incompetence over pandemic

Wije Dias  
6 May 2020

*The following speech was delivered by Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Wije Dias to the 2020 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 2.*

Dear comrades and friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an unstoppable erosion of public confidence in the rule of the Sri Lankan capitalist elite. Even before the pandemic began, the deepening crisis of world economy and the developing struggles of working people testify to the worldwide loss of confidence, by the oppressed masses, in capitalist rule. And it will not be restored after the COVID-19 catastrophe has abated.

However, there is no room for complacency on the part of the working class and its supporters among the youth and rural poor. The Socialist Equality Party warns the workers and youth in Sri Lanka and internationally, that the capitalist class will try all its reactionary measures, including a military coup, to retain political power, which is threatening to slip out of its control.

It is essential that the working class is armed with an alternative socialist strategy to counter such regressive moves.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary advances in medical science and technology, the capitalist system failed miserably in identifying, and beginning treatment, to save the precious lives of hundreds of thousands of the working population.

Responding to the shock and horror of millions at the utter incompetence of the ruling elites, governments everywhere were forced to instigate lockdowns of

workplaces and neighborhoods.

But by April, as the virus continued to spread, the bourgeoisie hurriedly floated a vicious campaign to reopen the economy, claiming that “the cure cannot be worse than the disease.” Major businesses were much more preoccupied with reopening production lines—to prevent any impediment to profit-making, irrespective of the danger to the lives of the workers, who were forced to go back to work.

There are currently 50,000 coronavirus victims in South Asia, mainly India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, while the death toll stands at nearly two thousand. The figures are low, mainly because the necessary mass testing has been ignored.

Despite this nightmare, bourgeois governments are marching in lockstep with the fascistic US president, Donald Trump, ordering workers back to work, without essential personal protective equipment. India's Barathiya Janatha Party government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leading the region, and has already promoted the Indian military as the patriotic savior of India against its enemies—Pakistan in the North West and China in the East.

Sri Lankan President Gotabhaya Rajapakse has even surpassed Modi, placing the military at the head of the civil administration, even prior to the current health emergency. Military men, with criminal cases pending in the judiciary for slaughtering thousands of civilians during the thirty-year-long anti-Tamil war, are being elevated as war heroes. The president promotes the military as the most efficient instrument for defeating the virus, just as it dealt with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan, who came to

power promising to cleanse the country's military rule, has followed suit, by calling on the military, on April 24, to conduct special tasks related to the pandemic.

In Bangladesh, Prime Minister Sheik Hassina, who depends heavily on the armed forces to confront growing opposition to her rule, uses the pretext of the influx of Rohingya refugees from Burma to boost the military's role in her administration, utilizing the new situation created by COVID-19.

At the same time all these governments are whipping up communalism, to disorient and divert the working masses from the failure of the ruling elites to meet the challenge posed by the pandemic.

In both India and Sri Lanka, the ruling elites are promoting anti-Muslim xenophobia as Sri Lankan Muslim families are held responsible for creating the so-called "virus clusters."

The capitalist media is being used incessantly to drown the population in servility, with the ready assistance of the reformists, trade union bureaucrats and fake lefts.

Only the Socialist Equality Party-Sri Lanka, along with its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International around the world, is prepared to undertake the historic task of providing the socialist revolutionary perspective and leadership to working people of all races in the South Asian region. Our theoretical and political preparation is firmly grounded on the historical lessons of the struggles of the world Trotskyist movement throughout the past century.

72 years ago, when fake independence was granted to the British colonies of the region, the Trotskyists of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India correctly denounced this as a bogus independence deal between the British imperialists and the local bourgeoisie. They called for the overthrow of capitalist rule, which had become the indirect rule of global finance capital.

The analyses of the ICFI and its sections, based on Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, have been vindicated. Neither independence from imperialism, nor the unification of working people against communalism, are possible under the rule of the bourgeoisie, in Sri Lanka or anywhere else, because it is nothing but the rotten agency of finance capital.

During the past decades, formerly free health services have been gutted by the bourgeoisie, under the dictates of the IMF and World Bank, bringing devastation to

billions, especially under conditions of the current catastrophic pandemic.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has created the conditions to expose the bankruptcy and reactionary role of world capitalism. The historic necessity of globally unifying the resources, knowledge and efforts of working people to conquer, not only viruses, but every devastating depredation of the profit system, can only be achieved under world socialism.

The fight for the establishment of an international federation of socialist states, of which a socialist federation of South Asia will be an indivisible part, depends on the building of ICFI sections in every country as the leadership of the working class, as it engages in the emerging revolutionary struggles. We call on all our listeners to join this struggle.



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