

# Tamil Nadu election rallies disregard social distancing as COVID-19 ravages India

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Assembly elections are scheduled for April 6 in the southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Pondicherry, and from March 27 in the eastern states of West Bengal and Assam.

The bourgeois parties contesting this election have demonstrated their utter contempt for public health. They are actively implementing the “herd immunity” policy pursued by the world bourgeoisie, encouraging the all-but-uncontrolled spread of coronavirus infection. At the same time, they are mobilizing thousands and organizing their election campaign rallies without even elementary forms of social distancing.

As variant strains of the COVID-19 virus spread rapidly around the world, 47,262 new infections were confirmed in India on March 21. According to the Union Health Ministry, 85 percent of the total cases are in eight states, including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. So far 11,787,000 people have been infected in India, and 160,725 people have died.

The re-emergence of the epidemic in the southern state of Tamil Nadu has confirmed 1,437 cases in a single day. So far it has spread to 869,004 people, and 12,618 people have died. In India, which has a population of 1.3 billion, so far 37,143,000 people have been vaccinated with locally-made Covaxin and Covishield vaccines, according to the health department. In Tamil Nadu, which has a population of about 77,000,000, only 1,038,900 people have been vaccinated so far.

In the capital, Chennai, 240,245 people have been vaccinated and 4,179 have died. According to the latest news, 56 students and five parents, including a teacher, have been infected at the government-aided girls’ high school in Ammapettai, Thanjavur district. Coronavirus has also been found in Pattukottai Boys’ High School and Alathur Boys’ High School near Madukkur.

The security, health and livelihoods of the common people are openly sacrificed for the profit pursuit of capitalism. Most of the victims are working people. India has the third highest incidence of COVID-19 infection in the world.

Like governments around the world, India’s Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has give up even trying to stop the spread of the virus. Following the BJP’s lead, its ally in Tamil Nadu, the regionalist All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) government of Edappadi K. Palanichamy, opened schools, factories, transport and business establishments across the state. In addition, AIADMK is conducting an election campaign without any security measures.

The Tamil Nadu state government will sink into debt of Rs 5.70 lakh crore (\$87.6 billion) in the coming months. These debts will be imposed by the ruling elite on working people through rising prices and social cuts. In this deteriorating economic situation, Chief Minister Palaniachai has been addressing election campaign meetings organized by the AIADMK around the theme “Tamil Nadu on the path to victory.”

Thousands of civilians are brought in and unloaded at lorries for public meetings. Even after the Tamil Nadu Transport Department warned that the public should not be accepted like this, reports say that it has been blatantly violated. The BJP and the caste-ist Proletarian Party in the AIADMK alliance have also begun campaigning.

Similarly, the Naam Tamilar Party, which has been campaigning to divide the working class and demand that only ethnic Tamils be allowed to govern Tamil Nadu, organized a huge public meeting in the capital, Chennai, on March 7. The meeting, attended by thousands, also blatantly violated basic COVID-19

rules, such as wearing a mask.

The leading opposition party, the regionalist, Tamil-nationalist Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) rallied tens of thousands of people in Trichy and organized a massive public rally on March 7, calling for a “Slogan for Dawn.” Other parties complained to the Election Commission of India (ECI) that more than 200,000 people were brought to the public meeting in more than 10,000 vehicles, without complying with any coronavirus safety rules. More than 2 billion rupees (US\$27,609,055) were spent on the meeting.

According to the rules of the Election Commission of India, the maximum amount to be spent in an assembly constituency is 3,080,000 rupees (US\$42,500).

Indian billionaires are thus spending massive sums for the DMK and AIADMK to capture power, while bringing larger numbers of working and toiling people to public meetings in unsafe lorries, in order to claim that they have the influence and support of the people.

These events again underscore the bankruptcy of the Indian Stalinist parties, whose branches in Tamil Nadu are campaigning as part of a DMK-led electoral alliance, and their allies. The Congress, the Stalinist Communist Party of India, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Marumalarchi (Renaissance) Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Indian Union Muslim League and the caste-ist Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (Liberation Panther Party) are all thus signaling they are willing to support the bourgeoisie’s “herd immunity” policy.

The longstanding orientation of the Indian Stalinists, seeking to tie workers to a politically debilitating orientation to the Congress, or to whatever bourgeois party seemed most likely to be able to rule in a given country or state, is producing a catastrophe amid the pandemic. They play the critical role in blocking the working class from building an independent, international movement fighting for a scientific and socialist policy against the pandemic.

At the meeting in Trichy, DMK Chairman M.K. Stalin did not utter a single word about the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, he recited seven empty points from his electoral program: economy, water resources, agriculture, education and health, urban development, rural infrastructure, social justice. At this meeting, as at the AMDK meeting, elementary social distancing was not observed.



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