

The struggle for Permanent Revolution in South Asia

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6 May 2021

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Dear Comrades,

The COVID-19 pandemic is surging in South Asia, bringing deadly consequences for nearly the 1.9 billion inhabitants in the region.

By May Day last year there were about 50,000 coronavirus cases and nearly 2,000 deaths from the pandemic in South Asia. Within one year, the number of infections has increased to a staggering 19 million and more, an increase by 380 times, with over 230,000 deaths, an increase by 115 times.

This surge of coronavirus cases and deaths is the outcome of the criminal policies of the ruling elites the world over, who have placed profit interests of big business over human lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global issue and cannot be overcome within a single country or even within a single region. The international working class must take matters into its own hands to mobilize globally available resources to fight the deadly pandemic.

Early last year, having ignored the impending danger of the pandemic, the governments in South Asia—mainly India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka—were forced to declare lockdowns in March 2020. However, these lockdowns had not been adequately associated with crucial measures, such as mass testing and contact tracing, or, above all, substantial allocation of financial resources to upgrade the already underfunded public health care systems, and to provide support for the millions of workers who had lost their income due to the closure of

businesses and industries.

Governments have miserably failed to achieve their declared aims. Moreover, the bourgeois leaders moved to reopen industries rapidly, to defend the profit interests of the capitalists. Even under the current rapid spread of the pandemic, the South Asian ruling elites, like their global counterparts, are continuing with their ruthless official policy of “herd immunity” and keeping the economy open.

India has become an epicenter of the pandemic, reporting the highest number of daily cases in any country in the world. Since April 22, it has been recording over 300,000 cases daily, pushing up the total COVID-19 infections to almost 18 million, second only to the US, and marking the second largest number of total cases in the world.

Since April 21, over 2,000 deaths have been reported per day. As of now, India’s total death toll has jumped to over 200,000. Even under the current disastrous situation, the Modi government continues to rule out a national lockdown to control the pandemic, placing the profit interests of the capitalists over the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

In Pakistan, the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan was the last to impose a lockdown in the region and the first to lift it last year. Under the present deadly conditions of the pandemic, with over 800,000 total cases and over 17,000 deaths, Pakistan is now ruling out another national lockdown.

In Bangladesh, with over 750,000 COVID-19 cases and over 11,000 deaths, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been forced to declare a lockdown, which has been extended up to May 5. But underscoring her government’s commitment to the profit interests of big business, industries including the garment sector have been allowed to function.

In Sri Lanka, the government’s boasts of controlling the

pandemic are punctured by a second wave of the virus. A total of 100,000 cases and a death toll of over 650 have been reported. Nonetheless, the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse refuses to impose a lockdown, following Modi's example. Instead, the government blames the people, insisting that they live with the virus by acting according to health guidelines.

As a part of the international upsurge of the working class, the workers and oppressed masses in South Asia have entered into struggles, including strikes and protests.

Due to the economic crisis intensified by the pandemic, a heavy economic burden has been placed upon workers by governments and corporations across the region, leading to an assault on jobs, wages and living conditions.

In Sri Lanka, during the past months alone, teachers, workers in the health care sector, postal, electricity, water supply and drainage, banks and railways, as well as the plantations, tourism and apparel industries have carried out protests and strikes in the public and private sectors.

The ruling class has responded to these strikes by seeking to divide and weaken the working class, aiming to crush the growing working class opposition by mobilizing fascist forces, whipping up communalism and speeding up preparations for a military-police dictatorial rule. Act "like a Hitler," declared the Minister for Transport Dilum Amunugama, urging President Rajapakse to establish a presidential dictatorship to crush the growing opposition, pointing to the campaign by sections of the Sri Lankan elite.

To counter these reactionary measures of the ruling elite, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka fights to unite Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers across communal divisions, in an independent movement based on a socialist program.

In line with the perspective of the ICFI, in opposition to the preparations of imperialist war and dictatorship, and based on a politically independent strategy, the SEP (Sri Lanka) has stepped forward to build a broad working class movement in South Asia.

The working class has been prevented from mounting such an independent political movement mainly by the treacherous role of the so-called left parties and unions, such as the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India, or CPI.

In Sri Lanka, all the unions, including the CWC in the plantations and Free Trade Zones and the General Services Employees Union, are openly collaborating with the government and companies in imposing assaults on jobs, wages and working conditions, to the extent of

abetting the police in arresting and locking up workers.

We call upon the workers in South Asia to politically and organizationally break from these treacherous parties and unions. Unify their struggles to defend social and democratic rights, and form their own rank-and-file committees.

The SEP (Sri Lanka) has already taken the initiative to develop rank-and-file committees in the health care, education, garment and plantation sectors, as well as to rally artists and defend freedom of expression.

Developing this initiative further, the SEP (Sri Lanka) is fighting to rally the working class

in support of the ICFI's call for an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Above all, the working class in the region, winning over poor farmers and the other oppressed to its side, must adopt a revolutionary socialist strategy of fighting to overthrow capitalist rule.

Here, this strategy must be based on the theory of Permanent Revolution elaborated by Leon Trotsky. According to Trotsky, in countries of belated capitalist development, like those in South Asia, the tasks of the democratic revolution can only be achieved under the leadership of the working class. Such an independent political movement of the working class should aim to establish a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.

To provide revolutionary leadership for the working class, the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka, in close collaboration with the ICFI and utilising its publication, the *World Socialist Web Site*, is fighting to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in South Asia, particularly in India.

Thank you, comrades!



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