

Statement of Workers' Organisations of West and South Asia

We, the undersigned members of the West and South Asia region of the International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organisations (ICMLPO), having convened under the current conditions of the Corona-19 Pandemic to assess the current situation in the world and in South and West Asia, reviewed the work of our parties and organisations in the initial period of the pandemic and discussed the details of the work we are conducting under the conditions of the “second wave” of the pandemic.

The meeting started with a moment of silence in memory of Comrade Raul Marco whose contribution to the formation of ICMLPO has been very significant.

The conference discussed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the conduct of the respective governments on the working people and their movement and adopted the following statement.

The toiling people of the world have been deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which has exacerbated the pre-existing fundamental contradictions of capitalist order. The toiling people are faced with massive loss of employment, cut in wages and increase in working hours along with acute health hazards. Crisis is endemic to capitalism. The years preceding 2020 saw growing economic stress with deceleration of growth, increase in unemployment, and growing inequality. The year 2020 was marked by the pandemic and the eruption of a new economic crisis of capitalism with a global character, the crisis which has been aggravated by the pandemic and has developed with it.

The bourgeoisie has used the pandemic as a means of overcoming some of its economic difficulties, of suppressing the rights of the workers and toilers and ignoring their demands. Capitalism used the Covid-19 pandemic to limit and erode democracy and the organisations of the working people. The policies adopted by the bourgeois governments with regard to the pandemic and the medical treatment have a class bias and there has been a complete disregard for the concerns and requirements of the laboring masses.

In most countries while the capitalists are economically and financially supported, the working class, labouring peasantry, lower strata including the oppressed castes and tribal peoples have all been left unsupported. Work at full capacity continued at factories and workplaces with no regard for workers' health. The pandemic was broached completely with a class attitude by the rulers which took care of the requirements of the rich and powerful and ignored the health requirement of the labouring people. Many of our countries do not have adequate public health systems. Existing hospitals in general do

not provide services for free.

The pandemic was completely ignored in countries like Iran, and its existence denied. Even after the virus affected large masses of people, and the Iranian government was forced to admit its existence it adopted the policy of so called 'herd immunity'. The government labeled the call to quarantine the infected areas and workplaces as the voice of 'counter-revolution'. Capitalist production was not interrupted even during the most challenging periods of the pandemic in Turkey. In India, under conditions of ill-conceived lockdown, migrant workers were compelled to walk hundreds of kilometres with their families from the cities to their villages. In Bangladesh, the laboring poor were left to perish uncared for.

And in the aftermath of the pandemic, the ruling classes are attempting to present the pandemic as the cause of the capitalist crisis, thus whitewashing their neoliberal policies which actually aggravated the crisis. They have also set out to use the pandemic to take further new anti-worker measures. Laws concerning the protection of labour and decent working conditions which were badly implemented even in normal times were largely shelved under the excuse of the pandemic. Instead of protecting the workers and the toiling people, the ruling bourgeoisie has been and plans to continue shifting the entire burden of the crisis and the pandemic onto the shoulders of the working masses. There has been massive loss of jobs, wage cuts, unsafe working conditions and forced lay off causing acute distress to the working people. We cannot accept such transferring of the burdens of the pandemic and the crisis onto the shoulders of the workers and labourers. All the blame lies with capitalists and their governments, and the burdens should be shouldered by the capitalists and their governments.

The pandemic has not only led to the deepening of class contradictions but has also aggravated inter-imperialist contradictions. In Asia, we are witnessing the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry, especially between the USA and China, and their fight for the spheres of influence has drawn our countries within it.

It is impossible to overcome the epidemics in a humane way in the capitalist system in which private ownership of the means of production and profit determines public policy. Pandemics like Covid-19 which are likely to occur in the future can only be handled effectively in a socialist system in which all productive resources are publicly held and the interests of the working people determine policies. It is incontestable that the struggle against the pandemic cannot be separated from the struggle against imperialism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression. The conditions we are undergoing have taught us all to struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic and capitalism together.

In the current situation, therefore, we call upon the workers and all toiling people, the

democratic and progressive forces of the regions to demand from their governments to adopt the policy of quarantine while providing support to the needy masses. We must fight against the laws and activities of the domestic bourgeoisie that threaten and restrict the rights of the people, and be vigilant that democratic rights are not violated and that fascism is not established.

We demand;

- * Governments should abandon the policy of “herd immunity” that has caused innumerable deaths and take the responsibility of safeguarding the wellbeing of the masses seriously!
- * Health is a public right; provide equal and free public health services for all.
- * Workplaces with coronavirus infection must be closed down and workers’ pay should be secured by the states
- * Ban retrenchments and ensure right to paid leave for workers during lock down.
- * Ensure safety of workers in worksites. No safe working conditions, no production!.
- * Provide adequate food and monetary support for working class families, including the unemployed and those in the informal sector, migrant workers and the displaced persons without any preconditions
- * Prisons where infection has spread should be evacuated! Political prisoners should be freed!
- * Doctors and health staff in the forefront of the fight against the pandemic should be supported. Reduce the daily work hours for the medical and healthcare professionals!
- * Discourage large gatherings, religious or otherwise, which increase the chance of contamination without compromising democratic rights of people.
- * Strikes and demonstrations cannot be banned; it is not acceptable to restrict the right to strike, protest, political and trade union association, freedom of the press with the excuse of the pandemic. No to state repression and the police violence!
- * No to ethnic, national, and religious discrimination, and xenophobia! Equality of rights and opportunity for all including the oppressed castes and tribal peoples.
- * Give special protection to at risk segments of the population, those for whom contamination causes a higher risk of death!
- * Quarantine the provinces and cities in which the corona contamination is on the rise!
- * Vaccinate the population free of charge when an effective and reliable vaccine becomes available!
- * Education should continue with the necessary hygiene measures in place; classes infected with the virus should be closed temporarily, and online education should be provided with necessary equipment, and without cost to the students. Bridge the ‘digital divide’ before resorting to online education.
- * End imperialist wars and military bases across the world.

* Reduce war expenditures; budgets for armaments should go to health and education.

We call upon the working peoples of all nationalities of South and West Asia to struggle, with these demands, against the governments which do not consider the Covid-19 pandemic as a public health issue and against bourgeois governments which do not carry out this fight by prioritising public health.

We call upon the working people to combine the fight against the pandemic with the fight to end capitalism, imperialism, all forms of exploitation and oppression to create a new Socialist Society where such pandemics will not lead to mass unemployment, starvation and deprivation.

We, the Marxist-Leninist communists of West and South Asia (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) are doing everything in our power to unite Labour against Capital and for progress of its struggle and will continue to do so.

We can ward off the effects of the pandemic like unemployment, misery and future uncertainty only through relentless struggle of the working class and toiling people. We, the working class, working peasantry, labourers, youth and women can overcome both the pandemic and capitalism with its destructive crises. It is only we who can achieve this.

Let us unite to emancipate ourselves from the rule of capital that has brought us crisis after crisis!

Long live the struggle for Democracy!

Only Socialism can end poverty, misery, health crises, and social injustice!

Signed

Communist Party of Bangladesh (ML)

Labour Party, Turkey

Organisation “Revolutionary Democracy”, India

Pakistan Mazdoor Mahaz

Party of Labour (Toufan), Iran

Dated

16th January 2021