

New Delhi's assault on Kashmir and the fight against communal reaction, imperialism, and war

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Last Monday, India's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government illegally abrogated the special, semi-autonomous, status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)—the Indian-controlled part of the Kashmir region that is at the center of the seven decades-old military-strategic rivalry between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

New Delhi also bifurcated J&K and degraded the status of what hitherto had been India's only Muslim-majority state to that of two Union territories with greatly diminished powers. J&K will henceforth be under central government trusteeship, with its "elected" assembly and government reduced to mere window-dressing.

These changes have been implemented via a constitutional coup that was conceived in secret by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Indian President Ram Nath Kovind, and the top brass of India's army and intelligence agencies.

The people of Jammu and Kashmir, as of India as a whole, were not forewarned, let alone given a chance to debate these changes. They awoke Monday to learn that the government had excised, by executive fiat, J&K's special status from the constitution, and that Indian-held Kashmir had been placed under an unprecedented state of siege.

At week's end, all internet, cable television, and cell and land phone service remain suspended in J&K. Tens of thousands of soldiers and paramilitaries continue to enforce draconian curfew orders and a ban on all gatherings of more than four people. J&K's "complete integration" into the Indian Union has begun under the jackboot of the Indian state, but otherwise, as the Chennai-based *Hindu* observed, "entirely cut off from the rest of the country."

The BJP's constitutional coup has multiple reactionary aims. These include:

- Bringing a swift, bloody end, and on terms dictated by New Delhi, to the Pakistan-supported, anti-Indian insurgency that has convulsed J&K since 1989;
- Strengthening India's hand strategically and militarily against both Pakistan and China;
- Inciting Hindu communalism and bellicose nationalism, so as to mobilize the Hindu right, for whom subjugating Kashmir has long been a rallying cry, and to intimidate and split India's workers and toilers.

This last aim is especially important. While the BJP just won an election victory, it is acutely aware that it sits atop a social powder keg. Even as working-class opposition mounts, it is facing growing pressure from big business to dramatically accelerate the implementation of socially incendiary pro-investor reforms.

India's ruling elite, including much of the ostensible parliamentary opposition, has rallied behind the BJP's constitutional coup, even while conceding it is a "high-risk gamble."

This is a global tendency. Everywhere, crisis-ridden and frightened ruling elites are turning to military conflict and extra-constitutional

measures to deal with intractable political and geo-strategic problems.

Imran Khan, Pakistan's right-wing Islamic populist prime minister, outlined a chilling scenario Tuesday of a rapid descent into "a war till we shed the last drop of blood," including through the use of nuclear weapons. Such a war would inevitably develop into a global conflict.

The working class of India and Pakistan must intervene independently in this crisis on the basis of a socialist internationalist program and in implacable opposition to all factions of both bourgeois elites and their intrigues in Kashmir, across South Asia, and beyond.

Partition and the failure of the bourgeois rule

The growth of communal reaction and of the war danger in South Asia must be understood as the outcome of two interrelated processes.

First, the manifest failure of the bourgeois-led Indian national movement to win genuine independence from imperialism or resolve any of the other burning democratic tasks, such as the eradication of landlordism and casteism. This failure is epitomized in the bloody communal partition of the subcontinent at "independence" in 1947 into a Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India.

The Indo-Pakistani inter-state rivalry has served as a means of continued imperialist domination, frustrated rational economic development, and led to the squandering of countless lives and resources in war and war preparations. Today it threatens the people of South Asia, and indeed the entire world, with a nuclear holocaust.

The second of these processes is the systemic crisis of world capitalism. It is compelling every national-based bourgeois clique to strive to dramatically intensify the exploitation of the working class, and—with the US and the other imperialist powers in the forefront—to seek to bolster its position on the world stage through aggression and war.

The mass anti-imperialist movement that convulsed South Asia for three decades from 1919 through 1947-48 had a great emancipatory potential. But under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie it was betrayed and aborted.

The Indian National Congress of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the premier party of the national bourgeoisie, claimed to stand for Hindu-Muslim unity. But trembling for its property, the Congress leadership was organically incapable of, and hostile to, uniting the workers and toilers of South Asia based on an appeal to their common class interests.

Terrified of the growing strength and independent intervention of the working class in the 1930s, and especially between 1942-47 when British India was swept by an incipient revolutionary upsurge, the Congress leaders became ever more desperate to strike a deal with London, so that they could get their hands on the British colonial state apparatus and stabilize bourgeois rule.

Having surrendered the initiative to India's departing colonial overlords

and the communalist, landlord-dominated Muslim League, the Congress not only accepted partition; in the late spring and summer of 1947 it joined forces with the Hindu Mahasabha to insist on the communal partition of the Punjab and Bengal.

In a prescient analysis, the Trotskyists organized in the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) exposed in the midst of these titanic events the twin lies on which the Congress leadership justified its support for Partition—that it would solve “the communal problem” and “open the road to freedom.”

On the contrary, the BLPI warned it would serve “as a means of reforging the chains” of “imperialist enslavement,” incite inter-state national-communal rivalry, and “accentuate” communalism “in each state.” The progressive task of uniting the myriad peoples of South Asia could only be accomplished in struggle against and all forms of bourgeois-communal irredentism and bourgeois rule. “Whom the bourgeoisie have torn asunder reactionarily,” affirmed the BLPI, “only the working class can unite progressively.”

The open wound that is Kashmir attests to the correctness of this analysis and the utterly reactionary character of both states born of partition. For seven decades both New Delhi and Islamabad have trampled on the democratic rights of the Kashmiri people, who since the first Indo-Pakistani war in 1947-48 have been divided by one of the world’s most heavily fortified borders.

Since 1989, New Delhi has waged a “dirty war” in J&K, replete with disappearances and summary executions, against the insurgency that erupted after it rigged state elections, and ignored and suppressed the ensuing mass protests. Islamabad, meanwhile, has sought to manipulate anger and disaffection with Indian rule in J&K and harness it to its own reactionary strategic interests by funneling logistical support to Islamist Kashmiri separatists who have engaged in communal attacks and ethnic cleansing.

Post-independence, Pakistan rapidly signed on to serve as an American imperialist satrap in the Cold War confrontation against the Soviet Union. For almost half of the state’s existence, it has been ruled by US-sponsored military dictatorships.

The Indian bourgeoisie, for its part, took advantage of the post-war boom and offers of Soviet support to pursue a state-led capitalist development project that it cynically dubbed “Congress socialism,” even as it left the masses in poverty, squalor and ignorance. Similarly, it postured on the world stage as a leader of the “anti-imperialist” Non-Aligned Movement.

However, like its Pakistani rival, the Indian bourgeoisie followed the British colonial stratagem of inciting caste and communal differences to deflect mounting social opposition. While nominally the embodiment of the Indian Republic’s constitutional commitment to secularism, the Congress Party increasingly promoted a Hindu-tinged Indian nationalism. It presided and connived in communal atrocities, including the Congress-instigated 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom and the razing of the Babri Masjid in 1992.

The Indian bourgeoisie embraces imperialism and reaction

When globalization and the Stalinist bureaucracy’s restoration of capitalism in the USSR kicked the legs out from under its state-led capitalist development strategy, the Indian bourgeoisie quickly cast aside its socialist, anti-imperialist, and, for that matter, secular pretensions. With the Congress Party in the forefront, it turned with a vengeance to forging a new partnership with imperialism, based on India’s transformation into a cheap-labor platform for global capital and closer relations with Washington.

The fruits of India’s post-1991 “rise” have been monopolized by a tiny capitalist elite that has gorged on sweatshop profits and the fire sale of public assets. Social inequality and human misery in India are among the

highest in the world.

Yet the bourgeoisie is deeply anxious and dissatisfied. Under conditions of global economic turbulence and intensifying geopolitical conflict, it fears the “window of opportunity” for India to emerge as a rival production-chain hub to China and lay claim to great-power status is rapidly closing.

Corporate India has embraced Modi and propelled his right-wing BJP into the country’s foremost political force so as to accelerate neo-liberal restructuring and more aggressively assert its interests on the world stage.

The Modi government is determined to change “the rules of the game” with Pakistan, on the calculation that it needs to transform itself into the regional hegemon of South Asia if it is to be a major player in world geopolitics and stake its claim to the oil and other resources needed to “grow” Indian capitalism. By fomenting conflict with Pakistan, it also seeks to divert social tensions at home, under conditions of growing class struggle.

Building on the Indo-US “global strategic partnership” forged by its Congress Party-led predecessor, the Modi government has transformed India into a veritable frontline state in the US military-strategic offensive against China, providing material support and encouragement to Washington’s maniacal drive for global hegemony.

Washington’s dramatic downgrading of its traditional ties with Islamabad, meanwhile, have emboldened New Delhi in its reckless campaign against Pakistan.

The threat of the Indo-US alliance has in turn driven China and Pakistan to strengthen their longstanding military-strategic ties.

Mobilize the working class against war and communal reaction

This enmeshing of the Indo-Pakistan and Sino-Indian conflicts with the growing confrontation between the US and China poses extreme dangers to the people of South Asia and the world. It has added additional explosive charges to all three conflicts and given the disputed Kashmir region added geo-strategic significance.

Kashmir borders China’s autonomous Tibet and Xinjiang regions, and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which Beijing prizes as a means of circumventing Washington’s plans to blockade China’s ports in a war or war crisis, passes through Pakistan-held Kashmir.

The last three decades have not just witnessed the rampage of the Indian bourgeoisie to the right. In India and across South Asia there has been a vast expansion in the size and social power of the working class. Moreover, on a global scale, there is a growing and increasingly self-consciously international working class upsurge against capitalist austerity, social inequality and militarism.

It is this force that is the antidote to communal reaction and the threat of war. In opposition to the reactionary capitalist elites in New Delhi and Islamabad, the workers of India, Pakistan and throughout the sub-continent must intensify the class struggle. On the basis of the strategy of Permanent Revolution first elaborated by Leon Trotsky, they must join forces in the fight for the Socialist United States of South Asia and seek to unify their struggles with workers around the world.

Only through the establishment of workers’ power in alliance with the oppressed toilers can freedom from imperialism be secured, South Asia’s myriad peoples be united on a genuinely equal basis, communalism and casteism eradicated, and the pressing need for jobs, decent income and basic services met.

The fight for this program requires a political war on Stalinism, including its Maoist variant, which for decades has tied the working class to nationalism and one or another supposedly progressive faction of the bourgeoisie. All of these parties defend the political legacy of the Communist Party of India (CPI), which subordinated the working class to the Congress Party and Muslim League.

For decades the CPI and its larger offshoot, the Communist Party of

India (Marxist) have functioned as an integral part of the bourgeois establishment. They propped up a succession of right-wing governments, most of them Congress party-led, between 1991 and 2008 that spearheaded neo-liberal reforms and closer ties to Washington; support India's military build-up, which is now being fueled by the fourth biggest military budget in the world; and endorsed Modi's military strikes on Pakistan in September 2016 and this February.

They have responded to Modi's reelection in May by redoubling their efforts to harness the working class to the Congress and other bourgeois parties, and to the rotting "democratic" institutions of the Indian bourgeois state.

Yet all the great social struggles dating back to the beginning of the 20th century have demonstrated that reaction and war can only be successfully combated by mobilizing the working class as a politically independent force in the fight for socialist revolution.

We urge all WSWs readers in India and Pakistan to take up the fight for socialism by working to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in their respective countries.

Keith Jones

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