



## Press Release:

Labor Day 2020, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

# Lessons from Corona: Smash Capitalism!

May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

The struggle of workers in Chicago, 1886 is the basis for May Day. In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic public mobilizations were not possible. Therefore, Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT) and Roots for Equity organized a webinar to commemorate May 1 Labor Day. The speakers at the webinar included labor and peasant leaders and people's rights activist.

The Covid-19 pandemic has not only exposed the ineffectiveness of the capitalist system to deal with a crisis but also its criminal tendency to disregard hunger and impoverishment suffered by the masses at this critical juncture, prioritizing profits over people. Further, the imperialist anti-labor policies have also been well exposed. Neoliberal policies have bereft nation-states of financial, material and human resources, are helpless to stop the disease and look after the needs of the people. With the people not a priority, Pakistan's public health expenditures have never exceeded 3% of the national budget. Onslaught of imperialist neoliberalism through privatization has further eroded the public health system highlighted by lack of public facilities and weak administration. A situation that impacts the working class with extreme intensity, as they are incapable of accessing the exorbitantly expensive private health care system.

In the face of the pandemic, deregulation, privatization and trade liberalization policies are the structural reasons for the working class facing joblessness, financial instability and lack of health and other forms of social protection. In the pre-neoliberal era workers were guaranteed job protection, health, education, shelter and other facilities. Now under privatization even the right to permanent job security has been eroded; this is the basic reason that joblessness, poverty and hunger is present in the country, and is much aggravated under the pandemic.

During the pandemic, factories and businesses have been closed leaving the working class facing acute economic hardship. In addition, the pandemic also has led to global decrease in demand; just in the garment sector nearly one million workers face losing their jobs. Only in Punjab, in this sector at least 500,000 have lost their jobs already. According to the Department of Planning and Development, Khyber Pakhtunkwa government, if the lockdown continues than 460,000 workers including daily wagers and street vendors will be left without a livelihood. In the Hattar Industrial zone many hundreds of workers have already been fired. Similarly, in Karachi SITE, in only one textile factory 700 workers have been laid off. Using the lockdown as an excuse, in many industrial areas of the country workers have faced different forms of exploitation including being forcefully removed from work, given forced leave and/or wage reduction. The pandemic is also wreaking hardship for our immigrant labor that is one of the biggest sources of foreign exchange for the country.

The relief package provided by the federal and provincial governments is inaccessible for a majority of the working class due to lack of registration and other handicaps. Only 62,000,000 workers are alone associated with industry and service sector whereas the government has only allocated a meager Rs. 200 billion for workers including daily wagers; the agriculture workforce is not even included here, especially the women agricultural workers. Women face twin sources of violations, one at the hand of patriarchy whereby increased domestic violence under the pandemic a sure phenomenon, and the other economic hardship and hunger. The pitiful sum offered by the government is more than enough to expose the lack of political to serve the people and proves the point that under Capitalism, welfare of the people is not possible.

In a situation where there is increasing hunger and joblessness under the added effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, its critical that neoliberal policies based on accumulation of profit need to be replaced with

a public system that encompasses not only production but also the provision of basic services including livelihood, health, education and other basic rights. Its now very clear, that self-sufficiency and self reliance including food-self sufficiency is a critical element for national stability and development. This is only possible when the working class of the country has full access and control over resources and production to pave the way for a peaceful prosperous sovereign nation without the shackles of imperialism.

PKMT's demands the following:

1. Guaranteed incomes and benefits, cash grants and relief for the working people.
2. Free Corona mass testing and adequate health services for the people.
3. Social protection for the farmers and workers.
4. Cancellation, not simply relief, of onerous foreign debt of poor developing countries.
5. Suspension and renegotiation of unequal trade agreements.
6. Nationalize public health systems.
7. Respect democratic and human rights.
8. Lift sanctions against Palestine, Iran and various other countries.
9. Rechannel military budget to public health and social services.

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