

A Call To Workers, Labourers And The Public On The Struggle Against The Corona Virus Pandemic

Labour Party EMEP (Turkey)

Corona virus is not a disaster that suddenly surfaced due to the Chinese eating bats. Neither is it a natural disaster, an unexpected anomaly. On the contrary, the likelihood of such a pandemic had already been identified by health organisations, discussed by relevant bodies in each country, and the need to prepare for such an eventuality had been noted. It is established that the Ministry of Health in our country prepared a report on this issue as late as April 2019. Warnings and advice from scientists and health professionals that warned of a likely epidemic, when the first Chinese cases had surfaced, were ignored. Capitalist countries that invested billions of dollars on development of weapons technology, supporting arms monopolies, left their peoples unprepared for a pandemic of this scale.

Not only did governments around the world fail to take steps to stop the early spread of the virus, they underestimated and downplayed the threat until it became serious enough to disturb capitalist economy and the mechanism of exploitation.

Pandemics with high death rates were witnessed in history, all around the world. We continue to see different epidemics of varying types every so often. It is not possible to say that Coronavirus is the last stop in a succession of epidemics caused by virus mutations such as bird flu, swine flu, Sars-Mers.

Main factors that trigger modern epidemics are profit-driven industrial interventions that disrupt 'natural' progress in and damage the entirety of our natural environment; ranging from the conditions small cattle and poultry animals are kept in, to hybridisation of legumes and pulses, to genetic modification of almost all food products. Opening of forests to looting and interventions on key sources of water, leading to the disruption of natural balances, can also be added to this list. In short, the pandemic had announced its arrival long ago.

However, the spread of the pandemic, affecting such a huge population, is not down just to the virus itself. The real issue is the liquidation of the gains of workers and the public in the area of health and healthcare becoming a commodity. Healthcare services have become an area in which big capital invested heavily in and hopes to make the most profit. Capitalism develops not only the opportunities for epidemics but also the conditions and the basis for worsening consequences of their destructive effect.

The Capitalist System and Governments Are Making Workers and Labourers Pay the Cost of the Pandemic

The reason for high loss of life in this coronavirus pandemic is the fact that we live in a system that doesn't have public health as its priority. Disregard for the core principles of public health,

systemised as a result of hundred years of scientific development and the struggles of the peoples; privatisation of health institutions, leaving production of medical equipment and drugs to the mostly unsupervised industrial companies after maximum profit; the almost complete elimination of protective and preventative health services; the erosion of social welfare policies; these are the main culprits that led to the situation today. Accumulations and gains over the centuries by peoples have been laid to such waste and public resources pillaged to such a degree that it is almost impossible to deal with the current situation. The issue that arises now, also in the light of governments' stance regarding isolation and quarantines, in support of companies that do not want to give up on their profits: the rulers of the system see viral elimination fitting for the workers and the underprivileged, doomed to die of hunger if they don't work and from the pandemic if they do. The attitude is we will lose some if we must but will continue to exploit the ones that survive.

Workers suffer the heaviest burden of the consequences of the functioning of a capitalist ring that collectively led to the rise of the pandemic by creating the conditions for it but also led to its spread through their actions. This virus has once again exposed the rift between social classes. While the capitalists have withdrawn to their own safe environments and isolated, production and provision of services continue in their factories, companies, workplaces, at the expense of workers' lives. The bourgeoisie are the ones on the protected side of the pandemic and the workers are on the unprotected side.

The One-Man Regime Is After Saving the System Not the People

The path followed by the AKP leadership in the face of the pandemic prioritises not public health but the continuation of the system. This does not differ from many countries in the world. However, it is slower in our country as the declared 'national struggle' against the pandemic carries the colour and stamp of approval of the now well-established leadership reflex. The economic packet introduced opens up the support of the treasury and the banks to big capital and big companies; while the government is underwriting their liabilities, it is also mercilessly and tactlessly collecting donations from workers.

The one-man party leadership has once again demonstrated that it is in the service of its partners of monopolist capitalists. Trying to make each event favourable to itself, the government is trying to create a nationalist vibe; using this time of great concern for the public to increase the encroachment on rights and political pressures. The pandemic, just like it was on the coup attempt of 15 July, is seen as a means and reason to strengthen the one-man regime by Erdoğan and his circles.

The Erdoğan government, transferring all the riches, especially those created by the workers, of the country to the capitalists has left the fight against the pandemic to individuals. While nothing noteworthy is done for public health, the campaigns for donations by local authorities controlled by the CHP and the 'We're defending the public' campaign by HDP have been suspended by the government, which sees any action that does not involve them as a threat. The leadership, having shown the same attitude during the Van and Elazığ earthquakes does not allow others to fill in

the gaps it left and determines the parameters of its order to “look after your own selves”; “as much as I allow you to, in the way that I want you to.”

The leadership is irresponsible, visionless, inept, unscientific and illogical in terms of combating the pandemic. Initially causing people to infect each other in front of post offices, lining up to receive the 1000TL government help, and taking two days to think of delivering the help to people at their homes; they are making it up as they go along. They do not have a plan or a method.

Unions and workers’ associations that offered a plan and coordination are kept out of the process. Keeping the scientific committee that they themselves set up as just advisors, they even demand words of allegiance from the health secretary as he is about to go on to TV to make a statement. The hurt caused by leaving workers’ associations, especially the Turkish Doctors Association (TTB), health organisations and workers’ organisations out of the struggle against the pandemic is increasing by day. The public suffers from the attempts to save the day and to benefit from an extraordinary situation.

If political pressure and government bans are increasing by day, it is a necessity and legitimate to counter this and defend the democratic rights and freedoms of the public.

Furthermore, if under the current conditions, working means playing puss-in-the corner with death, it is legitimate and right for workers to go on strike or down tools. We will only overcome these extraordinary conditions through the solidarity of workers, continuing our efforts to organise and preparing for harder struggles.

Labour Party (EMEP) will continue its work regardless of the conditions.

In terms of the urgent steps to be put into practice to fight the pandemic and for public health, we call firstly on workers and the public, workers’ organisations and democratic forces to;

1 – Within the struggle against the pandemic, the running and control of all private health establishments, factories that produce healthcare equipment and drugs should be transferred to unions, workers’ associations and health workers.

2 – Healthcare cannot be a subject of profit and trade. Privatisation of health services should be stopped, the public right to free and quality healthcare should be guaranteed.

3 – All work and production in non-essential sectors should immediately be stopped, workers in these sectors should be given paid leave. Flexible working practices that flaunt the pandemic conditions should be banned and sackings should be outlawed.

4 – Factories, workplaces and living areas where infection has surfaced and all risky areas should be assessed, tests carried out and free masks, gloves and disinfectants should be distributed.

5 – All families living below the official line of poverty should be exempted from utility bill payments as well as telephone and internet costs for the duration of the pandemic. Citizens in

this situation should have their credit payments deferred without cost and should receive a minimum level of income.

6 – It is highly unlikely that the money collected from the public under the pretext of donations will be spent on healthcare; given that all government resources are opened to, especially the partisan, capital and all their liabilities are underwritten by the government but also the unemployment fund is cleaned out. Occupying the public with phony donation campaigns should stop and a wealth tax should be introduced.

7 – The use of the unemployment fund for purposes other than to support workers and their families should stop. All resources should be distributed with regard to basic needs of the public.

8 – The working hours of those that have to must be reduced without a reduction in their pay. A safe working environment should be established, protective equipment and clothing should be provided without cost.

9 – The Canal İstanbul Project must immediately be stopped, guaranteed payments for the building of bridge, airport, city hospitals must be cancelled and the funds for these projects must be spent on public health.

10 – All antidemocratic activities, actions, removal of rights and political pressure must be stopped.

<https://www.emep.org/en/lets-stop-carrying-this-outdated-system/>