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Current Threats to the Constitution

Prashant Bhushan

Sixty nine years ago, we framed a constitution and founded a republic. The foundations of this republic are a democratically governed society with various fundamental rights guaranteed to every citizen and the establishment of institutions which will preserve democracy and the rights of citizens.

Though we founded a representative democracy where people do not have a direct say in government decision making or law making, but it is implicit that for democracy to be meaningful, the people must have adequate information about what is happening in society, how the country is being governed, what kind of law and policies are being proposed, so that they can discuss all these issues and express their opinion about them.

It is also necessary in the functioning of democracy that power and in particular financial power is not so unevenly distributed, so that a few people will be able to in Noam Chomsky's words "manufacture consent" by using their power to advertise and influence public opinion.

Our constitution also guarantees various fundamental rights to all citizens and some to even non citizens. The most important of these is the right to life and liberty which is guaranteed to citizens and non citizens alike which has been held by the Supreme Court to include not just the right to a bare life and bare liberty but also a life of dignity and thus having all those amenities and facilities which allow for a life of dignity such as food, shelter, education, healthcare, a healthy environment, a corruption free society, etc.

The right to liberty also requires a freedom from oppressive and draconian laws which jeopardise the liberty of citizens. In the other civil rights guaranteed by the constitution is the freedom of speech and expression which has been held to include the right to a free media as well as the right to information and therefore the right to be informed about the functioning of all public authorities and institutions. We have also been guaranteed the right to equality and therefore the protection of minorities from an assault on their

This is the text of the Krishna Bharadwaj Memorial Lecture, delivered by Prashant Bhushan at Jawaharlal Nehru University on March 14, 2019.

rights by a communal majority.

Various institutions have been created by the constitution and the laws to guard the functioning of democracy and also to protect fundamental rights of citizens. These include an independent judiciary, which has been tasked to protect fundamental rights and to ensure that the executive and the legislature remain within the bounds of the powers laid out for them by the constitution.

An Election Commission has been created to ensure free and fair elections and all that is necessary for that. A Comptroller and Auditor General has been set up to do financial and performance audits of every part of the government which uses public funds. Special laws have been made to set up an independent Central Vigilance Commission which is supposed to not only accord vigilance clearance to public servants, but also to supervise the functioning of the CBI and act as the nodal agency to receive complaints from whistle blowers.

The Lokpal Act was brought in to set up the apex anti corruption ombudsman and the CBI Act to create an anti corruption investigating agency. There are also various laws and institutions to protect the freedom of the press. A Salutory Whistle Blower Law was also passed.

If we do an audit of the functioning of our democracy, the health of fundamental rights of citizens and the health of institutions created to protect all of this, it might be useful to divide all that into what happened in the first 64 years and what has happened in the last five years since Independence—since as we will see the last five years have been a watershed in many ways.

In the first 64 years of our republic, our representative democracy made some progress and some regress as well. The breath and depth of education did improve overall during the first 64 years, thereby making way for a more educated citizenry.

The advent of the Right to Information Act in 2005, also led to a substantial advance in the progress of democracy as people got greater access to information about the functioning of public authorities.

A robust right to information campaign ensured that the RTI Act was used substantially leading to greater transparency of public institutions and authorities. The Election Commission also became more independent and robust, which led to freer and fair elections.

However, economic inequality of our society grew particularly after economic liberalisation, with policies focussing on GDP growth at any cost. This increasing economic inequality led to more and more wealth in the hands of fewer people at the top who could then use it to influence elections and thus our polity came to be controlled increasingly by large corporates and policies were tailored for the economic interests of large corporates rather than the people. This also led to the phenomenon of manufacturing consent as Chomsky called it.

On the front of fundamental rights, the first 64 years also saw some expansion of rights particularly by the Supreme Court through an expansive and creative interpretation of the right to life (which was held to include a right to live with dignity) and the freedom of speech (which was held to include the right to information, a free press, the right

to privacy, etc).

There was also some improvement in the protection of Dalits and minorities with the creation of a Minorities Commission and an SC/ST Commission. Several rights based legislations have also been enacted especially in the first decade of the 21st century, such as the Food Security Act, the Forest Rights Act, the Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and the new Land Acquisition Act of 2013. These went a long way to expand and strengthen the rights of poor and marginalised sections of society.

The first 64 years also saw a strengthening of several institutions, including the judiciary, which become more independent and robust in general, despite other institutional failures of being inaccessible to the majority of the people, being lethargic and also unaccountable and corrupt. Despite all these problems, its independence improved as the selection of judges was withdrawn from the government and vested with the judiciary itself. Though that led to slightly more independent judges being appointed, it did not necessarily lead to more honest or more competent judges being appointed.

The first 64 years also saw, strengthening of the independence as well as institutional depth of the Election Commission as well as of the CAG. Despite both these bodies being appointed by the government, this happened because of the growth of these institutions themselves and the breath and depth that was added to them, as well as an institutional embedding of their functional independence, which gradually seeped into the consciousness of the individuals who came to man these institutions, especially in the

last 30 years.

The Supreme Court also chipped in to order changes in the method of selection of the Director, CBI, the Central Vigilance Commission and the Police Chiefs in order to make them more independent. The institutional changes directed by the court in the police organisations were such that if they had been properly implemented it would led to a sea change in the functioning of the police, at least with regard to its independence from the political executive.

Unfortunately, however, many of those salutary changes ordered which included the establishment of a Police Establishment Board for transfers and postings of police officers, the creation of Police Complaints Authorities for entertaining complaints against Police Officers and a minimum tenure for field level officers, have been frustrated by an obdurate executive in most states which want to have the police as their handmaiden, to be used for their political ends.

Assault on democracy

The last five years have been a watershed in the functioning of our democracy, the protection of fundamental rights as well as the health of institutions. These years have witnessed an unprecedented assault on various elements of democracy, on rights and institutions.

The last few years have seen a steady erosion in the independence of the Election Commission, and after many years we are finding that important decisions of the Election Commission, especially the announcement of dates of elections and the enforcement of its model code of conduct, increasingly appear

to be partisan and decided by the government.

Officers from Gujarat who are said to have been close to the Prime Minister and Amit Shah have been appointed to the Election Commission, with the present Chief Election Commissioner not only being from Gujarat but also one who figures in the Radia tapes where he talks to her about an acquaintance who claimed that he had paid 9 crores to obtain a favourable judgement from the then Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. He was at that time perhaps heading Air India.

That such a senior officer did not bother to report this serious corruption of justice to any authority, but quietly mentioned it in gossip with a corporate lobbyist Nira Radia, speaks volumes about his character. It is because of the erosion of public confidence in the independence of the Election Commission that people have become very nervous about the integrity of the electronic voting machines and there is now therefore a persistent demand, especially by the opposition, to go back to paper ballots.

Elections in the last five years are now being increasingly influenced by money power. This is partly because the Election Commission has failed to enforce the limits on spending by political parties. But also because parties and candidates have begun to get unlimited amounts of money from their corporate cronies. It has been estimated that one lakh crore would be spent by parties and candidates in the 2019 elections, out of which eighty thousand crore would be spent by the BJP and its candidates alone.

Apart from not fixing limits for spending by political parties

and not making laws to ensure that parties and candidates receive and spend money only through banking channels (cashless transactions which the PM wanted to impose on the country through demonetisation), three retrograde changes in the law of election funding have increased the role of money power and corporate hijacking of elections.

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, brought primarily to prevent parties, candidates and public servants from getting and being influenced by foreign funds, has now been amended to allow receipt of foreign funds through subsidiaries of foreign companies. The limits on corporate donations to parties and candidates which was earlier 7.5% of their profits has been removed to allow unlimited corporate funding.

Worst of all, a new anonymous instrument of political funding has been introduced through the instrument of electoral bonds which are bearer bonds and which allow anonymous funding of political parties even through banking channels. Thus the path has been cleared for payment of bribes by corporations to the ruling parties through the device of electoral bonds which guarantee the anonymity of their donors. It is not surprising therefore that the BJP has received about 95% of the approximately 2,000 crore of the funding through electoral bonds in the last 2 years since they have been introduced.

All the above amendments of electoral funding have been achieved by the dubious device of smuggling these amendments in through a Finance Bill, which avoids the amendments being taken to and voted in the Rajya Sabha where the ruling party doesn't have a majority.

The device of the Money Bill to bring about amendments to various laws which have nothing to do with the consolidated fund of India has been increasingly resorted to by the present government, making a mockery of the Constitutional requirement of bills being passed by both houses of parliament.

Parliament itself has seen a steady erosion in the number of days it meets, the time spent in discussions and particularly the time spent to discuss laws which are passed. In the last five years, not even 10% of the slotted parliamentary time has been spent in any meaningful discussion and perhaps not even 1% to discuss the slew of laws that have been passed amidst shouting and confusion.

Thus, far from making democracy more participatory, even in terms of allowing prior disclosure of Bills proposed to be passed or allowing any public participation in the laws to be made, even the present nominal representative democracy has been steadily emasculated.

During the last five years, the Right to Information Act has also been eroded by throttling the Information Commissions and not appointing people to man the vacancies. Even when the vacancies are directed to be filled by court orders, pliable bureaucrats have been appointed without any transparency in the selection. Simultaneously, crony capitalism has grown with policies being increasingly controlled by large crony capitalists who ensure that policies and government decisions are tailored for their economic benefit and to the detriment of the common people.

Our banks and financial institutions have been plundered by crony corporates who now owe

tens of lakhs of crores of unpaid debt to our banks. Many of them have been allowed or made to flee the country and have comfortably ensconced themselves in London or tax havens like Antigua or Bermuda, while our government makes a show of searching for them or seeking to extradite them.

Consequently economic inequalities have grown enormously and the GINI index that measures economic inequality is perhaps the highest in the world for India. It was recently reported that the wealth of the nine richest Indians is equivalent to the wealth of the bottom half of our population. All this, coupled with the control of few corporations over large sections of the mainstream media, has accentuated the manufacture of consent in India.

Erosion of rights

The last five years have also seen an unprecedented assault on the freedom of speech and the right to dissent. Persons critical of the government have been assaulted on the streets by saffron lynch mobs which are patronised by the government and a complicit police; in many cases they have been charged with sedition, despite the fact that the Supreme Court had injuncted the use of this law for a situation where there is no incitement to violence or public disorder.

Those who escape the lynch mobs or sedition have had to face the wrath of an organised lynch mob on the social media, which as Swati Chaturvedi pointed out in her book *I Am a Troll* are organised and controlled by none other than the Prime Minister himself. These trolls descend like a pack of wolves

on any influential person who criticises the government or the PM by bombarding them with abuse and threats, on their phones, on social media platforms, etc. This is also sometimes picked up and amplified by those sections of the mainstream media which have become lapdogs of the government.

Dalits and minorities have especially borne the brunt of lynch mobs as they have been sought to be bludgeoned into submission by assertive saffron mobs who are secure in the confidence that the government and police will not act against them. Documentation of cases of lynchings have shown three stark facts:

1. Almost all of the hundreds of cases of mob lynching have been directed against Muslims and Dalits;
2. In almost all cases, the perpetrators are associated with assorted saffron groups who are connected with the BJP/RSS or at least enjoy their protection;
3. The police rarely act against the perpetrators unless compelled to by courts and often act against the victims themselves.

False information or fake news which is designed to generate hate against Muslims in particular is being generated and spread on a mammoth scale by the social media organisations affiliated with the BJP and its assorted lapdog and media portals. This has created a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness among large sections of minorities in particular as well as Dalits, especially when they see the administration, including the judicial administration, being reduced to bystanders.

The use of draconian laws like UAPA and NSA, particularly on hapless sections of minorities including Dalits, have accentuated

the injustice and the climate of fear among them.

The condition of the poor and the marginalised has become even more helpless with massive unemployment and job loss in the last five years and increasing agrarian distress wherein agriculture has become a losing proposition and thousands of farmers are being forced to commit suicide every year. India continues to steadily plummet on the Human Development Index as well as other indices designed to measure the well being of the majority of society. All of this has led to a degradation of human rights as well as a degradation of democracy in the country.

The most serious and long lasting assault on our republic has however been on account of the assault on our institutions. These include constitutional bodies like the judiciary, the Election Commission, the CAG as well as statutory bodies like the CVC, the CBI, Lokpal and also universities and other educational institutions and bodies.

There has been a concerted attempt by this government to erode the independence of the judiciary, in which it has succeeded to some extent. Even after the attempt to bring back the executive into the role of selecting judges through the Judicial Appointments Commission was scuttled by the Supreme Court, we have seen this government brazenly scuttling appointments of judges recommended by the collegium by just sitting on those names that it finds inconvenient; in particular, recommendation of judges from among minority communities have borne the brunt of this assault by the government.

Apart from sitting for years on several recommendations,

the government has refused to appoint inconvenient judges whose appointments have been reiterated repeatedly by the SC collegium in gross violation of the law.

For the first time in more than three decades, fingers are being pointed at the independence of the Election Commission and the CAG. In the audit of the Rafale contract, the government predicted in advance in a note given to the Supreme Court, three months before the CAG report was finalised, that the report would redact the details of pricing. This indeed happened three months later when the CAG report on the Rafale purchase was finalised and given to the PAC.

The redaction of pricing details from a CAG report is not merely unprecedented, it is contrary to the CAG Act which requires the entire report of the CAG to be tabled in parliament. The fact that the government knew three months in advance that the CAG would bow to this illegal demand of the government to redact pricing details from its report, demonstrates the extent to which the independence of the CAG has been compromised by the government.

Despite the Lokpal Act being passed more than five years ago, the appointment of a lokpal has been steadily stonewalled and even the inclusion of the leader of opposition from the selection panel of the Lokpal has been obstructed for five years by this government, which amended the Lokpal Act with alacrity to exempt public servants from making their asset disclosures to the government.

Also, for more than five years, the Whistleblower Act has not been notified, while an amendment has been brought to the Act which

will completely stultify the law by saying that any whistleblower who provides any more information about corruption in the government than what an ordinary citizen can obtain under the Right to Information Act, would lose his protection as a whistleblower and would be liable to be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act.

Instead of repealing the colonial Official Secrets Act, this government now threatens to use it against journalists who have published documents exposing the corruption, violation of rules and the interference of the PMO in the Rafale contract. Apart from using the Official Secrets Acts, this government and its officers have also sought to use Contempt of Court as a weapon to intimidate activists and silence criticism of the government.

The CBI has been degraded further from being a caged parrot to blood hound of the government. When a CBI Director, whose tenure was protected, threatened to investigate the Rafale contract he was ousted in a midnight coup by the government and one Nageshwar Rao was appointed as Acting Director, who affected 40 transfers in the CBI within a day at the behest of the government.

The Central Vigilance Commission is headed by an officer who played a key role in suppressing incriminating documents recovered in the raids on the Sahara and the Birla Group of Companies which showed the PM and BJP Chief Ministers as recipients of large sums of unaccounted cash.

Another gentleman appointed as Vigilance Commissioner had been indicted by the CVC itself for having fabricated the confidential report of his subordinate senior officer of

a bank of which he was Chairman for destroying the career of that officer.

Universities and educational institutions and regulatory bodies have particularly been in the cross hairs of this government. Virtually every appointment of Vice Chancellor in universities has been made of people who are associated with the RSS or have been close confidants of the present rulers. Thus, many appointments of Vice Chancellors as well as other educational regulatory bodies have been of people who have no academic qualifications for their jobs but have been placed there only due to their saffron links.

Such persons have systematically not only crushed dissent but also dismantled the spirit of inquiry and critical thinking in these educational institutions. Suggestions have been made by these persons to put up tanks in the premises of their universities to instil “nationalism” among students. Some of our finest universities like JNU, BHU and Hyderabad University have especially borne the brunt of this assault.

Reclaiming the Republic

The republic founded by our constitution makers is therefore under siege today. Reclaiming it would require a slew of several fundamental and wide ranging reforms in our laws, policies and institutions. Many of these have been suggested in a document titled “Reclaiming the republic” prepared by a group of concerned and eminent citizens of this country from among academics, activists, lawyers, judges, etc.

In this document, we have tried to put together a list of the most essential and urgent reforms in laws,

policies and institutions which are necessary to reclaim the republic and democracy and for fundamental rights and regulatory institutions to survive in this country.

Pushing through these reforms would be a massive undertaking and would require a major campaign on

the part of a very large and broad section of our civil society activists, movements and other concerned citizens. The stakes are high for all of us and I hope we can all rise to the occasion.

(The author is a noted Supreme Court advocate.)

Modinomics = Falsonomics: Part II

Neeraj Jain

It is not just GDP data that the government is fudging. It is fudging or is blocking the publication of every kind of data related to the functioning of the economy that shows that the economy is not doing well and which therefore puts the BJP in a bad light.

Employment–Unemployment Surveys Scrapped

Thus, for instance, the government has discontinued the quinquennial NSSO Employment–Unemployment Surveys (EUS) conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation as well as the Annual Employment–Unemployment surveys conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The NSSO–EUS, like all the other NSSO surveys embodied the idea with which the organisation was instituted in 1950 by Professor Mahalanobis, widely regarded as the father of Indian statistics. His vision for the organisation was to obtain and quantify comprehensive information on an annual basis on the socio-economic, demographic, sectoral and other profiles of the country, both at the national and state levels. After trying different approaches and

concepts, the NSSO standardised the concepts and definitions of labour force, employment and unemployment, which were then adopted in quinquennial surveys (large sample sizes of over 100,000 households) on employment and unemployment which have been conducted regularly since 1972–73 in rural and urban areas.

The quinquennial surveys served as an extensive source of information pertaining to not only the levels of labourforce participation rates, work participation rates and unemployment rates, but have provided rich information on the levels of under-employment, different categories of workers, their living conditions and contractual status (self-employed or wage employed and their types), level of wages and earnings, occupational structures, status of informal labour and several other indicators of the quality of the workers and the non-workers.

In all, there have been a total of ten rounds of these surveys which provide validated and internationally comparable long term statistics pertaining to the Indian labour markets. After the 68th round that occurred in 2011–12, the next round was due in 2016–17, but the Modi Government has discontinued

it. No public announcement was made about the reasons, the survey was scrapped silently. Probably its scrapping had something to do with the uncomfortable data from the fifth round of the Annual Employment–Unemployment Survey of the Labour Bureau (discussed below), after which this survey too was discontinued by the Modi Government.¹

The Annual Employment–Unemployment Survey (EUS) was begun in 2010, to make available some data annually, and was conducted by the Labour Bureau. The report of the fifth round was released in September 2016. As per this report, the unemployment rate in India shot up to a five-year high of 5 per cent in 2015–16. The survey reported that about 77 per cent of the households were reported to be having no regular wage or salaried person.²

Following the release of this report, the Modi Government decided to discontinue not just the Annual Employment–Unemployment Survey but also the NSSO's quinquennial survey. The latter survey is a more in-depth survey, and would have revealed in greater detail the serious employment crisis gripping the economy, especially after demonetisation. The ostensible reason given for scrapping these surveys is that they make available data after a lag, and so do not help in policy making.³ But the real reason lies elsewhere is obvious from the fact that following the scrapping of these surveys in 2016, the government has made no data available about the unemployment situation in the country for the past three years! The only plausible conclusion that can be drawn is that the government does not want the

truth about the disastrous impact of demonetisation and GST on the employment situation in the country to come out. Several private surveys have revealed that these policies have caused enormous job losses—for instance, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reported that 1.5 million jobs were lost during the first four months after demonetisation (January–April 2017).⁴

Statisticians Rebel

The government came under immense criticism for its failure to come up with a new survey to estimate the employment situation in the country. So, it instituted another employment survey, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), to be done by the NSSO. This survey was conducted between July 2017 and June 2018. It was important as it was the first official survey of the country's employment situation after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the demonetisation of high-value currency notes in November 2016. Despite the National Statistical Commission (NSC) approving the release of the data—and the NSC is the apex body that coordinates India's statistical activities and is autonomous⁵—the Modi Government decided to withhold its release. Unfortunately for the government, its attempt to give this report a quiet burial failed, because India's statisticians finally revolted. They had had enough.

On January 28, 2019, the only two non-government members of the National Statistical Commission, P.C. Mohanan (who was also the acting chairperson of the Commission) and Delhi School of Economics professor J.V. Meenakshi resigned from the Commission to protest the

delay in the release of the report, though the NSC itself had officially cleared it. A newsreport quoted one of them as saying, “The commission is being sidelined, neglected. We felt that the NSC was not doing its job and we were not being involved in key decisions. The NSC's job is to restore trust in official statistics and we were not serving that purpose.”⁶

The resignations of India's top statisticians created a furore in the media. Soon after, on January 31, 2019, the *Business Standard* newspaper obtained and published important details from the report. The leaked data indicated that the survey had found India's unemployment rate to be at a 45-year-high of 6.1 per cent in 2017–18.⁷ This report tallies with another CMIE report that suggest a terrifying situation, with job losses amounting to 11 million for 2018.⁸

True to form, Union Minister Jaitley, who is more of a blogger than a minister, immediately issued a rebuttal from his hospital bed in the United States, claiming it was an “unverified draft”, while back in India, NITI-Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar held a ‘damage control’ press conference on the very same day to assert that the NSSO report was not final as the government had not approved it yet. When asked by reporters as to who in the government was supposed to approve the report, he fumbled, “I suppose the Cabinet will approve. I don't know.” Both these statements were rubbished by experts. P.C. Mohanan, who had resigned from the Chairmanship of the NSC just a few days ago, lambasted Jaitley's and Kumar's claim that it was a “draft” report and asserted that it was the “final report” and needed no further approval. Former Chief Statistician Sen, when

asked if it was a practice to get the Union Cabinet's approval for NSSO reports, emphatically stated, "It has never happened. No. Never."⁹

And Bibek Debroy, chief of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, declared recently that a new national sample survey will be conducted by the government to show there is substantial job creation—a chilling and open admission that the government would window-dress national employment data.¹⁰ What brazenness! But it is reflective of the mentality of the entire Modi Government—that they are accountable to no one, and can subvert any institution in the country to further their agenda.

Even Mudra Job Survey Goes Underground

More recently, it was reported in the media that the government has suppressed the publication of yet another employment survey: by the Labour Bureau on the number of jobs created under the Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency (MUDRA). This survey by the Labour Bureau covered an estimated 97,000 Mudra beneficiaries who took loans between April 8, 2015 and January 1, 2019. A report published in the *Indian Express* quoted sources as saying that the report will not be made public for another two months, that is, till after the Lok Sabha elections. The official reason cited are "errors" and "anomalies" in the methodology used for the jobs survey.¹¹

The MUDRA programme was launched in April 2015, and provides loans at low rates for people to set up small business and in order to generate jobs through self-employment. Last August, the Department of Financial Services

had stated that around 90% of the loans fell in the lowest category of under Rs 50,000. Clearly, this amount too measly for any serious, even if small, entrepreneurial venture, and so obviously, job creation under the MUDRA scheme about which PM Modi himself has been making such tall claims must be negligible.¹²

Given the audacity with which the Modi Government has been manipulating / suppressing all uncomfortable data, it is obvious that the MUDRA survey results would have also told a similar story of job losses and joblessness, and so the Modi Government has suppressed this report too.

After suppressing all these official surveys that would have revealed the distressing state of unemployment in the country—to give just one anecdotal evidence, around 1.9 crore candidates, including some with PhDs, applied when the Railways advertised 63,000 low-level and mid-level jobs last year¹³—the Prime Minister and his cabinet ministers are now giving speeches all over the country making wild claims about millions of jobs having been created during the past five years. If indeed this is true, what was the need to suppressing the survey reports—by statistical bodies that are considered to be among the best in the world (that is, before the Modi Government set about destroying them).

Does the Govt Care About Data Integrity Anymore?

Another important statistic that the government has manipulated / suppressed is farm suicide data. First, soon after coming to power, in 2014 itself, the Modi Government got the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to make major changes in

its methodology because of which a majority of farmer suicides got shifted to new or revised categories in NCRB data tables. Because of these new parameters, the number of farmer suicides in 2014 fell to 5,650, which was less than half their 2013 figure of 11,772. On the other hand, there was a spectacular increase in suicides recorded under the category "Others", from 24,809 in 2013 to 41,216 in 2014. But even with these new diluted parameters, in 2015, the number of farmer suicides crossed the 8,000 mark, recording a whopping increase of 40% over the 2014 figure of 5,650 suicides. After that, further release of data on farmers' suicides stopped! On December 18, 2018, Union Agriculture Minister Radhamohan Singh unashamedly told parliament that the NCRB, which collects such data, has not published figures of farmer suicides since 2016.¹⁴

Likewise, the Modi Government got the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to suppress data about the quantum of demonetised currency that had returned to the banks. The RBI normally releases data on cash with the public in its fortnightly bulletins. Indeed, it did so until mid-December 2016, after which it has suddenly found itself incapable of completing the task of counting the cash returned in demonetisation; it kept claiming that it was still counting the notes that had returned. Finally, after more than 20 months, it finally declared on August 30, 2018 that the counting had been completed and that 99.3% of the junked Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes have returned to the banking system.¹⁵

This manipulation of statistical data by the Modi Government has gone to such extremes that on March 14, 2019, a group of 108

eminent economists and social scientists from across the globe issued an open statement expressing concern about it. They emphasise the fact that economic statistics are a public good. Policy formulation will become difficult and faulty in the absence of data or when the data is wrong or insufficient. Not only that, credible economics statistics are a vital necessity for informed public discourse in democracies where citizens seek accountability from its government. They go on to say: “For decades, India’s statistical machinery has enjoyed a high level of reputation for the integrity of the data it produced on a range of economic and social parameters. It has often been criticised for the quality of its estimates, but never were allegations made of political interference influencing decisions and the estimates themselves.” However, lately, Indian statistics and the institutions associated with it have “come under a cloud for being influenced and indeed even controlled by political considerations. . . . Any statistics that cast an iota of doubt on the achievement of the government seem to get revised or suppressed on the basis of some questionable methodology.” Because of this, the “national and global reputation of India’s statistical bodies is at stake.”

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More recently, Raghuram Rajan, who has served as Governor of RBI during the first three years of the present Modi regime, and was also formerly the Chief Economist of the IMF, and therefore definitely cannot be called a “compulsive contrarian”—words used by Arun Jaitley to dismiss the statement of the 108 economists and social scientists mentioned above—in an interview with CNBC–TV18 stated that he is

“in the camp that has no idea what the statistics are at this point.” He stated that “a revamp” was needed “to really figure out what India’s true growth rate is”, and called for an impartial body to look at the numbers.¹⁷

Unfortunately, we have a government at the Centre that is not concerned with integrity of data anymore, so it is not bothered about the true growth rate, or the true unemployment rate, or the true poverty rate . . .

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Islamophobia, Theirs and Ours

Apoorvanand

The massacre at Christchurch in New Zealand has forced European countries into deep introspection. New Zealanders are bewildered as to how and why such a horror could visit their country. In Australia, the birthplace of the accused, people are being asked to look at the reality of increasing malice and hatred against Muslims in particular and immigrants in general. It has been pointed out that the massacre is only the end point of the Islamophobia that is spreading across public life, institutions and the media.

Amidst this recognition of Islamophobia, it was heartening to read about mosques across the globe being flooded with flowers from people from other faiths. In Singapore, New Zealanders went to mosques to express their solidarity with the Muslims. They felt it was important not only to underline that the perpetrator, who sought to speak in their name through his 74-page manifesto, was rejected by them, but also to express their active empathy.

You could see the sincerity of pain on the face of the prime minister of New Zealand and could sense the urgency in the worry expressed by the Australian prime minister. He has also supported the call for action against an Australian senator who put the blame on the victims.

In India, home to the second largest population of Muslims in the world, we saw no such initiative. Indian Muslims were killed in the massacre but no compatriot sympathised with them. It is futile to expect the governments and political classes to join their kin in

their mourning. We happily accept the foreign currency they bring but would not share their loss.

My mind went to the attacks on mosques in India—Malegaon, Mecca Masjid, Ajmer Sharif. How did the nation react then and what was the response of the governments?

Mosques, in these election times, are in the news for a different reason. The BJP in Delhi has asked the Election Commission to “appoint special observers for the mosques especially in the Muslim-dominated areas so that political and religious leaders cannot spread hate among people to influence elections on the lines of religion”. It did not evoke outrage. Barring the AAP, no political party thought it necessary to call out the BJP for making mosques objects of suspicion.

In the West, there are people who work constantly to identify Islamophobia in all forms and demand action against those who promote it. In India, we have normalised it so much that if Muslims complain, they are called unnecessarily touchy. Experiences of Muslim children being mocked and bullied in their schools travel through generations. A man past his 70s tells me about how he was harassed by his schoolmates 68 years back for being a Muslim. A man in his 50s said that sitting through the classes of medieval history was painful for him. He could feel the accusing eyes of his classmates as the stories of Muslims plundering India rolled out as objective history. A Muslim girl, all of 6, studying in a “progressive” school in Delhi,

thanked her Hindu mother for being so wise as to not let the surname of her Muslim father be in her name. The principal of my daughter’s school refused to believe her when she complained about a teacher indulging in blatantly ‘othering’ Muslims. And we are not even talking about the chain of schools under the Saraswati Shishu Mandir organisation which turn out Hindus as perfect Others of Muslims.

Policy makers and implementers unabashedly express their Islamophobia under cover of national security. Recently a friend shared his horror after returning from a mid career training of police officers and civil servants who openly denounced Muslims and underscored the need to “put them in their place”. Madrasas are being asked to submit proof of nationalism by different governments. It has not shocked us that in the name of culture and economy the eating habits of a large number of people have been criminalised. The Supreme Court, by making Sri Sri Ravishankar one of the mediators in the Ayodhya dispute, legitimised Muslimophobia. You can speak against Muslims and yet remain respectable.

The ultimate form of Islamophobia experienced by Muslims is when they are told that they are so modern that they do not look like Muslims. Muslims are asked to shed their Muslimness in all forms to be accepted as equal members of a civilised society.

Elections are around the corner. We will see the open demonisation of Muslims as a means to mobilise

Hindu votes. Recently, in the campaign for the assembly elections, the prime minister and his party talked about a conspiracy to make a Muslim the chief minister of a state. A minister in Assam is openly talking about the fear of some constituencies turning Muslim majority and also about the “disastrous” prospects of Badruddin Ajmal becoming the chief minister. We have made Muslim demonisers our leaders and ask Muslims to accept them to prove their tolerance and inclusiveness. We see them as our role models. It is seen as a good bargain to secure economic growth.

Writers like Premchand and Ramdhari Singh Dinkar repeatedly asked Hindus to accept Muslims as equals. They are long dead. Islamophobia continues to run like blood in our veins. We share our lives with those who hate Muslims and yet claim to remain civilised. Unless we first recognise this duplicity, we would not be able to move towards getting rid of this disease.

(The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University.)

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And Now, It's Lohia's Turn!

Prem Singh

23rd March is Dr. Rammanohar Lohia's birthday. But it is said that he did not want people to celebrate the day because it was on this day that the revolutionaries—Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were executed by the British government. So most of his admirers and Indian socialists celebrate Lohia Jayanti by observing it as Martyrdom Day.

This time, on the occasion of Lohia Jayanti, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remembered Lohia on his blog. As soon as this news became public, one of my friends called me to take notice of this fact. He said with urgency in his voice that I should immediately write a reply to the Prime Minister's tweet. I told the friend that in today's politics, blogs and tweeters have become a huge industry, in which mercenaries or paid people work in large numbers. If one were to write answers to the blogs and tweets of the leaders, then there will be hardly any time to do one's own work. I asked the friend if anyone can respond to the stuff Modi has been stating/writing about personalities such as Gandhi, Ambedkar, Patel and Bhagat Singh for the last five years? Is it even desirable?

The phrase *khanti Lohiavadi* (staunch Lohiaite) is commonly used for diehard socialists. The friend who called me comes in the same category. He spoke anxiously saying ‘But the case of Doctor Saheb (Lohia) is altogether different. He was till now out of the picture. Modi should not be allowed to capture him.’ I replied that joining this controversy

would mean playing on Modi's pitch, and that serves no purpose. The friend was slightly angry at my reluctance. I tried to convince him that Modi and RSS can capture neither Gandhi, Ambedkar, Patel, Bhagat Singh nor Lohia. How can a person or organisation, which does not have any regard for the values of freedom struggle and the values of the Constitution, appropriate personalities who were moulded in the furnace of the struggle for the country's independence? There is a fundamental opposition between the two. Modi and RSS can use them only for their power game, and they are doing exactly the same. Regarding Lohia, saying anything about him in the context of Modi or RSS will be a bad joke.

The friend reluctantly agreed but remained adamant on the idea of refuting Modi. Finally I asked him if there is any justification in blaming Modi and the RSS for 'kidnapping' Lohia. The blame falls more heavily on those 'socialists' who, on the occasion of Lohia Jayanti or Lohia's death anniversary go to the extent of inviting Home Minister Rajnath Singh and President Ramnath Kovind along with other RSS/BJP leaders as guests and speakers on the day? They do this under the leadership of pro RSS/BJP leaders like Nitish Kumar and thus make a marketable business of Lohia! The friend was now really upset and he put the phone down saying that such people have definitely been successful. Look at the great future possible! This time if Modi wins, his government might

want to award Lohia with the Bharat Ratna. It does not matter of course, that it will actually be the worst kind of devaluation of Lohia till date.

The next morning, I read in the newspapers detailed reports on the comments Modi had made about Lohia in his blog. Modi, in the wake of the Lok Sabha elections, has finally made Lohia a weapon and attacked the opposition. The comment is full of inane observations and hollowness. It is a matter of regret that a person who had been a freedom fighter and who constantly fought for equality in the interests of the poor has been dragged on the scene for electoral gains on the occasion of his birth anniversary. Even more so when the person doing this is the Prime Minister of the country. As we know, there is no justification whatsoever in discussing Lohia's ideology, principles and policies in the context of Modi's blog. But I would only point out that Lohia's non-Congress-ism, which according to Modi, was his 'heart and soul' is a completely wrong statement. Modi has replaced non-Congressism with anti-congressism in his blog.

Lohia had fought for the independence of the country under the Congress banner. The Congress Socialist Party (CSP), of which Lohia was a part, was formed in 1934 within the Congress fold. After independence, the Socialist Party separated from the Congress in 1948. This decision was made because the Congress had refused to allow the existence of the CSP under its new party constitution. In a democracy, the criticism of the ruling Congress and its leadership was Lohia's democratic obligation. At least Lohia used to believe in this democratic ethos. At the fag end of

his political career, Lohia adopted the strategy of non-Congressism to defeat the Congress in 9 states. It was not his political theory but a strategy. In his last editorial of 'Jan' (October 1967), he reviewed that experiment and expressed his dissatisfaction with the results.

The Sonia Gandhi–Manmohan Singh Congress in the times of Modi has little to do with the Nehru Congress. The Sonia Gandhi–Manmohan Singh Congress is a supporter of corporate capitalism. The RSS/BJP and Modi too are supporters of the same ideology and system. When Manmohan Singh implemented the New Economic Policies in 1991, the senior BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said that now the Congress has adopted the ideology of the BJP. In this respect there is no difference of policies between the two parties. Modi is simply advancing the policies of the Congress. However, there is one difference: Manmohan Singh, being an economist of high calibre, carried out neo-liberal policies in the classical way, while

Modi makes blind moves in a bizarre manner. Even as regards misuse of power, the Modi government has not been far behind the Congress.

Citizens are being oppressed and humiliated for criticising Modi or the government during his regime; the constitutional institutions, which have formed the basis of democracy, are being devalued and destroyed; the ministers of the government openly proclaim that they do not accept the Constitution, rather they are working to change it; they go to the extent of declaring that this election of the Lok Sabha will be the last; the BJP president says we will remain in power for 50 years . . .

The Modi government's anti-democratic manifestations are endless. In spite of all this, Modi uses the name of Lohia, a democrat from beginning to the end, just to attack his rivals in the opposition! What can one call it—irony or the culmination of hypocrisy?

(The author teaches Hindi at Delhi University and is president of Socialist Party India.)

The People of Palestine Are on the March

Vijay Prashad

The bombs start again. Israel, as if on a timer, begins to pulverise Gaza. The bombs strike from one end of the country to another, a warning against the protests that have been ongoing for a year. There is a shudder from Gaza, phone calls to friends who say that they are fearful that this bombing run will escalate. Nothing is beyond Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, who will use these bombs as an advertisement for his campaign to be reelected as

Israel goes to the polls on April 9. The phone lines carry the sound of scared children and anxious adults, a building demolished, the warplanes shrieking overhead.

Abu Artema's Birds

In January of last year, the Palestinian journalist Ahmed Abu Artema sat at his computer in his home in Rafah (Gaza, Palestine). He had just returned home from a walk in this 365-square-kilometer

(141-square-mile) enclave that sits on the Mediterranean Sea. There is a hint of paradise in Gaza—the sea on one side, the citrus groves on the other. But the entire piece of land—populated by 2.2 million Palestinians—is hemmed in by the Israeli occupation. The land is dotted with barbed wire fences and ditches, with armed guards on alert to shoot where and when they will, and the sea is patrolled by Israeli naval vessels, which routinely stop and arrest Palestinian fishermen. Paradise is encircled by barbed wire and gunboats. Abu Artema decided to write a plea.

“No one stopped the birds,” he thought during his walk as he saw a flock of birds fly across the perimeter fence. The Israeli occupation, he felt, “clips my wings” and “disrupts my evening walks.” What if a Palestinian from Gaza decided to “see himself as a bird and decides to reach a tree beyond the fence,” he mused? “If the bird was Palestinian, he would be shot.”

So, this journalist—a father of four young children—wrote the following simple question: “What would happen if thousands of Gazans, most of them refugees, attempted to peacefully cross the fence that separated them from their ancestral lands?” The answer, plainly, was that they would be shot.

Land Day

In 1976, the Israeli government announced the seizure of 20,000 dunams of land in the Galilee. The government declared a curfew so that it could proceed with the land theft without protest. It miscalculated. Pressure grew from below, so Tawfiq Ziad—the mayor of Nazareth (the largest Palestinian city inside Israel’s 1948 lines)—called for a general

strike. The strike on March 30, 1976, was almost total, with the Israeli State reacting to it with ferocity. The land was seized, but March 30 became a monumental day, Land Day, an annual commemoration of the struggle against the Israeli occupation.

Abu Artema’s plea made in January 2018 became real on March 30, 2018, when the Great March of Return began. The initial plan was to start the protests on Land Day and then continue until May 15, the day to commemorate the Nakba or the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland in 1948. But the energy opened up by the Great March of Return could not be contained. This protest, held each Friday, began with 30,000 Palestinians on Land Day in 2018 and continues with tens of thousands of Palestinians each week.

Suffocation

When Abu Artema took to his Facebook page, he would not have been able to drink water—even if boiled—from his tap. That month, the Palestinian Water Authority warned that 97 percent of Gaza’s water was undrinkable because of high levels of sewage and salinity. It was lucky that Abu Artema was able to get on Facebook. Gaza only gets power for about four hours per day. The Israelis blame the Hamas government in Gaza for these problems. Such a story is only possible for someone with no memory.

In each of the punctual bombings of Gaza since Operation Hot Winter (2008), Israel has targeted Gaza’s power plant and its water sources (wells, water towers, sewage pipelines and sewage treatment plants). Millions of dollars

of damage are done to Gaza’s infrastructure, which then cannot be repaired because Israel prevents materials from entering the enclave. Because of the Israeli bombings and Israeli embargo, Gaza, the United Nations has found, will become “uninhabitable by 2020.”

It is no wonder the Great March of Return has seen such large crowds, so many people—including children—coming to the fence each week despite the Israeli snipers and the tear gas. Palestinians set up tents out of range of the snipers so that they could feed the protesters and heal them. The destruction of infrastructure put a heavy burden on Palestinian women, which deepened their political commitment and brought them to set up and work in these encampments.

Medical personnel and journalists would be on hand, thinking that their professions gave them immunity. It did not. The Israeli snipers fired at them: two journalists were killed, 184 journalists injured; three medics were killed, 181 medics injured. Hind Khoudary, a journalist, said that her work has been “more than [a] nightmare. I would have never imagined I would see people shattered into pieces.”

War Crimes

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 196 people have been killed by the Israeli armed forces, while 11,427 people have been wounded (over 500 of them are in serious condition, with at least 300 having had at least one leg amputated). The United Nations office in Palestine (OCHA) says that the number of injured is double this—23,603 from March 30 to the end of December 2018.

Last year, as the violence by

Israel on the Gaza perimeter fence escalated, the United Nations' Human Rights Council set up a panel of inquiry (comprised of Argentina's Santiago Canton, Bangladesh's Sara Hossain and Kenya's Kaari Betty Murungi). On March 18, the panel submitted its report. Israel's government, which did not cooperate, rejected the report. The report found that there were "reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers shot at journalists, health workers, children and persons with disabilities, knowing they were clearly recognisable as such." The Chair of the panel, Santiago Canton, went further, saying that the panel "has reasonable grounds to believe that during the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Some of these violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity and must be immediately investigated by Israel."

Israel

So, there it stands. The international community's panel says that war crimes were committed, but the legal framework stops at the borders of Israel. Must be immediately investigated by Israel. But Israel will do no such thing. It has rejected the panel and its findings. There will be no investigation of the war crimes beyond what the panel has found. Instead, Israel has begun to bomb from the sky.

Israel will hold an election on April 9, a little more than a week after the first anniversary of the Great March of Return. On the anniversary itself, tens of thousands of Palestinians are expected to walk towards the perimeter. Last Friday,

on March 22, Israeli soldiers killed Nedal 'Abdel Karim Ahmed Shatat (age 29) and Jihad Munir Khaled Hararah (age 24). Israeli tear gas canisters flew into the medical field station at Bureij Refugee Camp. About 181 Palestinians were injured on that day. This shows that neither the Palestinian protesters nor the Israeli soldiers will back down.

Israel's government is undaunted by the UN findings. The Palestinians have no choice but to protest. The confrontation will escalate on the first anniversary of the March. The Israelis will be harsh, harsher to give Benjamin Netanyahu the kind of

muscular response that allows him to bully his way back to power.

Abu Artema's birds—perhaps they are terns or gulls—continue to fly back and forth. They emerge out of the poems of Mahmoud Darwish, the poem that asks, Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly after the last sky? Palestinians will remain in this vast congested open-air prison called Gaza, hemmed in and forgotten, bombed once more, mercilessly.

(Vijay Prashad is the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.)

Tosepan: Resistance and Renewal in Mexico

Alex Jensen

Since the mid-1980s, Mexico has been a poster child for globalisation. Through free trade treaties and structural adjustment policies imposed by international financial institutions, the country has been "liberalised"—opened up to unfettered corporate investment and imports—to an extent matched by few other countries. Though the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is the most well-known trade treaty to affect Mexico, it is but the first and largest of numerous multilateral and bilateral agreements that make Mexico the world's free trade agreement (FTA) leader. All told, Mexico has signed 12 free trade agreements with 44 nations, 28 bilateral investment treaties, and 9 agreements of economic cooperation.

The grim consequences of globalisation in Mexico are by now familiar. NAFTA threw the doors open to heavily subsidised US

agribusiness products—especially corn—which subsequently flooded into the country. Imports increased three-fold, and the price of corn dropped 50 percent, devastating the rural economy and forcing some 4.9 million campesinos (peasants) out of farming altogether, precipitating their mass migration from the countryside to cities (and to the US) in order to survive.

NAFTA also exposed the Mexican economy to retail and fast-food multinationals based in the US, besieging the country with an avalanche of junk foods and soft drinks high in fat, salt, and sugar, and an attendant epidemic of deadly "diet-related diseases"—e.g. hypertension, diabetes, and obesity (these would be more accurately termed "corporate globalisation-related diseases").

The liberalisation regime has also fueled a veritable bonanza for extractive industries—from mining

and fossil fuels to big dams and mega-infrastructure developments. Transnational companies—with the blessing of state and national governments—have been scouring the country, extracting its natural wealth and concentrating the benefits in fewer and fewer corporate hands (the richest 1 percent in Mexico owns over half of the country's wealth). Consequently, Mexico hosts over 500 ongoing environmental conflicts—one of the highest counts in the world today. Defenders of the environment are targeted with violent reprisals by those pushing destructive development. Global Witness reports that 15 environmental defenders were killed in Mexico in 2017, up from 3 in 2016.

Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan

It is hard to find much hope amidst this desperate situation, and yet, throughout Mexico, there is a florescence of inspiring resistance and alternatives, some long-established, some only now springing up. In the southern state of Puebla, the lush, cloud-forested Sierra Norte mountains bordering Veracruz are home to one of the oldest and most inspiring of these movements of “the other Mexico” or México profundo: the Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan (also known as Tosepan Titataniske, meaning “United We Will Overcome”).

In Puebla, local communities defending their territories and lifeways are confronting corporate–state development projects, including mining, gas fracking, centralised electrical grid infrastructure, big dams, and big box stores. According to the EJ Atlas, concessions have been granted in Puebla for 11 mines and 14 hydroelectric projects,

along with petroleum development (including fracking).

But there has been a fierce backlash across the state, successfully blocking many of these projects. In the Sierra Norte, the resistance has been particularly spirited and effective, causing a number of hydropower projects to be suspended, and a planned Walmart (under its Mexican subsidiary name, Bodega Aurrerá) to be scuppered.

Some of the most effective resistance has emanated from a network of cooperatives called Tosepan that has been working in the region for 40 years, building up a parallel solidarity economy among largely Nahua and Tutunaku indigenous communities, encompassing some 35,000 members across 430 villages in 29 municipalities. Tosepan was instrumental in encouraging a citizen's plebiscite to reject the incursion of a Walmart/Bodega Aurrerá store in the town of Cuetzalan in 2010, by using arguments about the economic, cultural and environmental harms it would cause. An analysis was done showing that Walmart's promised 60 low-quality jobs would come at the cost of 500 local businesses, and put at risk the entire solidarity economy built up by Tosepan and others, based on ancestral indigenous practices. The significance of this victory cannot be overstated in a country where Walmart has steadily been taking over and dominating the economy (1 in 5 Walmart stores worldwide are in Mexico, destroying local livelihoods and spreading a culture of consumption, disposability, and waste).

All of these struggles of resistance help to uphold the main work of Tosepan: constructing a

holistic, sustainable, locally and democratically controlled economy rooted in the indigenous culture and knowledge of the Sierra Norte—a source of dignified livelihoods and ecological security, and a viable alternative to the distress-migration suffered by so many other communities.

As one of Tosepan's members, María Luisa Albores, explained in a 2016 article in *La Jornada del Campo*: “The history of Tosepan is completely tied to its mission and reason for being, adhered to up until today: ‘Improve the quality of life of the families of the members (of the cooperative), through work organised to advance towards the construction of a project of ‘vida buena’.”

Tosepan is comprised of three civil associations and eight cooperatives, which together cover basic needs. These include: organic agroecological farming of staples like corn, beans and vegetables, as well as crops like coffee, pepper, and sugarcane, both for sale (primarily to local markets) and for the community's subsistence; small-scale, community-based ecotourism; natural building using local resources like bamboo and adobe, incorporating features like water harvesting, solar dehydrators, ecological cookstoves, and renewable energy; local health-care, focusing on prevention and traditional herbal remedies; decentralised renewable energy with a goal of total energy sovereignty; and local finance to support the functioning of the entire ecosystem of cooperatives (Tosepan has its own cooperative bank, called “Tosepantomin”, meaning “money of all”/“everyone's money”).

Since 2001, Tosepan's members have been involved in organic

coffee production based on highly diversified, biologically rich agroecological “gardens of coffee” that are possibly the most diversified coffee farms in Mexico. A single hectare may contain over 200 species of plants, with multiple ecological and social functions and values (ritual, medicinal, fuel, food for family consumption, non-timber forest products for trade, etc.).

Since 2014 there has been a special emphasis on food sovereignty in Tosepan, with the goal of meeting local needs first. Some of the activities towards this end have included:

- increasing production of organic corn
- establishing vegetable gardens and chicken coops in the majority of member homes
- designing a local credit scheme called “Backyard Garden Credit”
- producing a documentary film, *Corazones de Maíz* (Hearts of Corn)
- organising events to barter backyard garden produce as well as seeds of corn, beans, amaranth, chilis and squashes
- maintaining a nursery with approximately 1 million plants—valuable forest species like coffee, macadamia, red cedar, cinnamon and many others—distributed each year to members for reforestation and agroforestry
- growing edible mushrooms on coffee pulp

Beginning in 2003, one of Tosepan’s signature efforts has been to bring back the native bee *Scaptotrigona Mexicana*. This bee was domesticated in pre-colonial times, and the unique system of two-tiered clay pot hives has been maintained since then. The bees’

honey, propolis, and wax have many medicinal properties, while the pollen is rich in proteins. The cooperative also makes products like shampoos, soaps and creams from the honey and wax.

Albores explains the ethos guiding Tosepan’s work: “Our cooperative model is based in values of a cosmovision or form of life that closely coincides with the social and solidarity economy which values life, people, the land, plants, and animals. From this vision we have constructed the mode of life of Tosepan. . . . The sense of belonging and permanence in our territory gives us identity . . . in the face of the onslaught and displacements of the capitalist system. Here we are and will continue with dignity, on foot walking in our land, which is sacred.”

The capitalist system’s relentless need to expand and grow continues to pose a threat, and Tosepan has not been spared the violence that the global economy inflicts on local people standing in its way. Some of its leaders have been murdered and others have narrowly escaped attempts on their lives by mercenaries in the pay of industry. Violence and physical intimidation, it seems, continue to be favoured tools of plunderers who have otherwise been blocked by well-organised communities deeply committed to defense of their homes.

This is one of the signal lessons of the inspiring work of Tosepan: that a culture of solidarity—fortified by cooperatives providing for material and cultural needs—deepens democracy, and that this in turn makes it very hard for predatory capital to enter. However inspiring and admirable, though, the corporate free-trade regime bearing down

on Mexico continues to hover menacingly in the background, posing a constant threat to any initiatives in local self-reliance, ecological security, dignity, and renewal. Thus the need to confront and dismantle this regime is still paramount, to enable many more Tosepans to emerge and succeed.

(Alex Jensen is active in environmental health / anti-toxics work / agro-biodiversity projects in India and several other countries.)

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*Letters to Editor***Might is Right****Jawaharlal Jasthi**

When Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State of the United States of America expresses hope that India will not buy oil from Venezuela, in diplomatic terms the 'hope' has to be understood as 'warning'. The situation in Venezuela, created by the US and nurtured by the so-called civilized western world, is now reaching its climax and the US is preparing for direct onslaught. They are calling back all their diplomatic staff from Venezuela. It is a grace that they waited for two months for it. They were expecting surrender of the country to the machinations of capitalist regimes. They thought that the people will drive out President Maduro leaving the Chair to the puppet Juan Guaido installed by them. But the people in Venezuela saw through the game and stood by the elected President. They know that the scarcity of essential goods in the country is the creation of the sadistic west in a naked attempt to appropriate the rich natural resources of the country.

It is true that there is scarcity of essential goods in Venezuela. People are starving, patients are dying for want of medicines. But the country cannot use its own assets and income to ameliorate the situation. It is a situation created by the sanctions promulgated by the US. They seized the assets of the country and froze the same. Nay, they told the banks to transfer all the balances in the name of Venezuela to the account of Juan Guaido, who is installed

and recognised as the legitimate President of Venezuela. Nobody, none of the civilized countries objected and everybody complied. That is the power of sanctions of America. Nobody is allowed to have any sort of commercial dealings with Venezuela. How can the Venezuelans survive? That is not their concern. But they blame the Venezuelan government for the inhuman situation and for the troubles of the people. Having created the situation, they shed crocodile tears. They had the temerity to send help to feed the people. But when the trick did not work, they tried to instigate the neighbouring countries to cross the border. This also failed as the people are against such an invasion. Then they resorted to sabotage of the electrical system.

The West is claiming that the elections in Venezuela are not legitimate. In this connection it is desirable to look to the legitimacy of those elections. Jimmy Carter, the former President of the US, established a Center to monitor elections over the world. His statement is worth noting. "Of the 92 elections that we have monitored I would say the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world. . . . By way of contrast the US election system, with its emphasis on campaign money is one of the worst." Now the person elected by the worst system is calling the person elected by the best system as illegitimate. Worse than kettle calling the pot black.

How does America get the right to declare sanctions on Venezuela and force all other sovereign countries to follow suit? The secret lies in its might—both economic and

military. It is the lone super power. Leave alone other countries, even the Secretary General of the United Nations, President of the Security Council or of the General Assembly fail to open their mouths.

The US can do whatever it wants with impunity. Who is there to question? That is what happened with Iraq. It will be repeated with Venezuela.

**Obituary:
Viqar Ahmad****Qurban Ali**

Viqar Ahmad, the most outstanding broadcaster and an authoritative voice of the BBC Urdu Service for many decades, passed away on 13 March, 2019, after a prolonged illness in a London hospital. He was 90. Viqar Ahmad was born in Sitapur in Awadh in 1929 in undivided India to Nisar Ahmad, a prominent lawyer of his time in Uttar Pradesh (then known as United Provinces). Viqar was educated at Lucknow and Aligarh universities in the years before Independence and developed an early interest in politics and history. After the Partition, the family moved to Pakistan in 1950, where they settled in Karachi. Soon afterwards, Viqar left for London to study B.A. in European History at Birkbeck College. At the same time, he began broadcasting for what was then the BBC's Pakistan Service, first as a contributor and later as a member of staff.

In 1961, Viqar Ahmad returned to Pakistan to take up a job as a

lecturer in European History at Karachi University. He also became a regular contributor to discussion programmes on Radio and TV.

In 1971, Viqar returned to London again to join the BBC Urdu Service, by now with an increase in his audience because of following his commentary of the recent political and military upheavals. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, through some of the most turbulent years in the

politics of South Asia, Viqar was the regular presenter of the BBC Urdu service's flagship daily current affairs programme, *Sairbeen*.

Outside the studio, Viqar was a man of many friendships across the Urdu, Hindi and Bengali Services of the BBC. He and his wife Rehana are also fondly remembered as wonderful hosts in their family home in Harrow, where Faiz, Ahmad Faraz and Zehra Nigah would sometimes

be found reciting their poems late in the evening. According to his former colleague at BBC Urdu service Prof. Obaid Siddiqui "Viqar bhai was a caring husband, the much-loved father, an enlightened, liberal, humane man, a much-loved friend and colleague, a wonderful host and a remarkable broadcaster, whose influence on BBC broadcasts to South Asia is still felt today".

Aurat March Still Faces Never-Ending Backlash and Threats of Violence in Pakistan

Aurat March 2019 was held on March 8 as part of International Women's Day celebrations in different cities including Lahore, Faisalabad, Islamabad, Peshawar, Karachi, Hyderabad and Larkana. People from diverse backgrounds came out on the roads in large numbers to express solidarity with women. What happened next was a never-ending backlash and social media abuse for all the women involved or speaking for the march.

Aurat March started last year in Karachi and spread to the whole country this year. It has emerged as a new wave of feminism in Pakistan—and with that, the march organisers have been receiving rape and death threats online.

Nighat Dad, founder of the Digital Rights Foundation is one of the organisers in Lahore. She received rape threats on Twitter in reply to one of her posts on the Aurat March. Five other women reached out to her nonprofit organisation, which works for digital rights in Pakistan and runs a cyber-harassment helpline, to complain of receiving rape and death threats.

A number of women connected with the march are facing violent hate speech, rape threats, acid crimes and worse. Women are being targeted for staging a demonstration for their own rights and publicly aligning with the cause of women's rights and offering vocal support to Aurat March.

Digital Rights Monitor has reported various social media posts and users involved in incitement of violence against the demonstrators.

"The hate against Aurat March is demonstrative of the fact that the turnout and the zeal behind the march has touched a sore spot among the supporters of patriarchy. This is the main reason why, even days after the march, we are continuing to see hateful commentary, endless judgement and increasing threats of violence", says Sadaf Khan, co-founder Media Matters for Democracy, "The march has touched such a raw nerve, that people are actually investing in spreading misinformation to discredit the movement."

Doctored images from the march, often containing sexual

innuendos and falsified slogans are being circulated online. While some users are trying to raise awareness about these morphed images, the negative public sentiment is still keeping these falsified images in circulation.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Wednesday unanimously passed a resolution condemning the Aurat March, which was held across Pakistani cities on March 8.

The resolution, presented by Rehana Ismail of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), claimed that women had taken part in the march holding placards and raising slogans that were "obscene".

"Some hidden forces have sped up their efforts to destroy our family system and social customs, the practical demonstration of which took place on March 8, 2019, in various big cities on Women's Day," the resolution stated.

It said the demands made at the event for women empowerment were "shameful and un-Islamic".

Some of the slogans raised in the march were: "Khana garam

Raghuram Rajan Says Capitalism is 'Under Serious Threat'

kardoongi, bistar khud garam lo.” (I’ll warm up the food, you warm up the bed yourself.) “Tu kare to stud, mein karoon to slut” (If you do it, you are a stud, if I do it, I am a slut) and “Mera Jism, Meri Marzi,” (My body, my rules.)

Pakistan has experienced a surge in social media usage with more than 40 million Facebook users. The rapid growth has sparked an online debate about misogyny, with some women highlighting daily hate and pornographic messaging.

Many of these politico-religious parties, in past years, have rejected Pakistan’s Domestic Violence Bill calling it “anti-Islam”. In a contradiction of sorts, many of these parties, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, also have vibrant women’s wings that are actively involved in their politics and activism.

A report by the Human Rights Watch last year estimated that 1,000 “honour killings”—the practice of relatives murdering girls or women because they think the victim has brought shame or dishonour on the family—take place in Pakistan each year.

Courtesy: Sabrang India

The Unemployment Crisis: Reasons and Solutions

Contribution Rs. 25/-

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Naushir Bharucha Marg,
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Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan on Tuesday warned that capitalism is under “serious threat” of a “revolt” as the economic and political system has stopped providing for the people, especially after the 2008 global financial meltdown.

Mr. Rajan, now a professor at the University of Chicago, told BBC Radio 4’s Today Programme that governments across the world cannot afford to ignore social inequality when considering the economy.

“I think capitalism is under serious threat because it’s stopped providing for the many, and when that happens, the many revolt against capitalism,” the former Chief Economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

Mr. Rajan said he believes that capitalism is breaking down because it is not providing equal opportunities.

“It’s not providing equal opportunity and in fact the people who are falling off are in a much worse situation,” he said. He said authoritarian regimes arise “when you socialise all the means of production. A balance is needed, you can’t pick and choose—what you need to do is improve opportunity,” he said.

Mr. Rajan, tipped by some as a possible successor to take over from Mark Carney as governor of the Bank of England, said it was possible in the past to obtain a middle class job with “modest education”. But the landscape has changed in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis

and the resulting austerity.

“Now, if you really want to succeed, you need a really good education. Unfortunately, the very communities that are hit by the forces of global trade and global information tend to be communities which have deteriorating schools, rising crime, rising social illnesses and are unable to prepare their members for the global economy,” he said.

A recent report from S&P Global Ratings suggests another global credit downturn is possible, with a 50% surge in worldwide debt since the global financial crisis. It said since 2008, government debt has risen 77% while corporate debt is up 51%.

However, the analysts said the next downturn is unlikely to be as severe as the 2008 financial crisis. In discussing the state of the global economy, Mr. Rajan also pointed to the challenges of putting limits on the trade of goods.

“If you put up those barriers, then down the line they’ll put up barriers to our goods. How are you going to keep the goods flowing across those borders when we need to send them?” he asked.

Courtesy: The Hindu

Spectre of Fascism

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Writers, Scientists, Filmmakers, Theatre Artists Appeal to Vote Out Hate Politics

Hundreds of writers, theatre artists, scientists and filmmakers have issued appeals stressing that the coming elections are crucial for the future of our country, the spectre of fascism looms over the country, and appealing to the people of the country to vote against inequality, intimidation, discrimination, and unreason, vote out the BJP. Reproduced below are extracts from their appeals:

Statement by over 100 Filmmakers:

Our country is going through the most testing times ever. Though culturally vivid and geographically diverse, we have always stayed united. As a nation. It has indeed been a great feeling to be a citizen of this wonderful country.

But all that is at stake now.

Fascism threatens to strike us hard with all its might if we don't choose wisely in the coming Lok Sabha election. Period.

As we all know, ever since the BJP came to power in 2014, things have changed. And only for the worse. A country polarised along religious lines isn't the India we have known. Besides, the BJP and its allies have failed miserably in keeping their election promises.

They are now using mob lynching and cow vigilantism to split the country communally. Marginalising Dalits and Muslims is the name of the game. They are spreading their hate campaigns with the help of the internet and social media. Patriotism is their trump card. Any individual or institution that raises the slightest dissent is labelled 'anti-national'. 'Patriotism' is how they grow their vote bank. Let us not forget that some of our eminent writers and media persons lost their lives because they dared to dissent.

Romanticising and exploiting the armed forces is one of their strategies. Even at the risk of engaging the nation in an unnecessary war. There is unrelenting onslaught on the cultural and scientific institutions in the country. They mock the collective intelligence of the people by appointing persons with no relevance or experience as heads of these institutions, propagating unscientific and irrational beliefs even at international science seminars, making us the laughing stock of the entire world. Banning and censoring 'works of art', especially the most powerful of the lot—cinema and books—is their way of keeping the population away

from the truth.

Farmers have been completely forgotten. In fact, the BJP has made the country the boardroom property of a handful of businessmen. Flawed economic policies that ended up as extreme disasters are covered up and made to look like successes. All with the help of false propaganda and marketing blitz. This has helped them to create a false optimism in the country.

Manipulation of statistics and history is another one of their fond projects. Giving them one more term in power will be a grave blunder. It could well be the last nail in the coffin for the biggest democracy in the world.

We urge all of you to do everything in your capacity to keep this harmful regime from coming back to power. Let your mandate be to choose a government that respects the Constitution of India, protects our freedom of speech and expression, and refrains from all kinds of censorship.

Yes, This is our last chance!

Appeal by more than 600 Theatre Artists:

Since colonial times, Indian theatre makers have celebrated India's diversity through their work. We have done plays as part of the freedom struggle, we have taken on social ills through our art, we have stood for social equity and inclusion, we have struck a blow at patriarchy, brahmanism and caste oppression. Theatre makers in India have a long and proud tradition of standing against forces of religious sectarianism, chauvinism, narrowness and irrationality. We have spoken from the margins, we have spoken of the margins. With song and dance, with humour and

pathos, with compelling human stories, we have, for over a hundred and fifty years, imagined a secular, democratic, inclusive and just India.

Today, that very idea of India is under threat. Today, song, dance, laughter is under threat. Today, our beloved Constitution is under threat. The institutions that have to nurture argument, debate and dissent have been suffocated. To question, to call out lies, to speak the truth, is branded 'anti-national'. The seeds of hatred have entered our food, prayers and festivals.

The ways in which this hatred has seeped into our daily fabric are alarming and it has to STOP. . . .

We, theatre practitioners of India, appeal to the people of India to help safeguard the Constitution and our syncretic, secular ethos. We appeal to our fellow citizens to vote for love and compassion, for equality and social justice, and to defeat the forces of darkness and barbarism.

Our appeal—vote bigotry, hatred, and apathy out of power. Vote against the BJP and its allies. . . .

Appeal by more than 150 Scientists:

The upcoming election is a crucial one. It asks for a re-affirmation of the most fundamental guarantees our Constitution gives us . . .

An atmosphere in which scientists, activists and rationalists are hounded, harassed, intimidated, censored, jailed, or worse, murdered, is not the future our country deserves. It is not the future we want to give our youth. We want them to awaken to a country that sees science as a means of democratic empowerment through sceptical, open-minded questioning, rather than just a

commercial enterprise. We must put an end to the denigration of rational, evidence-based public discourse; only then can we create better resources and opportunities for jobs, education and research.

We appeal to all citizens to vote . . . against inequality, intimidation, discrimination, and unreason. These are inimical to the values of our Constitution, whose promise is best reflected in Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's famous words:

*Where the mind is without fear and
the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken
up into fragments
by narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the
depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its
arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has
not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead
habit
Where the mind is led forward by
thee
Into ever-widening thought and
action
Into that heaven of freedom, my
Father, let my country awake.*

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Shadow of Fascism

Prabhat Patnaik

In its attack on civil liberties, its restructuring of the State to effect an acute centralisation of power, and its pervasive purveyance of fear, the Modi years resemble Indira Gandhi's Emergency. But the resemblance stops there. In fact the two differ fundamentally in several ways.

First, there were no lynch mobs, and street thugs, terrorising people and giving them lessons in "nationalism" during the Emergency. It was only the State that repressed people then; but now we also have gangs of Hindutva hoodlums, who force critics of the government to apologise for their "misdemeanor", with the additional threat of arrests still hanging over these intimidated critics. One cannot easily forget the sickening sight of a professor being made to ask for forgiveness on bended knees for a facebook post critical of the government.

A new nationalism

Secondly, unlike the Emergency, the current repression invokes an ideology, that of "nationalism", interpreted as being synonymous with Hindutva, but cashing in opportunistically on the prestige of India's anti-colonial nationalism, despite having nothing in common with it. As a result, while Indira Gandhi's repression had the effect (no doubt unwanted by her) of making her critics appear honourable, the current repression deliberately portrays them as dishonourable, as "enemies of the people". This vilification is further magnified when State agencies are used to accuse

these opponents of "corruption" and "wrongdoings" of various kinds; the idea is to destroy their moral standing before the people.

The third difference is the government's capturing of the media. During the Emergency, the print media was subject to pre-censorship; papers would appear with vast spaces inked out, because of which they actually gained people's respect. Now, the media, barring a few honourable exceptions which too may not remain so for long, are totally in the Hindutva camp; and the task of destroying the moral stature of the opponents is facilitated because of the media's complicity it.

The media's changed role in turn is linked to the fourth difference between then and now: the Modi government is entirely in cahoots with corporate interests, while the Indira Gandhi regime maintained its difference with the corporates and even presented a "progressive" anti-corporate image. Indeed no government in post-independence India has been as close to the corporates as the Modi government, a point exemplified by his travelling to Delhi in Adani's aircraft for being sworn in as Prime Minister. (It is worth recalling by way of contrast that when Jawaharlal Nehru, the Hindutva *bête noire*, had not had enough funds to visit his wife Kamla when she was dying of tuberculosis in a Swiss sanatorium, and G.D. Birla had offered him financial assistance, he had refused; he had himself somehow managed to raise the money eventually).

Anti-minorities

The fifth difference is its thrust against the minorities, especially the hapless Muslim minority. Indira Gandhi's repression did not have any specific ethnic or communal or caste target. It was repression pure and simple directed at her opponents and those of her son Sanjay who was notorious for his shenanigans; correspondingly it did not have any grandiose projects of rewriting history, of presenting a narrative vilifying a particular religious community, and of using State power to thrust this narrative down the throats even of school children, inculcating in them a sense of hatred towards fellow countrymen belonging to a different religion.

The sixth difference, associated necessarily with this project, is a promotion of unreason, a prioritisation of faith over rational discourse, a cultivation of disdain for evidence, and even for internal consistency of argumentation. This phenomenon has for long characterised the RSS, but it has now invaded official public discourse, with even the Indian Science Congress not in a position to free itself of this discourse.

The seventh difference is the destruction of institutions that the Modi government has initiated, and this is especially true of public universities and other publicly-funded centres of learning. All these institutions are faced with a "heads I lose – tails you win" situation. If they cave in to the demands of the government to change their ambience and curricula, they

become intellectually dead anyway, since intellectual survival requires independent critical thinking. But if they persist with independent critical thinking, then they are starved of funds, and charged with harbouring “anti-national” seditious elements, as has happened to JNU. The fact that some of the finest institutions in the country, from the JNU, to the Hyderabad Central University, to the Pune Film Institute, to the Tata Institute of Social sciences, to the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, have been struggling for breath is symptomatic of our times. Nothing like this had happened before; no government in the past had ever shown such a disdain for thought.

Repression

These differences between the Emergency years and the Modi years can be summed up as follows. The Emergency was an authoritarian imposition, by the State, that had got extremely centralised by then, upon society, or upon the people at large; it was no doubt a fall-out of the contradiction between the logic of capitalist development and a democratic polity, but it did not represent direct corporate rule. The Modi years have witnessed not just an authoritarian imposition upon society by the State, that has also got extremely centralised; they have witnessed in addition a setting up of one segment of society against another, and the promotion of a cult of hatred, behind which the State acts directly in corporate interests. The difference in a word is between authoritarianism and fascism. The statistics of repression, such as the number of persons jailed, were worse during the Emergency. But the potential for repression being

built up now is much greater, more far-reaching.

Every single one of the characteristics mentioned above as being specific to the Modi years, is in fact a characteristic of fascism: the rampaging mobs, the “fusion of corporate and State power” (supposed to have been Mussolini’s definition of fascism), the targeting of a hapless minority, the promotion of unreason, the destruction of universities, and so on. To say this does not mean that we shall have a re-enactment of the 1930s. We have fascist elements in power but not yet a fascist State; and today’s context being different from the 1930s, we are unlikely even to have one.

To be sure, as in the 1930s, the current tendency towards fascism, which is not just an Indian phenomenon but a global one, arises from the crisis afflicting capitalism. Such a crisis brings with it a threat to the hegemony of the corporate–financial oligarchy, which therefore looks for an additional prop to retain its hegemony, one that can shift the popular discourse away from the flaws of the system to the danger supposedly posed by the “other”, some hapless minority that can be made the focus of anger. Corporate capital in such situations picks up some “supremacist” fringe group (such groups spewing hatred against a minority exist in most modern societies) and pushes it centre-stage through massive financial backing, thus bringing into being what Michal Kalecki, the renowned Polish economist, had called a “partnership of big business with fascist upstarts”.

This is what has happened in India too, with the promise of neo-liberal capitalism waning because of the prolonged stagnation that the

world economy has entered into after 2008; Modi has been instrumental in effecting this “partnership” between big business and the Hindutva crowd, whence his current political importance.

There is however a basic difference between the 1930s and now, which consists in the fact that the corporate–financial oligarchy in the capitalist countries then was nation-based, and engaged in acute rivalry with similar oligarchies of other nations; the apotheosis of militarism which is necessarily associated with fascism inevitably led to war in that situation.

This had two implications: one was that military spending in preparation for war, financed mainly by government borrowing, got the fascist countries quickly out of the Great Depression and its associated mass unemployment (Japan was the first to recover, in 1931, followed by Germany, in 1933); there was even a brief interregnum therefore between the recovery from Depression and the devastation unleashed by war, when the fascist governments had actually become quite popular for having overcome unemployment. The second implication was that fascism also burned itself in the process, through the war. The cost extracted for this extinction was no doubt terrible; but it did mean the extinction of fascism.

Today, by contrast, we do not rival corporate–financial oligarchies engaged in intense rivalry. All of them are integrated into a structure of globalised capital, which does not want the world broken up into separate “economic territories” through war; it would rather have a world that remains open for capital, especially financial, flows. This does not rule out wars; but wars today are

directed by leading powers against those States which are either not under the hegemony of globalised finance capital, or are challenging it.

Likewise, since finance capital dislikes fiscal deficits, and since the writ of globalised finance capital must run in any nation State (otherwise it would quit that country's shores en masse causing an acute financial crisis), increased government spending, even military spending, cannot be financed by a fiscal deficit. Nor can it be financed by taxes on capitalists which finance capital would obviously oppose. But these are the only means of financing government expenditure that can lead to an increase in employment (for government spending financed by taxes on workers who consume most of their incomes anyway does not add to aggregate demand). Contemporary fascism therefore is incapable of making any difference to the state of unemployment under neo-liberal capitalism. And being corporate-financed, it cannot challenge neo-liberal capitalism either.

This means both that it cannot acquire political legitimacy by improving the material conditions of life of the working people, and at the same time it is not going to extinguish itself through war as fascism in the earlier era had done. It cannot also do away altogether with the institution of parliamentary elections, because of the precious legitimacy which such elections provide to the hegemony of globalised finance. (It is significant that the coups we are witnessing these days against progressive regimes in Latin America that have dared to break away from neo-liberal policies are parliamentary coups, which are undertaken in the name of preserving democracy, unlike the

CIA-sponsored coups of an earlier era, such those which toppled Iran's Mossadegh or Guatemala's Arbenz or Chile's Allende).

It is in this context that the following denouement becomes a distinct possibility. Notwithstanding unwarranted interference with the electoral process, notwithstanding the discourse shift away from issues of material life to jingoistic nationalism which occasional terrorist actions make possible (there is a dialectic here between terrorism and the fascist elements in State power, each, objectively, serving to strengthen the other), the Modi government could lose the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. But the government that follows, if it does not break away from the neo-liberal paradigm to provide succor to the peasantry and other segments of the working people, will also lose its popular support after sometime, which will once again enable the fascist elements to come back to power in a subsequent election.

Fascification of society

We may thus have oscillations with regard to government formation, with the fascist elements never getting extinguished, but on the contrary enforcing a gradual fascification of the society and the polity through such oscillations. The way for instance that the Congress government that has succeeded the BJP in Madhya Pradesh is emulating that Party in cashing in on the appeal of Hindutva is a pointer to this phenomenon, of a gradual fascification of society through oscillations with regard to government formation.

We could in short witness a fascification of society over time, under pressure from the fascist elements who continue to remain

strong, whether or not they are actually in power. This would be a case of fascification, without a fascist State actually being imposed on society in the classical fashion of the 1930s, a case of "permanent fascism" unless the conjuncture that gives rise to fascism is itself eliminated.

This conjuncture is one of neo-liberalism in crisis. To counter fascification effectively in India it is necessary to go beyond the current regime of neo-liberal capitalism that has reached a dead-end and has enveloped the world in a crisis, from which even Donald Trump sees no way out for the USA, except by imposing trade protection (which amounts to a certain negation of neo-liberalism). A step towards such a transcendence of the current neo-liberal capitalism would be the formulation of a programme of action that brings about an immediate improvement in the material conditions of life of the working people.

To say all this is not to underestimate the importance of ensuring the defeat of the Hindutva forces in the coming elections and of unity among all the secular forces to achieve this. But while that is a first step, rolling back the fascification of our society and polity would require a lot more than that; it would require above all a programme that provides relief to the people from the depredations of neo-liberal capitalism. Only if such relief is provided (and appropriate measures to sustain it are made to follow), can we succeed in overcoming the fascistic legacy of the Modi years.

(Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.)

Recovering the Spirit of the Rowlatt Satyagraha, 100 Years Later

Ramachandra Guha

The leaders of our major (and minor) political parties are currently crisscrossing the country in search of votes. Exactly a 100 years ago, in the spring of 1919, another leader was also touring different parts of India. It was four years since Mohandas K. Gandhi had returned to his homeland. He had organised protests by peasants in Champaran in 1917 and Kaira in 1918; and also led a satyagraha of mill workers in Ahmedabad. Now he was launching his first pan-Indian movement aimed at an oppressive piece of legislation known as the Rowlatt Act, that sought to criminalise dissent and to try alleged dissenters without juries and in camera, with the press and the public excluded.

On February 8, 1919, Gandhi wrote to an Indian colleague that the Rowlatt Bills were not “a stray example of lapse of righteousness” but “evidence of a determined policy of repression”; therefore, “civil disobedience seems to be a duty imposed upon every lover of personal and public liberty”. The same day he wrote to a South African friend: “The Rowlatt Bills have agitated me very much. It seems I shall have to fight the greatest battle of my life.”

In the last week of February 1919, Gandhi hosted a meeting of patriots at his ashram in Ahmedabad. Here a “Satyagraha Pledge” was drafted. Its signatories resolved to court arrest unless the Rowlatt Bills were withdrawn. Meanwhile, Gandhi also wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, asking him to withdraw the bills, since even the

“most autocratic [Government] finally owes its power to the will of the governed”.

The Viceroy refused to withdraw the Bills. Gandhi now travelled with his Satyagraha Pledge across the country, seeking support and signatures. He visited Lucknow, Allahabad, Bombay, and Madras, as well as many smaller towns. He was preparing his growing band of followers for a major, countrywide, show of defiance, scheduled for Sunday, April 6, 1919.

At the time, Bombay was the epicentre of Indian nationalism. So Gandhi chose to lead the protests in that city himself. He arrived at the Chowpatty beach by 6.30 am. His admirers bathed in the sea and then came and sat around him. By 8 o'clock, there was a “huge mass of people” assembled on the sea face. One reporter estimated that 150,000 were present—“Mahomedans, Hindus, Parsis, etc., and one Englishman”. In his speech, Gandhi condemned the recent police firing on satyagrahis in Delhi, and then asked the crowd to endorse the resolutions asking the Viceroy to withdraw the Rowlatt Act, these sent “weighted with the blood of the innocents of Delhi and the promise that we shall continue to suffer by civil disobedience till the hearts of the rulers are softened”.

The Rowlatt Satyagraha was the first genuinely all-India upsurge against British colonialism (the Rebellion of 1857 had left large parts of the country untouched). Notably, while the scale, intensity and character of the protests varied

enormously, one feature was constant: the display of Hindu–Muslim harmony. Thus, while terming the satyagraha a “splendid success”, an Urdu weekly published in Bombay noted that the government’s passing of the bills had “united the Hindus and the Musalmans like sugar and water, although these two communities once stood apart from one another owing to the long-standing differences between them”.

Meanwhile, a newspaper in Karachi observed that the port town had “closed its shops and centres of business: when did such a stupendous thing happen before in the history of the city?” The paper further commented: “One was impressed at yesterday’s function with one soul-stirring fact—the disappearance of communal, parochial and sectarian impulses. They were “Hindus”, “Muhammadans”, “Parsis”, “Khojas”, “Jains”, yesterday; but they all felt they belonged to one community—the Indian; they all felt there was the One Religion in various religions, the Religion of Self-respect, the Religion of guarding India’s rights for the service of Humanity”.

The Rowlatt Satyagraha is the subject of great interest to historians of Indian nationalism and to biographers of Mahatma Gandhi. However, the Rowlatt Satyagraha is also of some contemporary relevance, for the fraternity that it manifested is worth recalling—and rehabilitating—in our own divided times.

I have quoted newspaper reports that testified to how, during the

course of the Rowlatt Satyagraha, Indians set aside their differences of creed and community. Let me now quote the leader of the movement itself. During the course of the movement, Gandhi asked Indian nationalists to take this vow:

With God as witness we Hindus and Mahomedans declare that we shall behave towards one another as children of the same parents, that we shall have no differences, that the sorrows of each will be the sorrows of the other and that each shall help the other in removing them. We shall respect each other's religion and religious feelings and shall not stand in the way of our respective religious practices. We shall always refrain from violence to each other in the name of religion.

The spirit of inter-community solidarity that so strikingly suffused the Rowlatt Satyagraha was less visible in later movements led by Gandhi. This was a fact he recognised, and mourned, and his own last years were devoted to recovering that spirit. Now, a 100 years after Rowlatt, we must press our leaders to do likewise. India would surely be a much safer and happier place if the politicians now on the campaign trail were to abide by the spirit of Gandhi's noble vow of April 1919.

(Ramachandra Guha is the author of Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World.)

India under Narendra Modi: A Throwback to the Germany of the 1930s?

Anjan Basu

As a boy, the German novelist Max von der Grun heard the news of Hitler becoming the Reich Chancellor over the radio on 30 January, 1933. Two days later, he and his family listened to Hitler speaking to the nation, again over the radio, on his first day in office. He wrote about it later:

Hitler proclaimed his new government officially in power. He did not do so before the Reichstag, the elected parliament, but over the radio. The meaning was clear enough . . .

Were the people clearly aware of his contempt for the parliament? I doubt it. In any case, my family considered it quite proper that Hitler had ceased to address . . . the deputies of the Reichstag, and had turned directly to the people.

It is hard to miss the similarities between Adolf Hitler and our very own Narendra Modi here. Like the Fuehrer, the Indian Prime Minister has never shrunk from showing the country his complete disdain for the Indian parliament—never mind the tearful tribute he paid to this same parliament ('The temple of democracy...' et cetera) when he was about to enter it upon being elected to office. Within two months of coming to power, Hitler got the Reichstag to pass what is known as the Enabling Act, a piece of legislation that spelled the death of the very same Reichstag by vesting in the Chancellor the power to frame and sign off on any law he deemed necessary 'in national interest'. For the next 12 years of the Third Reich,

the Reichstag met periodically only to ratify extensions of the same Act. (In the fitness of things, the great German parliament was housed in those years in an Opera house for the most part.) Mr Modi has skipped more sessions of the parliament than he has attended during his tenure as PM. He chose to stay away even when the parliament was discussing issues that would have far-reaching consequences. Often enough, he scoffed at parliamentary protocol by repeatedly promulgating executive ordinances in lieu of proper legislation. He also announced major policy initiatives at public engagements outside of the legislature, and did so quite frequently. Most tellingly, he often side-stepped the parliament's 'upper' house—the Rajya Sabha, where his party did not have a majority—on the specious argument that certain legislations did not need the Rajya Sabha's ratification. (His histrionics have often given the parliament a near-opera house look, too.) Of course he hasn't yet sought to dissolve parliament altogether, but there are enough straws in the wind to suggest that rewriting the Indian constitution is one of his party's top priorities. In the event of a strong mandate for a second term in office, he can surely devise ways and means of marginalising the parliament more completely by amending the constitution and dramatically changing the balance of power in favour of the executive, i.e., of himself. The Enabling Act is but a short step from that position.

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In Mr Modi's case as in Hitler's, the undermining of the parliamentary process took on another interesting aspect: both chose to communicate directly with the citizenry without any structured intermediation by either the legislature or the media. Hitler used the radio, while Modi's modern-day arsenal also includes TV, the internet and its numerous off-shoots. This mode of communication has unparalleled advantages for an unscrupulous practitioner of *realpolitik*. One, it can be an uninterrupted, and suitably grandiose, monologue which needs fear no challenge from a rational, unbiased audience which would like to sift the grain from the chaff by asking questions. Equally importantly, by giving to the common listeners/viewers a sense (however illusory) of direct access to the country's most powerful politician—thereby creating in the common citizen a false sense of empowerment—it enhances the speaker's image very significantly in the public's eye. This is a spectacular game of 'republican' showmanship that helps subvert democratic institutions far more effectively than any open assault on these same institutions could hope to achieve.

It takes a gifted demagogue to succeed in this game, and Mr Modi's skills in this area are quite as formidable as Hitler's. Ethical or moral scruples have hardly bothered either of them, and so their ability to manipulate public opinion has been almost limitless. When, after scoring stunning initial successes in their Russian campaign of 1941–42, the German Sixth Army led by General Paulus was routed in the battle of Stalingrad (now Volgograd), Hitler insisted to his countrymen that what looked like a setback was actually

a strategic triumph. Most Germans believed their Fuehrer. In the great demonetisation misadventure of November, 2016, Mr Modi managed to persuade a large majority of Indians—including many who lost everything they had in that cynical image-burnishing gambit of a megalomaniac—that their sacrifices would eventually improve the quality of their own lives significantly. The BJP's rousing victory in the UP Assembly elections of March, 2017 was a testimony to the fact that the PM's words had carried conviction.

Over and above their cynical disregard of parliamentary conventions and their undoubted talent for histrionics, let us note another character trait that Hitler and Mr Modi appear to share in common: the conviction that they were ordained to play a messianic role in the lives and affairs of their respective nations. Hitler's capacity for deluding himself on this score has been demonstrated too often to bear repetition. For Mr Modi, there are enough tell-tale signs that he is also convinced he is a messiah: referring to himself in the third person without a trace of embarrassment; an obsessive craving for photo-ops to show his carefully-groomed physiognomy to the world every minute of the day; laying claim to credit for anything good happening in his time, even when it has had not the slightest link to him personally; equally, a fervent belief that all social or economic ills predate his tenure or are the results of the opposition's conspiracy; and the compulsive change of 'costume' several times in course of a day. He is clearly past that stage when he needed others to tell him he was great. He now feels it in his very blood. Only a trained

psychologist can decipher for us the genesis of self-serving narcissism, but as lay citizens, we can visualise its impact on human communities easily enough. Hitler was alive and well within living memory, wasn't he?

Like Hitler in the early-to-mid 1930s (before he was ready to formally launch his campaign for a pan-European empire and the Holocaust), Mr Modi has been playing upon the basest instincts that still survive in most human collectives (usually lying dormant, but liable to be awakened into a frenzied existence if prodded cleverly enough) despite centuries of civilising influences: a deep-rooted sense of insecurity; suspicion of others in the community perceived to be competing for the same finite resources; a visceral antipathy towards the unfamiliar and 'the other'; a mindless obsequiousness towards someone seen as more powerful than 'us'; and a non-rational susceptibility to pomp and grand ritual. Hitler invoked fantastic images of a triumphant Germany bringing all the 'inferior' nations to their heels; Mr Modi's ideology exults in the project to revive the supposedly unsurpassed glory of an ancient Bharat. For both, militant nationalism is the way to go. For both, conflict and strife are not only unavoidable in achieving their grand objectives, they are enmeshed with these objectives so completely as to be indistinguishable from them. For Hitler, the 'other' comprised Jews, Slavs, Communists and radical Socialists, and such 'non-mainstream' elements as homosexuals and gypsies. Mr Modi has not yet had the opportunity (a second term in office is sure to give him one) of fully propounding his

‘world view’ in public, but has already done and said and insinuated enough to point to his unmistakable enemies: non-Hindu religious minorities (Muslims most of all: as the Chief Minister of the western-Indian state of Gujarat, he virtually presided over a pogrom of Muslims in February/March 2002 which left over 2000 dead; and he never so much as acknowledge that it was a massacre); communists and socialists and social liberals; civil rights activists; and, of course, Pakistan (both the state and the nation). Though he has not yet been able (for fear of losing elections) to articulate it clearly, his resentment at Dalits and other ‘low’ caste denominations is unmistakable, and the RSS, inside whose hallowed precincts his ideological moorings rest, has never made any secret of its distaste for every societal segment other than the ‘high-bred’ Hindu male. Denial of justice in nearly every walk of life to Dalits has been quite as pronounced and frequent in Mr Modi’s India as their denial to Muslims. Both these communities have been repeated victims of orgies of violence and abuse staged by Mr Modi’s cohort, and he has clearly given his blessings to these abominations by doing nothing and even saying little against them. In fact, the most brazen perpetrators of such crimes have often received overt endorsement from his own establishment. This establishment has also repeatedly equivocated on issues such as gay rights and gender equality. Many of its influential voices have expressed horror at decriminalising gay sex. They have also been quite open about how they think that women ‘belong’ in family homes rather than at the workplace. It is well-known that Hitler loathed homosexuality, and

gay men happened to be among the first detainees at Nazi concentration camps. As for women, Nazi Germany insisted on taking them out from the country’s work-force, encouraging them to be homemakers and mothers instead.

The points at which Mr Modi’s personality—as well as his personal style of functioning—converge with Hitler’s are too striking to be wished away as accidental. That in less than five years’ time India is so far advanced on the path to what can only be described as a variant of fascism points to the fact that the congruence goes beyond similar character traits alone. The historical contexts are very important here. Weimar Germany was an ill-fated republic that can be said to have been doomed at its birth to early decay and death. On the other hand, when Mr Modi came to power, India had an on-the-whole stable economy, and despite wide-ranging social and economic inequalities (and resultant tensions), was a functioning democracy. That he has been able to so seriously undermine that democratic structure in such short time demonstrates the odious forces he has brought into play. Writing in 1939, the German journalist Sebastian Haffner recalled a conversation he had had with his father soon after Adolf Hitler rose to power in January, 1933:

I discussed the prospects of the new government with my father. We agreed that it had a good chance of doing a lot of damage, but not much chance of surviving very long. How could things turn out so completely different?

What had given the young Haffner and his father hope was that, in the 14 years since the creation of the Weimar Republic in November, 1918, Germany had had as many as

14 Chancellors. Since Hitler’s hold on power was unlikely to last long, they told one another, there was only so much harm he could possibly do. But when things did turn out to be so very different, Haffner (who had to flee Germany in 1938) agonised over the question ‘how’. And, soon enough, he had the answer:

Perhaps it was just because we were all so certain that they could not do so—and relied on that with far too much confidence. So we neglected to consider that it might, if worse came to worst, be necessary to prevent the disaster from happening.

Looking around India today, one cannot help a creeping feeling that, like Haffner and his father in Germany in 1933, we may soon rue what we are doing now. More accurately, what we are not doing now but would have, if only we were a tad less smug in our liberal complacency. For we are looking on as the Indian state descends steadily into bedlam.

(Anjan Basu freelances as literary critic, commentator and translator.)

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Book Release: “The RSS: A Menace to India”

Qurban Ali

Scholar, lawyer and author Abdul Ghafoor Noorani’s latest book *The RSS: A Menace to India*, published by Leftword Books, was released in New Delhi on April 2, 2019. It’s a well written, comprehensive, research-intensive deep-dive book about one of India’s biggest and most secretive organisations.

Speaking on the occasion, journalist and commentator Siddharth Varadarajan said, “RSS is ruling India. Let’s make no bones about it. It is an organisation which calls itself a cultural entity but no one has any idea about its membership, structure and finances. They have exploited every loophole to keep its finances opaque.”

Varadarajan reminded everyone that the RSS’ might have removed the controversial parts from its second Sarsanghchalak M.S. Golwalkar’s book *Bunch of Thoughts*, but their central theme was there for everyone to hear when Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke at Wardha. He questioned why PM Modi gets away by saying Hindus are first class citizens ?

“Are Muslims and minorities not legitimate citizens? It was a blatant violation of Section 126 of the Representation of People’s Act. Opposition is not raising it. This allows Modi to get away by saying that Hindus are first class citizens,” Varadarajan emphasised. He added that in addition to being communal, RSS has penetrated and infiltrated every arm of the system—politics, defence forces, judiciary.

Here is the text of the speech given by Shri M. Hamid Ansari,

former Vice-President of India, on the occasion:

Mr. Noorani is nothing if not prolific. Here we have another tome of over 500 pages with its contents diligently distilled. It is also timely.

The topicality of the RSS as a subject of study is evident. This is the second volume on it in English to be published in eight months. The first was an updated version of an earlier work by Walter Anderson and Shridhar Damle. It sought to test a set of prepositions by using a case-study approach of the organisation and its network of affiliates emanating from what it called a homogenising of society.

The present work by Mr. A.G. Noorani goes beyond the superstructure into the origins of the organisation and its progress through certain critical landmarks in the history of modern India, pre-and-post Independence. It brings on record the views of Dr. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru about the RSS and its objectives. It is a comprehensive in its coverage. Particularly useful are the appendices and the documents therein.

The Constitution of the RSS is given in Appendix 2. The Preamble spells out its objectives, the first of these being ‘to eradicate the fissiparous tendencies arising from the diversities of sect, faith, caste and creed and from the political, economic and provincial differences among Hindus’ and ‘to bring about a regeneration of the Hindu Samaj.’

Similarly, the RSS Prayer and Oath which is administered to every entrant enjoins him to work for ‘the

all-round greatness of Bharatvarsh by fostering the growth of my ‘Hindu religion, Hindu society and Hindu culture.’

The focus thus is on those who profess to be Hindus who constitute 80 percent of our population. In other words, every fifth Indian—20 percent of the population—is beyond the stated ambit of the RSS and therefore supposedly beyond its prescriptive ideology.

Three questions logically arise here: (a) Do 80 percent Hindus become synonymous with 100 percent Indians? (b) Do the 20 percent non-Hindus get conflated with the 80 percent Hindu population? And (c) What happens to the Constitution of India, its democratic structure, its principle of equality and charter of rights, including the right to profess, practice and propagate their religion, and the duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture?

The answer to the first two questions is an emphatic NO, unless a hitherto unstated process of conversion in contravention of the Constitution is sought to be initiated. The answer to the third is evident: the Constitution remains the basic law of the land, is binding on all citizens and supersedes other affiliations.

The RSS has developed over the years public policy orientations and influence through the large number of its affiliates and by grafting and promoting Hindutva as a concept of cultural revitalisation and political mobilisation which ‘seeks to subjugate and homogenise

the ethnic pluralities by establishing the hegemony of an imagined cultural mainstream.’ This has also generated social violence by some of its adherents.

These principles, depicting Indian nationalism in terms of the faith of the religious majority, have serious negative social and political implications for sections of the citizen-body and are in violation of the Constitution. In this sense, it is detrimental to India as we know it, a denial of all that the freedom struggle stood for, a negation of the existential reality of a plural society, a camouflage for assimilation and homogenisation, a device for erasing the richness and diversity of our land, of converting civic nationalism into cultural nationalism and our liberal democracy into an ethnic one.

Jai Hind.

(Qurban Ali is a senior broadcast journalist.)

Climate Catastrophe and Extinction Rebellion

Paul Street

The British-based group Extinction Rebellion has called for nonviolent acts of civil disobedience on April 15 (2019) in capitals around the world to reverse our “one-way track to extinction.” This talk was given by Paul Street in Chicago, USA, some days ago in the background of this global call for action.

In the last years of his life, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke against what he called “the triple evils that are interrelated”—economic inequality, racism, and militarism. If King were alive today, he’d be talking about the five evils that are interrelated, adding patriarchy and Ecocide, the destruction of livable ecology. He’d also be noting the dangerous rise of a new national and global fascism linked to the presidency of a malignant racist who glories in accelerating humanity’s environmental self-destruction while the media obsesses over matters of far slighter relevance.

I was given three questions to answer today. The first question runs as follows: “How have you as a historian mapped the trajectory of Climate Change over time? What do we have to worry about right now?”

Let me say as politely as I can that I don’t like the phrase “Climate Change.” It’s too mild. Try Climate Catastrophe. If a giant oak tree is about to collapse on to your little house, you don’t say that you are at risk of housing change. You say “holy shit, we’re about to die and we better do something fast.”

I haven’t really tracked climate change as an historian. I am an urban and labour historian, not an environmental one. The climate issue really started being noticeable to me

with the often-forgotten Chicago heat wave of July 1995, when hundreds of people, very disproportionately Black, died.

I rely on climate scientists to crunch the time-series numbers on planetary warming and what they are telling us is not good, to say the least. We are at an oak tree tipping point for the house of humanity. It’s the biggest issue of our or any time. As Noam Chomsky told Occupy Boston 8 years ago, if the environmental catastrophe led by global warming isn’t averted in the next few decades, then nothing else we progressives, egalitarians, and peaceniks care about is going to matter.

In 2008, NASA’s James Hansen and seven other leading climate scientists predicted “irreversible ice sheet and species loss” if the planet’s average temperature rose above 1°Celsius as they said it would if carbon dioxide’s atmospheric presence reached 450 parts per million. CO2 was then at 385 ppm. The only way to be assured of a livable climate, Hansen said, would be to cut CO2 back to 350 ppm.

Here we are eleven years later, well past Hansen’s 1°C red line. We’ve gotten there at 410 ppm, not 450. It’s the highest level of CO2 saturation in 800,000 years, 600,000 years before the first fossil evidence of homo sapiens. I recently attended an Extinction Rebellion meeting in which it was reported that 22% of all human industrial-era carbon emissions have taken place since 2009, one year after Hansen issued his warning.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s latest report reflects the

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consensus opinion of the world's leading climate scientists. It tells us that we are headed to 1.5°C in a dozen years. Failure to dramatically slash carbon emissions between now and 2030 is certain to set off catastrophic developments for hundreds of millions of people, the IPCC warns.

The IPCC finds that we are headed at our current pace to 4°C by the end of century. That will mean a planet that is mostly unlivable. Tipping points of unlivable existence are already being reached by millions in Sub-Saharan Africa, Sub Continental and Southeast Asia, parts of Central America and other regions where climate-driven migration is underway, with significant political consequences.

Numerous Earth scientists find the IPCC report insufficiently alarmist. It omits research demonstrating the likelihood that irreversible climatological "tipping points" like the thawing of the northern methane-rich permafrost could occur within just "a few decades."

We really don't know how quickly the existential threat may unfold. This is an experiment that's never been run. What do we have to worry about? Extinction. Current female life expectancy in the United States is 81 years. A baby girl born this year would in theory turn 81 in 2100, when, at the current Greenhouse Gassing pace, Antarctica will have melted and the Amazonian rain forest will have long ceased to function as the lungs of the planet.

I was also asked by this conference's organisers to discuss "connections between Climate Change, class inequity, and imperialism" and to offer ideas on why "this intersectionality is often overlooked." Let me to be as brief as I can because that's a

doctoral dissertation or two. Eco-socialists like John Bellamy Foster are right about capitalism. It is a system not just of class disparity but of plutocratic and corporate class rule, the rule of the owners and managers of capital. And there are a number of environmental problems with capitalist class rule. The first problem is that the owners and managers of capital don't really care about anything other than the accumulation of capital and profit. They are systemically compelled to commodify anything and everything they can get their hands on. They have always been perfectly content to profit from anything and everything. They cash in on slavery, fascism, mass-incarceration, endless war, and even on turning the planet into a giant Greenhouse Gas Chamber—a crime that quite frankly makes the Nazis look like small-time criminals by comparison.

The second problem is that the owners and managers of capital are constantly throwing masses of human beings out of livable wage employment and off of social safety nets and out of common lands and public schools and public housing and the only so-called solution to the mass poverty that results from this constant Enclosure process they've ever been able to offer is the promise of new jobs through ever more expansion and growth, an environmental disaster at numerous levels.

The third problem is that Wall Street and Bond Street and LaSalle Street and the rest of the big financial streets and exchanges have huge fixed and sunken investments in a vast Carbon Industrial Complex. They do not want to see that giant portfolio devalued by home sapiens choosing to survive by keeping fossil fuels in the ground where they belong.

The fourth problem is that

capital is inherently and systemically opposed to and threatened by social, public, and environmental planning on the scale required for the task of moving humanity off fossil fuels and on to renewable energy and broadly sustainable environmental practices.

Fifth, class rule regimes insulate their top decision-makers from the worst environmental consequences of their growth-addicted systems. By the time people living in ruling-class bubbles begin to sense existential threat to themselves, it is generally too late for them to do anything about it except stuff like trying to get the Tesla guy to fly them to Mars or to download their consciousness into an Artificial Intelligence satellite to roam the galaxy for eternity.

With imperialism, the connections are less abstract. Eating up more than half the nation's federal discretionary spending and sustaining more than 1000 military installations across more than 100 nations, the Pentagon system itself has the single largest carbon footprint of any institutional complex on Earth. The so-called defense budget steals trillions of dollars that need to be spent on green infrastructure and green jobs if we are going to reduce carbon emissions to a livable scale. At the same time, America being a global super-power has long depended on US control over global oil and gas reserves: the remarkable economic and geopolitical power that flows to control over the flow, pricing, and currency denomination of those reserves and the super profits that result from their extraction and sale. Oil control has long been a great source of American critical leverage in the world system. (The fact that the United States under Obama achieved so-called energy independence through accelerated fracking and drilling in the homeland doesn't

change the strategic calculation. Its never been primarily about getting access to the oil for our cars and trucks and facilities. Its been about the critical imperial leverage oil control grants Washington.) A planet that depends on renewable energy rather than petroleum to run its economies will be less susceptible to that sort of imperial domination.

Why are these intersectional connections overlooked? Because it's a capitalist media and its sponsors are not interested in talking about how capitalism and its evil twin imperialism are only interested in profit over people.

The final question I was given is "What effective solutions and political strategies do you have to offer?" I want to say six things regarding the path forward. First, there's a whole bunch of information out there to use to counter the standard "cost and benefit" arguments that we can't afford to undertake a national and global Green New Deal and that shifting to renewable energy is a job killer. Both of those arguments are false. The technologies are available and affordable. Green jobs do pay and will continue to pay better than fossil fuel jobs.

Second, we can't afford NOT to make the transition. It is darkly hilarious to hear corporate Democrat and Republican right-wing commentators advance critical so-called cost-benefit analyses of the big scary Green New Deal. Whatever you think of whether or not the Green New Deal is radical enough to get the job done, at least Green New Dealers are talking seriously about the benefit of a livable earth. It seems like society might want to absorb significant costs to achieve the continuation of the species. It's a green cliché but it's true: there are no jobs on a dead planet. There is no economy on a

dead planet.

Third, we need to be ready to talk about green jobs and what they do and might pay and about how we can create social safety nets for fossil fuels sector workers if we want to sell environmental reconversion to the populace. The carbon-capitalist Exxon-Mobil-Donald Trump-Joe Manchin right has propagated the notion that green transformation is a giant job-killer. We must counter that claim in ways that show we understand and care about the concerns of the working-class majority.

Fourth, we need to be existentialists, not catastrophists. It's not about the crystal ball. We can't care about the odds. The betting line on Green Transformation does not matter. Maybe it's just 1 in 10. Maybe it's better. It doesn't matter. The odds go to zero in ten if we don't take action. Let Vegas take the bets. We are on the field of action.

Fifth, Howard Zinn was right. It's not just about who's sitting in the White House or the Governor's mansion or the Mayor's office or the city council seat. It's also and above all about who's sitting in the streets, who's disrupting, who's monkey-wrenching, whose idling capital, who's occupying the pipeline construction sites, the highways, the workplaces, the town-halls, the financial districts, the corporate headquarters, and universities beneath and beyond the biennial and quadrennial candidate-centered big money big media major party electoral extravaganzas that are sold to us as "politics"—the only politics that matters. This is true about fighting racist police violence. It's true about labor rights and decent wages. It's true about all that and more and it's true about saving livable ecology.

Sixth, know your climate

enemies. If you think it's just the eco-fascist Republicans, you are sadly mistaken. Yes, unlike Donald Trump, Barack Obama did not deny the existence of anthropogenic, really capitalogenic global warming. But so what? As Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers noted last year, "Obama watered down global climate agreements and grew oil and gas output and infrastructure in the United States. . . . Obama presided over the highest gas production in history and crude oil production rose by 88%, the fastest rate in the 150-year history of the US oil industry." Obama bragged about this to a bunch of petroleum executives at the Baker Institute last year.

Vote if you think it'll make any difference but don't drink the full Kool Aid of American electoral fake-representative politics, the longtime graveyard of American social movements. Become a Gilet Jaune or a Gilet Verde. Get your yellow, green, red and black vests on. Learn how to build barricades. Study civil disobedience. Join the great Extinction Rebellion, which has a dynamic new Chicago chapter and will be making some splashes here and around the world this year. Remember the words of Mario Savio: "There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus—and you've got to make it stop!"

If you're waiting for some elite politician to fix this ecological mess you will be hung out to dry well past humanity's expiration date.

(Paul Street is an independent journalist, policy adviser and historian.)

Modinomics = Corporatonomics: Part I

Neeraj Jain

Ever since the Congress released its manifesto promising to implement a scheme, NYAY, under which it would guarantee a transfer of Rs 72,000 per year or Rs 6,000 per month to the poorest 20% of India's households, the BJP has gone to town claiming that the scheme is not practical, and the country has no resources to implement it. But actually, as we show below, the scheme is very much doable, the government, if it so wishes, can implement not only this but also several other much needed welfare measures for the people.

The total budgetary receipts of the government, which are equal to its budgetary outlay, include tax revenue, non-tax revenue and capital receipts. The total receipts, and hence the total budgetary outlay of the Central government in 2019–20, is Rs 27.8 lakh crore. If the government wants, it can significantly increase this by increasing its tax and non-tax revenue. Can it do so? Yes, it can.

India: Low tax revenue

Budget 2019–20 estimates the gross tax revenue of the Centre to be Rs 25.5 lakh crore, and net tax revenue to Centre to be Rs 17.1 lakh crore. Now, the fact of the matter is, the total tax revenue of the government is very low. This can be understood by comparing the total tax revenue of the Indian Government (Centre and States combined) as a proportion of GDP with other countries. India's tax-to-GDP ratio (taking into consideration all taxes of the Centre and states) was 17.82% in 2016–17 (BE), according to the Indian Public

Finance Statistics, Government of India, 2016–17. *The Economic Survey 2015–16* says that India's tax-to-GDP ratio is lowest among BRICS countries (Brazil 35.6%, South Africa 28.8%). It is lower than both the Emerging Market Economy (EME) and OECD averages, which are about 21% and 34% respectively.

It is thus obvious that there is a huge scope for the government to increase its tax revenue. If India's tax-GDP ratio is to be brought to 26–27% (that is, a 50% increase), and since the Central government collects the bulk of the tax and non-tax revenue in the country, this means that the Centre's tax revenues can be increased by at least 50%.

How to increase the government's tax revenue

According to the *Global Wealth Report 2016* compiled by Credit Suisse Research Institute, India is the second most unequal country in the world, with the top 1% of the country's rich owning nearly 60% of the country's wealth. The cumulative wealth of India's billionaires was \$440 billion in 2018¹, which translates into Rs 31 lakh crore, more than the budgetary outlay of the government in 2019–20. On the other hand, India also has the highest number of people living in abject poverty in the world—a staggering 276 million people lived on less than \$1.25 per day at purchasing power parity (PPP) terms according to the World Bank in 2011. Taking another, more stringent measure, as of 2014, 58% of the total population were living on less than \$3.10 per day. That is more than 600 million

people.² And as we have discussed elsewhere, even these terrible figures are underestimates by a wide margin, India's poverty levels are actually horrendous.

Therefore, a simple way to increase tax income, and simultaneously reduce the enormous inequality prevailing in India, would be to increase taxes on the rich. This is precisely what the developed countries do; inequality in those countries is much less as compared to India because of progressive tax and fiscal policies.³

Presently the tax collection system in India is grossly inequitable, and overwhelmingly favours the rich. On the one hand, as we discuss below, the government gives huge tax concessions to the rich, while on the other hand, the larger portion of the taxes it collects is from the ordinary people. To understand this, let us take a look at the tax structure of the government.

There are two types of taxes, direct taxes and indirect taxes. Direct taxes are levied on incomes, such as wages, profits, property, etc., and so fall directly on the rich; while indirect taxes are imposed on goods and impersonal services, and so fall on all, both rich and poor. An equitable system of taxation taxes individuals and corporations according to their ability to pay, which in practice means that in such a system, the government collects its tax revenue more from direct taxes than indirect taxes.

In most developed and developing countries, the direct tax revenue as a percentage of total revenue varies from 55% to 65%

and more. But in India, for every Rs 100 collected by the government as tax revenue, only around Rs 30 comes from direct taxes (and the rest, Rs 70, from indirect taxes). The government is aware of this. *The Economic Survey 2017–18* admits that direct taxes account on average for about 70% of total taxes in Europe. It also admits that India has much lower proportion of direct taxes in its total tax revenue as compared to other emerging market economies (except for China, which is a non-democratic country). An article in thewire.in points out that India's personal income tax collection both as a percentage of revenues and as a percentage of GDP is much lower than not just the USA and OECD but also the BRICS countries (as a percentage of GDP, personal income tax in USA was 10%, around 8% for the OECD countries, 5% for China, 3.6% for Russia, and 8.5% for South Africa, but was just around 1% for India.⁴

Most of the taxes collected by the States are in the form of indirect taxes. The direct taxes are mostly collected by the Centre. In the Centre's tax revenue, the share of direct taxes has been falling since the UPA-II regime. The share of direct taxes in Centre's gross tax revenue fell from 61% in 2009–10 to 56% in 2013–14, the last year of the UPA Government. Under the Modi Government, this has fallen further to 54.1% in 2019–20 BE. In other words, it has fallen by a full 7 percentage points in a decade.

Therefore, if the government reduces its tax concessions to the rich, as well as increases direct taxes on them, the Centre can easily increase its net tax revenue from Rs 17 lakh crore at present (in 2019–20 BE) to Rs 25 lakh crore at the

minimum. In fact, as the measures given below suggest, it can even go up to Rs 30 lakh crore!

Let us discuss some possible steps that the government can take to do so.

i) Curb illicit capital flows to increase tax revenue

One way the government can increase its tax revenue is by curbing illicit outflows and inflows of money. According to the latest report by the international watchdog *Global Financial Integrity* released in April 2017, between \$8–23 billion was illegally taken out of India and between \$39–101 billion illegally came into India in 2014, primarily through trade mis-invoicing. Even if we take the lower figures, the total illicit financial flows total \$47 billion. These illegal flows primarily take place to escape taxation; had the government taken strong steps to curb these flows and tax them, they could have yielded at least \$12 billion or Rs 78,000 in taxes—this amount is 6.3% of the total tax revenue for the financial year 2014–15.

Unfortunately, the present BJP Government, despite all its rhetoric against corruption and black money, is simply not interested in taking firm steps to curb these illegal flows. As we have explained in an earlier article published in *Janata Weekly* on demonetisation⁵, all the chest thumping by the new government about fighting corruption and curbing the black economy is a lot of hot air; the truth is that it is actually diluting anti-corruption legislations.

ii) Eliminate the huge tax concessions to rich

The most important reason for the low tax revenue of the

Government of India is the huge tax concessions given by it to the rich. The budget documents reveal that in its first two years in power, the Modi–Jaitley Government gave tax exemptions given to the country's uber rich totalling a mind-boggling Rs 11 lakh crore. These tax write-offs are in corporate income tax, customs and excise duties.

In the Union Budget 2017–18, the government changed the methodology for calculating these tax exemptions, and thus drastically lowered the estimated revenue foregone for the year 2016–17. We have calculated the revenue foregone for this year using the older methodology, to show that the revenue foregone was Rs 5.5 lakh crore for this year.⁶

In the budget document of 2018–19, the government has not made a full estimate of the tax concessions given to the rich under excise and customs duties for 2017–18 as it said that the revenue forgone due to exemptions under GST will be calculated next year; the document calculates only the revenue foregone due to corporate tax concessions—and these have increased over the previous year. And for this year, this statement is missing, probably because it is an interim budget.

Considering the past behaviour of the government, and its overall attitude towards giving tax concessions and other subsidies to the rich, we can safely assume that the revenue foregone for 2017–18 and 2018–19 would be at least at the same level as during the first three years, which therefore means that the government must have given at least Rs 27.5 lakh crore of tax concessions in corporate taxes, excise duties and customs duties to the rich during its five years in power. (See Table 1)

Table 1: Revenue Forgone Due to Tax Exemptions and Fiscal Deficit (Rs lakh crore)

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	Total
Revenue Forgone	5.49	5.51	5.50*	5.50*	5.50*	27.5

*Our Estimate

But for the tax concessions given to the rich, the gross tax revenue of the government would have gone up from Rs 22.48 lakh crore in 2018–19 RE to at least Rs 28 lakh crore, an increase of 25%.

iii) Re-Impose Wealth tax

Wealth tax in India was abolished by the BJP after coming to power in 2015. As the wealth tax stood then, an assessee was required to pay 1% of the value of his assets above a certain threshold. But there were so many exemptions to this, that the wealth tax collection was only about ₹950 crore in 2014–15, a miniscule fraction of the ₹2.7 lakh crore collected by way of taxes on income on non-corporates that year.⁷ Using this as an excuse, Jaitley abolished the wealth tax.

It has been estimated by the *Global Wealth Migration Review* 2018 that the total wealth of India's high net worth individuals, that is, the dollar millionaires, totals 48% of the total private wealth (total assets of private individuals less liabilities) in the country. India had a total private wealth of \$8,230 billion or Rs 576 lakh crore in 2017, and of this, 48% or Rs 276 lakh crore was held by millionaires.⁸ A two percent wealth tax on this wealth would yield Rs 5.5 lakh crore. And if those with private wealth above \$10 million are taxed at a higher rate, and the billionaires are taxed at a yet higher rate, this amount can be considerably increased to probably in the range of Rs 7–9 lakh crore. (Of course, this

tax would have to be complemented by taxes on gifts and transfers which would be a means of evasion.)

iv) Re-impose Inheritance tax (also called estate duty)

This tax is perfectly in synchronism with the philosophy of a market economy; it was abolished in India in 1985. It is imposed by several developed countries, with rates ranging from 10% to as much as 55%. The most capitalistic of capitalist nations, the USA and the Netherlands impose a stiff inheritance tax with some states in the US impounding as much as 50 percent of one's estate, leaving the inheritors only the remaining 50 percent. We propose a modest inheritance tax of one-third of the value of property inherited for only the country's millionaires, whose number according to the *Global Migration Review* is 3.3 lakh. Assuming that every year 5% of their total wealth gets transferred to their children, or other legatees, as inheritance, then such an inheritance tax would fetch $276 \times .05 \times .33 = \text{Rs } 4.6$ lakh crore per annum.

India: Low non-tax revenue

The non-tax revenue of the government is very low because of the huge transfers of public funds and resources to private corporations and the super-rich. But for these transfers, the government could have hugely increased its non-tax revenue, or it could have saved on its budgetary expenses. These transfers

to the rich include loan write-offs, handing over control of the country's mineral wealth and resources to private corporations in return for negligible royalty payments, transferring ownership of profitable public sector corporations to foreign and Indian private business houses at throwaway prices, direct subsidies to private corporations in the name of 'public-private-partnership' for infrastructural projects, and so on. These transfers of public wealth to private coffers total several lakh crore rupees. This implies that *had the government not given these transfers, it could have increased the budget outlay by several lakh crore rupees*. To give just two figures:

- During the first four years of the Modi Government, public sector banks have waived loans given to big corporate houses to the tune of Rs 3.1 lakh crore; additionally, they have also restructured loans of the 'high and mighty'—which is a roundabout way of writing off loans—probably to the tune of ten lakh crore rupees (the actual amount is not known). Despite this, the total non-performing assets (that is, bad loans) of the banks had gone up to Rs 9.5 lakh crore as of June 2017; the RBI has now initiated a process of accelerated restructuring of these loans too.
- In the five budgets presented by it, that is, upto 2018–19 RE, the Modi Government has allocated a total of Rs 2.7 lakh crore just

for construction of roads and highways. The government no longer constructs highways. They are now constructed by private corporations, who collect toll from the users to recover their investment. Then why is the government allocating so much money for construction of roads and highways? This is the subsidy being given by the government—not as loan but as grant—to private corporations as an ‘incentive’ so that they invest in construction of highways; it is another matter that apart from this subsidy, which is as much as 40% of the project cost, they get to keep the earnings from the toll as well.

It is because of this vampyean plunder of the country's wealth and resources by corporate houses that India now has the third largest number of billionaires in the world. This plunder has reached such rapacious proportions that even the RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, himself an ardent votary of neoliberalism, has lambasted the collusion between “venal politicians” and “crony capitalists”. After observing that India has the second highest number of billionaires in the world per trillion dollars of GDP (after Russia), he pointed out that “three factors—land, natural resources, and government contracts or licenses—are the predominant sources of the wealth of our billionaires. And all of these factors come from the government.”

India: Low general revenue

These huge concessions / subsidies / transfers being given to the rich, both in the form of tax concessions and non-tax concessions, are responsible for the

government's low revenues and low budgetary outlay. Readers will be surprised to know that India's total government revenue as percentage of GDP is amongst the lowest in the world. It is more than 40% for most countries of the European Union, going up to above 50% for countries like Belgium, France, Denmark and Finland. It is 29.7% for South Africa, 36.6% for Argentina and 31.6% for Brazil. The world average is 30.2%. But India ranks far below—the Indian Government's total revenue is only 20.8% of GDP (this is total government revenues, Centre + States combined).

From the data given above about government's tax revenue as compared to other countries, or from the data on government's total revenue as compared to other countries, it is obvious that there is huge scope for increasing total government revenues in India.

As discussed above, the government's tax revenues (net tax revenue to Centre) can easily go up to Rs 25 lakh crore, or even Rs 30 lakh crore, from the Rs 17 lakh crore at present. The government's non-tax revenue is Rs 2.7 lakh crore, it can also easily go up to Rs 5 lakh crore if some of the huge subsidies being given to the rich are eliminated. Therefore, this means that total non-debt revenue of the Centre can go up from Rs 20 lakh crore at present to at least Rs 30–35 lakh crore (see Table 2), and probably even more if the government develops the political will to increase taxes on the rich and reduce subsidies to corporate houses.

Increase borrowings

Apart from this, another way in which the government can raise money for increasing welfare expenditures is by indulging in

deficit financing! The theory, that high levels of fiscal deficit relative to GDP will adversely impact growth, is humbug. John Maynard Keynes, one of the greatest economists of the 20th century, had debunked it long ago. He had argued that in an economy where there is poverty and unemployment, the government can, and in fact should, expand public works and generate employment by borrowing, that is, enlarging the fiscal deficit; such government expenditure would also stimulate private expenditure through the ‘multiplier’ effect. All developed countries, when faced with recessionary conditions, have implemented Keynesian economic principles and resorted to high levels of public spending and high fiscal deficits.

Then why have all our Finance Ministers—from Arun Jaitley to his predecessors—been harping on the need to curb the fiscal deficit? It is a part of the neoliberal economic model being implemented in the country. In the lexicon of this humbug economics, the concessions given to the poor, which are aimed at making available essential welfare services like education, health, food, transport and electricity to the poor at affordable rates, are given the derisive name of ‘subsidies’ and are being drastically reduced in the name of reducing the fiscal deficit. That this theory is a fraud is obvious from another simple fact: as mentioned above, the BJP has also been giving enormous subsidies to the rich, and these are much more than the few subsidies being given to the poor. If Jaitley was indeed so concerned about the fiscal deficit, he could have reduced these subsidies to the rich. But in the jargon of neoliberal economics,

Table 2: Government Receipts, 2019–20, Actual and Proposed (Rs lakh crore)

	2019–20 BE	2019–20 (proposed)
Net Tax Revenue to Centre	17 lakh cr	25 – 30 lakh cr
Non-Tax Revenue	2.7 lakh cr	5 lakh cr
Total Revenue Receipts (to Centre)	19.8 lakh cr	30 – 35 lakh cr
Capital Receipts	8.1 lakh cr	13.9
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>Debt receipts (Borrowings + other liabilities)</i>	7 lakh cr	12.8
Total Receipts	27.8 lakh cr	43.9 – 48.9 lakh cr
Total Receipts as % of 2019 GDP	13.23%	20.9 – 23.28%

these subsidies to the rich are called ‘incentives’ and are considered to be essential for growth.

The total government borrowings as a percentage of non-debt receipts has fallen from 62% in the decade of the 1980s to only 39% during the five years of the BJP rule (2014–19). Assuming that the government borrows in the same proportion as the 1980s, the government borrowings can go up from Rs 7 lakh crore proposed in the 2019–20 budget to Rs 12.8 lakh crore.

Enough resources to finance NYAY and more

This would mean that the budgetary outlay of the Centre can easily go up to Rs 44 lakh crore or even Rs 49 lakh crore from the Rs 27.8 lakh crore budgeted in 2019–20 (see Table 2). That is an increase of Rs 16–21 lakh crore, which works out to between 7.6–10% of the GDP. That’s huge.

In its election manifesto for 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress has promised to implement a scheme for guaranteed income support, NYAY, if voted to power. This scheme promises a transfer of Rs 72,000 per year or Rs 6,000

per month to the poorest 20% of India’s households. The BJP has criticised this scheme, saying that the country does not have resources to implement it. Now, the estimated number of households in India in 2018 is 25 crore; 20% of this number is five crore families. Five crore families multiplied by Rs 72,000 per family per year works out to an annual bill of Rs 3.6 lakh crore. Considering the huge amount of resources that can be raised, to the tune of Rs 15–20 lakh crore, if the government reduces the huge concessions being given to foreign and Indian corporate houses, and marginally increases the taxes on them rich, this guaranteed income transfer scheme is clearly doable.

In fact, the government if it so wishes can implement so many schemes to guarantee the poor a life of dignity, including good quality and free education and health care, decent old age pensions to all, and guaranteed jobs at minimum wages to all at decent wages, and also enormously increase its investment in agriculture to bring it out of the deep crisis that it is facing. The resources for all these investments can easily be raised—what is needed

is the political will to increase the taxes on the rich.

Then, why is the BJP not doing it?

The reason is simple: the BJP is the most pro-big corporate government that has come to power at the Centre since independence. It must not be forgotten that in 2014 elections, India’s leading corporate houses had openly supported the BJP. That is because Modi had a very successful record of favouring corporates during his Chief Ministership of Gujarat. At an investor meet in Ahmedabad, Ratan Tata drenched Modi in praise saying that a state would normally take 90 to 180 days to clear a new plant but, “in the Nano case, we had our land and approval in just two days.” Modi’s ability to run the economy such that corporate houses can rake in big profits is best exemplified by the rapid rise of Gautam Adani from a small-time Gujarati businessman to one of India’s richest corporate honchos in a little over a decade—during the very years Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat.⁹

And so, as the 2014 Lok Sabha elections approached, India’s top corporate houses gradually came

to the opinion that Modi should be backed for Prime Ministership. Anil Ambani stated: “Narendrabhai has done good for Gujarat and [imagine] what will happen if he leads the nation.” While his brother Mukesh Ambani gushed, “Gujarat is shining like a lamp of gold and the credit goes to the visionary, effective and passionate leadership provided by Narendra Modi.”¹⁰ They liberally poured money into Modi's election campaign, making Modi's campaign expenditure the highest ever in India's election history. It was an unprecedented election campaign, what with 3D holographic rallies, extensive use of the social media as never before, and a mesmerising media campaign.

After coming to power, the BJP has been running the economy solely to benefit India's biggest corporate houses and the uber rich, because of which the wealth of the richest 1% in the country has zoomed to mindboggling levels. The number of dollar billionaires in the country has doubled during the first four years of Modi rule: in 2014, the Forbes list of billionaires had the names of 56 Indians; by 2018, this number had more than doubled to 119. The richest 1% have cornered most of the wealth being created in the country: Oxfam reported that in 2017, the richest 1% population cornered 73% of the country's wealth generated in that year, because of which it estimated that the cumulative wealth of India's billionaires rose 35% from \$325 billion in 2017 to \$440 billion in 2018!¹¹

There is little room for doubt: the BJP is the most pro-corporate government to have come to power since independence. No wonder that it is raising the bogey of lack of resources to criticise Rahul Gandhi

and Congress' NYAY scheme. The fact of the matter is, the country has enough resources not just for this guaranteed income transfer scheme, but to implement other welfare measures too that would provide all its citizens all the basic necessities required for people to live like human beings—healthy food, best possible health care, invigorating education, decent shelter, security in old age and clean pollution-free environment.

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The Assange Arrest Is a Warning from History

John Pilger

The glimpse of Julian Assange being dragged from the Ecuadorean embassy in London is an emblem of the times. Might against right. Muscle against the law. Indecency against courage. Six policemen manhandled a sick journalist, his eyes wincing against his first natural light in almost seven years.

That this outrage happened in the heart of London, in the land of Magna Carta, ought to shame and anger all who fear for "democratic" societies. Assange is a political refugee protected by international law, the recipient of asylum under a strict covenant to which Britain is a signatory. The United Nations made this clear in the legal ruling of its Working Party on Arbitrary Detention.

But to hell with that. Let the thugs go in. Directed by the quasi fascists in Trump's Washington, in league with Ecuador's Lenin Moreno, a Latin American Judas and liar seeking to disguise his rancid regime, the British elite abandoned its last imperial myth: that of fairness and justice.

Imagine Tony Blair dragged from his multi-million pound Georgian home in Connaught Square, London,

in handcuffs, for onward dispatch to the dock in The Hague. By the standard of Nuremberg, Blair's "paramount crime" is the deaths of a million Iraqis. Assange's crime is journalism: holding the rapacious to account, exposing their lies and empowering people all over the world with truth.

The shocking arrest of Assange carries a warning for all who, as Oscar Wilde wrote, "sow the seeds of discontent [without which] there would be no advance towards civilisation". The warning is explicit towards journalists. What happened to the founder and editor of *WikiLeaks* can happen to you on a newspaper, you in a TV studio, you on radio, you running a podcast.

Assange's principal media tormentor, the *Guardian*, a collaborator with the secret state, displayed its nervousness this week with an editorial that scaled new weasel heights. The *Guardian* has exploited the work of Assange and *WikiLeaks* in what its previous editor called "the greatest scoop of the last 30 years". The paper creamed off *WikiLeaks'* revelations and claimed the accolades and riches that came with them.

With not a penny going to Julian Assange or to *WikiLeaks*, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, turned on their source, abused him and disclosed the secret password Assange had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing leaked US embassy cables.

With Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding joined the police outside and gloated on his blog that "Scotland Yard may get the last laugh". The *Guardian* has since published a series of falsehoods about Assange, not least a discredited claim that a group of Russians and Trump's man, Paul Manafort, had visited Assange in the embassy. The meetings never happened; it was fake.

But the tone has now changed. "The Assange case is a morally tangled web," the paper opined. "He (Assange) believes in publishing things that should not be published. . . . But he has always shone a light on things that should never have been hidden."

These "things" are the truth about the homicidal way America conducts its colonial wars, the lies of the British Foreign Office in its denial of rights to vulnerable people, such as the Chagos Islanders, the expose of Hillary Clinton as a backer and beneficiary of jihadism in the Middle East, the detailed description of American ambassadors of how the governments in Syria and Venezuela might be overthrown, and much more. It all available on the *WikiLeaks* site.

The *Guardian* is understandably nervous. Secret policemen have already visited the newspaper

and demanded and got the ritual destruction of a hard drive. On this, the paper has form. In 1983, a Foreign Office clerk, Sarah Tisdall, leaked British Government documents showing when American cruise nuclear weapons would arrive in Europe. The *Guardian* was showered with praise.

When a court order demanded to know the source, instead of the editor going to prison on a fundamental principle of protecting a source, Tisdall was betrayed, prosecuted and served six months.

Hour of Chain and Noose

- Faiz Ahmed Faiz

This is the hour of madness, this too the hour of chain and noose
You may hold the cage in your control, but you don't command

If Assange is extradited to America for publishing what the *Guardian* calls truthful "things", what is to stop the current editor, Katherine Viner, following him, or the previous editor, Alan Rusbridger, or the prolific propagandist Luke Harding?

What is to stop the editors of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, who also published morsels of the truth that originated with *WikiLeaks*, and the editor of *El Pais* in Spain, and the *Der Spiegel* in Germany and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia. The list is long.

David McCraw, lead lawyer of the *New York Times*, wrote: "I think the prosecution [of Assange] would be a very, very bad precedent for publishers... from everything I know, he's sort of in a classic publisher's position and the law would have a very hard time distinguishing between the *New York Times* and

WikiLeaks."

Even if journalists who published *WikiLeaks*' leaks are not summoned by an American grand jury, the intimidation of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning will be enough. Real journalism is being criminalised by thugs in plain sight. Dissent has become an indulgence.

In Australia, the current America-besotted government is prosecuting two whistle-blowers who revealed that Canberra's spooks bugged the cabinet meetings of the new government of East Timor for the express purpose of cheating the tiny, impoverished nation out of its proper share of the oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea. Their trial will be held in secret. The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, is infamous for his part in setting up concentration camps for refugees on the Pacific islands of Nauru and Manus, where children self harm and suicide. In 2014, Morrison proposed mass detention camps for 30,000 people.

Real journalism is the enemy of these disgraces. A decade ago, the Ministry of Defence in London produced a secret document which described the "principal threats" to public order as threefold: terrorists, Russian spies and investigative journalists. The latter was designated the major threat.

The document was duly leaked to *WikiLeaks*, which published it. "We had no choice," Assange told me. "It's very simple. People have a right to know and a right to question and challenge power. That's true democracy."

What if Assange and Manning and others in their wake—if there are others—are silenced and "the right to know and question and challenge" is taken away?

Goebbelsian Doublespeak: B. R. Ambedkar and the RSS

N. Sukumar

In the 1970s, I met Leni Reifenstahl, close friend of Adolf Hitler, whose films helped cast the Nazi spell over Germany. She told me that the message in her films, the propaganda, was dependent not on "orders from above" but on what she called the "submissive void" of the public.

"Did this submissive void include the liberal, educated bourgeoisie?" I asked her.

"Of course," she said, "especially the intelligentsia. . . . When people no longer ask serious questions, they are submissive and malleable. Anything can happen."

And did.

The rest, she might have added, is history.

(John Pilger is a renowned investigative journalist and documentary film-maker.)

Historically, the philosophical roots of the RSS can be located in German National Socialism and the former has constantly strived to live up to the ideals of its mentors. This is best illustrated when the RSS indulges in Goebbelsian doublespeak to further its exclusivist nationalism. A lie spoken repeatedly becomes the truth—the appropriation of Babasaheb Ambedkar into the pantheon of 'nationalist' heroes reveals the political frustration of the RSS to make inroads into the Dalit / Adivasi / Moolnivasi mindscapes. Nathuram Godse physically eliminated Gandhi and the RSS is striving to ideologically annihilate Ambedkar. This article strives to deconstruct the issue of Panchjanya (April 19th 2015) and the special issue of Organiser on the 125th birth anniversary of Babasaheb which testify to the ideological vacuum of the Sangh Parivar and its urgency to 'create' new idols. The focus is on the engagement with the religious ideas espoused by these journals and their contradictions with Ambedkar's philosophy.

The model state, Gujarat has long been considered the social laboratory for Hindutva. Jan Breman¹ has analysed the well-entrenched nature of the Hindutva movement and its predecessors in Gujarat, strongly opposed to communal harmony and to the design of society as a melting pot of diverse and open-ended social segments. The mobilisation of low and intermediate castes to participate in the activities of the Sangh parivar

organisations in the last two decades has broadened the base of Hindu fundamentalism as a social-political force.

To bring the Dalis into the Hindutva fold, on the one hand, the Sangh Parivar took conscious steps to break the Dalit-Muslim nexus in Gujarat,² and on the other hand, Hindutva spin doctors sought to give a makeover to one of the most revered icons of modern India, Babasaheb Ambedkar, who sought to unravel the hegemony of religion and culture over the people.

Deifying Ambedkar

The Panchjanya issue of April 19, 2015³ commences with hyperbolic and effusive praise for Babasaheb, "a great leader who sought to organise and strengthen society on the basis of social harmony; a foresighted leader who strived to mould his country to meet the future challenges; a patriot, in short a seer of his age." A lot of water has flowed down the Ganges since Arun Shourie wrote Worshipping False Gods wherein Ambedkar was vilified as a traitor, as a supporter of Pakistan, etc. The Panchjanya now says, "Sri Guruji (Golwalkar) argues that after Buddha it is only Ambedkar who discoursed about social welfare and religious interests, to get rid of social evils. Indeed, Ambedkar is the true inheritor of Buddha's legacy and I heartily endorse his purity."

The above mentioned journal quotes Ambedkar on various issues without giving any reference as to

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its authenticity. It makes the blanket claim: "Through his various writings and speeches, Ambedkar engaged with savarna Hindus." But there is no reference to any book or writing of Ambedkar to prove that he ever said so. Panchjanya says, "Ambedkar wrote that Hindu religion believed that every man is a microcosm of the divine and every man is entitled to dignity. However, savarna Hindus have ill-treated dalits. If Dalits are maltreated then even God is displeased." But again, no source is cited for this statement. When the fact is that Ambedkar's views were the exact opposite of this, he was very critical of Hindu religion itself: "Hinduism is not interested in the common man. Hinduism is not interested in society as a whole. The centre of its interest lies in a class and its philosophy is concerned in sustaining and supporting the rights of that class. That is why in the philosophy of Hinduism, the interests of the common man as well as of society are denied, suppressed and sacrificed to the interest of this class of Supermen."²⁴

In yet another article, the same journal quotes Ambedkar as saying (again without citing any source), "He pointed out that till Hindu society is organised, justice and humanity will not be worshipped and till then independence is incomplete." This is also a fabrication, as for Ambedkar, "Hinduism is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity." Ambedkar further says, "Inequality is the soul of Hinduism. The morality of Hinduism is only social. It is unmoral and inhuman to say the least."²⁵

Panchjanya says that at a speech in Amravati (again no source is cited as to the date and occasion for the speech), "Ambedkar argued that

even dalits have rights in Hindutva. In order to establish the Hindutva philosophy, Valmiki, Chokhamela, Rohidas etc dalits have contributed in great measure and numerous dalits have sacrificed their lives to safeguard this philosophy. Hence, if Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas can enter temples, why cannot dalits do so?" This is again a falsification. Thus, the great medieval poet saint Chokhamela, in one of his abhangas, calls to God, "Why have you given me this birth if you have to give me birth at all? You have erred in giving me this birth; you have been unkind."²⁶ Here, Chokhamela is questioning his birth within the contours of the caste hierarchy, which is the bedrock of Hinduism, but the Panchjanya wants us to believe that Chokhamela was an advocate of Hindutva.

The attempt to falsify history is very evident in the above mentioned arguments. No distinction is made between Hinduism and Hindutva and both concepts are used as synonyms for each other.

The special issue of *Organiser* on the 125th anniversary of Dr Ambedkar seeks to deify Ambedkar by making the claim that the Indian Constitution is a new "Manusmriti", it in fact says it should be called "Bheemsmruti".⁷ It forgets that on December 25, 1927, Ambedkar burned the Manusmriti, a symbol of enslavement for majority of the denizens of India.

To call the Constitution "Bheemsmruti", to think that the thought could have come to Ambedkar's mind that the Constitution is "Bheemsmruti", is an affront to all that Ambedkar believed in. He considered any form of hero worship as detrimental to democracy. He had stated, "There

is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. As has been well said by the Irish Patriot Daniel O'Connell, no man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its liberty. This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of any other country. For in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship."²⁸

Peddling Falsehoods

The RSS mouthpiece, *Organiser*, in its special issue claims that Ambedkar believed that Buddhism and Hinduism were fundamentally the same.⁹ In his famous article *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, Ambedkar said that a true religion should have the following four characteristics: a) In the sense of morality, it must remain the governing principle in every society; b) it must be in accord with reason, which is merely another name for science; c) its moral code must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity; and d) it must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. He further said that only Buddhism can satisfy all these tests, and it is the only religion the world can have.¹⁰ In a clever sleight of hand, the *Organiser* quotes Ambedkar and gives the four characteristics of true religion

as outlined by him, but omits to mention the crucial conclusion, that only Buddhism can satisfy all these tests.

The effort to saffronise Ambedkar is very palpable when the *Organiser* claims that Ambedkar was a follower of Ram. It wants to wish away his epic work, *Riddles in Hinduism*, by claiming that the text was kept in his cupboard till the last breath of his life. The fact is, Rama holds no attractions for Ambedkar, for whom the most significant event in the Ramayana was Rama's decapitation of a shudra for practicing asceticism. Ambedkar calls this "the worst crime that history has ever recorded."¹¹

While toying with Ambedkar's beliefs, the RSS ideologues have eschewed any historical veracity. In his work, *Who Were the Shudras? How they came to be the Fourth Varna in Indo-Aryan Society*, Ambedkar argues at length on the origins of Chaturvarna. However, for the Sangh Parivar scholars, caste crept into Indian society with the Islamic invaders. Very subtly, they not only lay the sin of introducing untouchability into India on Islam but also play up the fear of Hindu women being violated by the mlechha invaders.¹²

While expurgating Ambedkar's ideas, the *Organiser* also generously edits the political terminology espoused by Ambedkar. The RSS's reluctance to use the term 'India' is well known, so the All India Scheduled Castes Federation founded by Ambedkar in April 1942 is transformed into Bharatiya Scheduled Caste Federation. The conversion to Buddhism was not merely a challenge to Hindu caste supremacy but Ambedkar provided a well thought out rationale for his act

of conversion.¹³ The *Organiser* cooks up a novel myth that "Ambedkar promised Gandhi that he would leave Hindu Dharma but would see to it that the least damage was done. When he embraced Buddhist faith in Deekshabhumi, Nagpur on October 1956, he said, 'I had kept my promise to Gandhiji.'" Neither in Gandhi's writings nor in Ambedkar's writings and speeches does one come across any such conversation.

According to the *Organiser*, Ambedkar believed that untouchability is inscribed on the Dalit body rather than being a blot on Hinduism and claims that he said, "we (untouchables) have to clean it. It means that we ourselves will have to fight this social slavery." The narrative gives the impression that Ambedkar was apologetic of the caste system rather than its fiercest critic. It even says that: "At one point he says that the Bhagvad Gita is my inspiration"; that he wrote "Jai Bhavani" on his newspaper; and that "He was proud of calling himself a Hindu."¹⁴ Ambedkar's writings make clear that the *Organiser* is lying. Ambedkar affirmed on October 13, 1935, at Yeola in Nasik district, "Unfortunately, I was born a Hindu untouchable. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but it is within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu."¹⁵

The Propaganda War

Once they succeeded in ending democracy and turning Germany into a one-party dictatorship, the Nazis orchestrated a massive propaganda campaign to win the loyalty and cooperation of Germans. The Nazi Propaganda Ministry, directed by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, took control

of all forms of communication in Germany: newspapers, magazines, books, public meetings, and rallies, art, music, movies, and radio. Viewpoints in any way threatening to Nazi beliefs or to the regime were censored or eliminated from all media. The RSS is traversing the very same path. Its political front, the Bharatiya Janata Party, is now the world's largest political party with 8.8 crore members. Gradually, all dissent is being stifled and landmark changes in the polity and society are being ushered in through ordinances, bypassing parliamentary debates.

One of the harshest critics of the Hindu social order was Ambedkar who sought to transform the caste society through legal, rational and constitutional norms. His followers have struggled to create an enlightened India by interrogating the social, cultural, political and economic domains controlled by entrenched interests through political struggles, revolutionary poetry and prose, new iconography and symbols. The appropriation and deliberate misreading of Ambedkar's life and vision will delegitimise his egalitarian ideas, demolish and demoralise the struggles to usher justice and fraternity and lead to the continued enslavement of the marginalised groups. The subversive and deliberate gesture of misquoting Ambedkar reveals the lack of historical and scholarly authenticity in the intellectual projects of the RSS. However, the dalit-bahujan citizens will not accept any tampering with the ideals of Babasaheb Ambedkar and would offer a befitting response.

Notes

[1] Jan Breman, *Communal Uproar as Resurgence of*

- Social Darwinism*, www.epw.org.
- [2] See: “Communalism as a Political Strategy”, <http://www.hrw.org>.
- [3] *Panchajanya*, April 19, 2015, Bharat Prakashan, Delhi.
- [4] *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Govt of Maharashtra, Vol. 3, 1998, p. 77.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 66, 87.
- [6] Eleanor Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*, Navayana, 2013, p. 54.
- [7] *Revisiting Ambedkar, Organiser*, April 2015, p. 58.
- [8] “Dr. Ambedkar's final speech in Constituent Assembly - Bar & Bench”, <https://barandbench.com>.
- [9] *Organiser*, op. cit., p. 78.
- [10] D.C. Ahir, “Dr. Ambedkar's Pilgrimage to Buddhism”, in: A.K. Narain and D.C. Ahir (editors), *Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994, p. 8.
- [11] Ambedkar, *The Riddle of Ram and Krishna*, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Govt. of Maharashtra, Vol. 4.
- [12] *Organiser*, op. cit., p. 15.
- [13] Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, “What Path to Salvation?”, <http://www.columbia.edu>.
- [14] *Organiser*, op. cit., pp. 15, 58.
- [15] *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Govt. of Maharashtra, Vol 17, p. 95.

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Remembering Justice Sachar on his first death anniversary

Justice Sachar, His Report and Muslims

Prem Singh

Today (20 April 2019) is the first death anniversary of Justice Rajindar Sachar—a socialist visionary, a Justice par excellence, a true secular and democrat, an unrelenting human rights and civil liberties champion and a wonderful person having complete faith in human goodness. While paying her tribute to him on his demise, Seema Mustafa rightly said, 'Our finest has gone'. I personally feel a great sense of loss without him, particularly in my political activities. He was so very involved in the affairs of Socialist Party (India) which he and senior socialist leaders like Surendra Mohan, Bhai Vaidya, Pannalal Surana, Prof. Keshav Jadhav formed in 2011 along with several young socialists. He used to have this hope and belief that the old glory of the Socialist Party and the original spirit of the movement / ideology will thrive once again in the realm of Indian politics. Of course, in order to replace the present corporate capitalist order. I often wondered about his optimism and used to ask him that if people around him did not respond adequately to his appeals, how could he hope that public in general would support his party and candidates? To that he only used to give an innocent smile, without a slightest sign of pessimism. His smile always kept us in a positive frame of mind and that is what we miss badly without him around us.

In the later period of his life, Justice Sachar was mainly known for the Sachar Committee Report. The Sachar Committee, headed

by Justice Rajindar Sachar, was constituted in 2005 by the then Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh to prepare a report about the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in the country. The Committee's 403 page report was presented in the Lok Sabha on 30 November 2006. The findings and recommendations of the report immediately became a topic of sharp debate in political, social and intellectual circles. The report was considered to be a mirror which showed the true picture of the Muslim community throughout India. Consequently, it received praise from a large part of intelligentsia as well as from political parties. Although there were some dissenting voices too about the findings, recommendations and methodology of the report, it was well received by most people. After the publication of the Report, many adverse reactions were made. An assassination plan was also reported. When this disclosure was published in the *Indian Express*, I wrote a letter to the Manmohan Singh government requesting it to provide protection to Justice Sachar. But the government did not pay heed to my request although the same government wanted to give him Padam Bhushan in lieu of the Report, which Justice Sachar humbly refused.

The report, known as ‘Sachar Committee Report’, brought for the first time attention to the ever growing economic inequality and social insecurity and alienation of Muslims in India since Independence. It

found, on basis of official data, that the Muslim population, estimated at over 138 million in 2001, was under-represented in the civil service, police, military and in politics. Muslims were more likely to be poor, illiterate, unhealthy and in trouble with the law as compared to other Indians. Thus, the myth of 'Muslim appeasement' was thoroughly exposed and the report became a focus of debate and controversy among scholars and political parties/leaders. Justice Sachar's activities, including this Report, were guided by the perspective of socialist ideology and the socialist movement of India. First and foremost, he was a staunch Lohian socialist.

Then there started a race among various political parties to make promises in their manifestos to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report. The only exception was the BJP which, in fact, opposed the report vehemently. But the secular parties kept repeating their promises through manifestos and rhetoric. However, when one reviews the progress of the implementation of the report carried out by the central and the state governments, the picture appears to be quite dismal.

The Report states that the minorities, especially the Muslims, have been the ignored factor in all Central Governments. Amongst the various recommendations, the Prime Minister's High Level Committee Report had recommended the establishment of Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) as an instrument to prevent discrimination against minorities in the private sector like housing and employment. It was an important point since courts cannot interfere in cases of discrimination in private sector.

This recommendation has been inexcusably sidelined and has remained in cold storage. The EOC can be set up by the state governments without taking permission from the Central government. A very urgent recommendation of the Report dealt with the unfairness of divisions of electoral constituencies which results in lesser number of Muslims in the legislature to which they are broadly entitled, based on the population. This anomaly arises from the irrational demarcation of seats in the legislature.

In U.P., there is abundant potential for substantial number of Muslims to win seats. As per the Report, to address this, the delimitation of constituencies in a fair manner is essential. But on the contrary the constituencies with substantial number of Muslims have been reserved for scheduled castes, and constituencies with substantial number of scheduled caste voters are unreserved. This is unfair to both Muslims and SC electorate. The Committee had hoped that it would receive the attention of the government immediately because the Delimitation Commission was at that time engaged in this exercise and evidently any suggestion or any exercise to be done by it had to be undertaken during the current term of the then Delimitation Commission. But, the Committee's suggestion was ignored during the delimitation.

But now, as far as the Muslim minority is concerned, politics has taken a different turn after the advent of Narendra Modi on the national scene. The result is that no political party has mentioned the recommendations of the Sachar Committee in its manifesto during Lok Sabha elections 2019. Justice Sachar wanted to live on till this

election. But unfortunately his health did not permit him to fulfill his desire. If he had been alive today, he would have felt very upset about this development.

[The author teaches Hindi at Delhi University and is president of Socialist Party (India).]

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Modinomics = Corporatonomics Part II: Modi's Budgets and Agriculture

Neeraj Jain

In the previous part of this article, we had shown that the government, if it wants, can raise enough resources to implement a whole slew of welfare measures. But instead of doing that, it is more interested in giving away huge subsidies to the tune of several lakh crore rupees to the corporate houses. In this part, we take a look at Modi Government's policies with regards to the severe agrarian crisis gripping the country.

PM Kisan Samman scheme

The neoliberal reforms being implemented in the country for the past nearly three decades have pushed Indian agriculture into a deep crisis. Public investment in agriculture has been falling. Both input subsidies (such as fertiliser, electricity and irrigation subsidies) and output support to farmers (in the form of public procurement of agricultural produce) have been drastically cut. Farmers are finding it difficult to access loans from banks at subsidised rates, pushing them into clutches of moneylenders. Consequently, for the majority of India's farmers, who are small farmers with land holdings of less than 1 hectare, their total income from all sources (cultivation, farming of animals, non-farm business and wages) has fallen to less than their consumption expenditure. It has led to a huge increase in rural indebtedness; over the two decades 1992–2012, the incidence of indebtedness among cultivator households has nearly doubled. These neoliberal policies drove

the hardy Indian farmers into such despair that more than 3.5 lakh farmers had committed suicide over the two decades to 2014—something that did not happen even during the days of the British Raj.

Narendra Modi and the BJP swept to power in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections on the back of a whole slew of extravagant promises to farmers. After coming to power, it promised to double the income of all farmers by 2022.

However, ever since it assumed power, the agricultural policies of the Modi Government have only worsened the crisis gripping Indian agriculture. And so, the past year saw India swept by over a dozen farmer marches, including the epic march by over one lakh farmers from all over the country to the country's capital Delhi in November 2018.

With elections looming, in a desperate bid to win over farmers, the Modi Government in its Interim Budget 2019–20 announced a PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme to provide income support of Rs 6,000 per year to small and marginal farmers. Under the scheme, around 12 crore farmers with small landholdings of up to two hectares, will be provided direct income support of Rs 6,000 per year, in three equal instalments of Rs 2,000 each. In a naked attempt to buy votes of farmers, the Finance Minister Goyal announced that first instalment would be transferred immediately, before March 31, 2019. Landless farmers, tenant farmers and sharecroppers will not benefit from the scheme.

The amount translates into a mere Rs 500 per month—which is a joke, considering the depth of the farm crisis. The scheme is even weaker than the income support to farmers being given in Odisha and Telengana, which give farmers Rs 10,000 per year, and have no landholding limits, apart from other benefits.

Betraying farmers

On the other hand, the budget is silent on the important issue of farm loan waiver. It would have cost the government at the most Rs 3 lakh crore, while benefiting crores of farmers across the country. The injustice of this becomes all the more apparent when one takes note of the fact that the loan waivers given by the Modi Government to corporate houses total several times more than this.

On the issue of implementing the most crucial recommendation of the Swaminathan Commission, that farmers should be given MSP which is 50% over the C2 cost of production (which is the comprehensive cost of production), in this year's budget speech too, the Finance Minister repeats Jaitley's lie of last year that the government has "fixed the minimum support price (MSP) of all 22 crops at minimum 50% more than the cost." During the year 2018–19, the government has announced increases in MSP for kharif and rabi crops, but the increase is much below the C2+50% price recommended by the Swaminathan Commission (see Table 1).

Whatever be the MSP declared,

another problem faced by farmers is that most farmers do not get this price for their crops. Government procurement operations cover only a few crops, mainly rice, wheat, cotton and occasionally pulses. (While there is no government procurement per se in sugarcane, mills are legally obligated to buy cane from farmers at prices fixed by government, an effective MSP-like arrangement.)

year's budget papers reveal the shocking fact that actual expenditure on food subsidy had been only Rs 1,05,864 crore in 2017–18—a reduction of 27% over the revised expenditure for food subsidy in 2017–18 of Rs 1,45,892 crore as given in the 2018–19 budget papers (see Table 2). Do the budget estimates have any meaning under the Modi Government? It only means that

rate, the rest is borne by the Centre and the respective State. While the allocation for this scheme has gone up by nearly five times over the five Modi Government budgets (2018–19 RE over 2014–15 A), several reports have come in the media showing how this scheme has turned out to be a way of transferring public funds to corporations—in the name of public welfare, it has resulted in windfall

Table 1: MSP on Rabi–Kharif Crops and C2+50%¹

<i>Crop</i>	<i>Declared MSP</i>	<i>C2 + 50%</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Rice	1,750	2,340	590
Wheat	1,840	2,008.50	168.50
Cotton	5,150	6,771	1,621
Soyabean	3,399	4,458	1,059
Maize	1,700	2,220	520
Gram (chana)	4,620	5,757	1,137.50

Table 2: Budget Allocations for Food Subsidy, 2014–19 (Rs crore)

	<i>2014–15 A</i>	<i>2017–18 RE</i>	<i>2017–18 A</i>	<i>2018–19 RE</i>	<i>2019–20</i>
Food Subsidy	1,17,671	1,40,282	1,00,282	1,71,298	1,84,220

The Shanta Kumar committee admits that 94% of farmers do not get MSP, even if it is low.

The finance minister had admitted this problem in his budget speech last year. He had proposed that “Niti Aayog, in consultation with Central and State Governments, will put in place a fool-proof mechanism so that farmers will get adequate price for their produce.” More than a year has gone by; the government has presented two budgets, but there has been no financial allocation to implement this promise in either of the budgets! Meanwhile, a few more thousand farmers have committed suicide.

Government procurement from farmers mainly comes under the budget head, ‘food subsidy’. This

despite the worsening agrarian crisis, the government is not interested in expanding its procurement of foodgrains. The revised estimate for food subsidy in 2018–19 is given as Rs 1,77,874 crore. Considering last year's performance, and the slipping fiscal deficit, it is doubtful if the government has actually spent this amount.

A scheme about which the Finance Minister makes no mention in his budget speech is the much-hyped Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Table 3). The reason is not far to seek—the scheme has turned out to be a huge scam. The scheme aims to provide financial support to farmers suffering crop loss/damage arising out of unforeseen events. The farmer pays the premium at a subsidised

profits for insurance companies. The scheme has enabled insurance companies to earn a whopping Rs 15,795 crore as profit in just the last two years. They got a gross premium of Rs 22,362.11 crore and paid an insurance claim of Rs 15,902.47 crore to 3,01,26,403 farmers in 2016–17; and in 2017–18, they disbursed claims of Rs 15,710.25 crore against a premium of Rs 25,045.87 crore to 1,26,01,048 farmers.² This year, the scheme has been allocated Rs 14,000 crore, as compared to Rs 13,000 crore allocated last year.

The Finance Minister had announced the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (prime minister's irrigation scheme) with much fanfare in his very first budget of 2014–15. The Economic Survey of

2017–18 admits that the percentage of net irrigated area to the total cropped area was 34.5% that year. Despite this situation, this scheme has always been underfunded. Overall, the total expenditure on this scheme during the five years of the Modi Government (2018–19 RE over 2014–15 A) has increased by only 8.5% (CAGR), which is barely enough to beat inflation (see Table 3).

The flagship scheme of the Central government for creating robust pre- and post-harvest infrastructure for agriculture is the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. However, allocation for this has been halved over the five budgets of the Modi Government, from Rs 8,443 crore in 2014–15 A to Rs 3,600 crore in 2018–19; the allocation for 2019–20 has been marginally increased to Rs 3,800 crore.

In the long-term, the only solution to the crisis gripping Indian agriculture is promoting organic or sustainable farming techniques in agriculture. However, the budget for a very important scheme related to this, called Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, continues to stagnate at a lowly Rs 325 crore as compared to the allocation in the 2018–19 BE of Rs 360 crore. The footnote to the budget document states that

the National Project on Organic Farming is meant to promote organic farming techniques in the country, but its allocation is a princely Rs 2 crore! The National Mission on Oil Seed and Oil Palm, which had been allocated a meagre Rs 400 crore in 2018–19 BE, has now apparently been abandoned by the government; it has not been given any allocation in the 2019–20 Interim Budget.

An important sector that can help provide some relief from the agrarian crisis is the livestock sub-sector (includes sectors like dairy, poultry and meat) and fisheries sub-sector. The livestock sector provides additional income to a large section of small and marginal farmers; it is estimated that fishing, aquaculture and allied activities provide livelihood to more than 14 million people. While the Finance Minister in his budget speech claimed that the government gives high priority to the animal husbandry sector, this is only empty rhetoric; the allocation for the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy and Fisheries is very low in absolute terms, only Rs 3,100 crore in 2019–20; and has actually declined as compared to 2018–19 RE (Rs 3,273 crore). As a percentage of the budget outlay, it is a miniscule 0.11%. Within this, the allocation for what

is called the white revolution has significantly declined from Rs 2,431 crore in 2018–19 RE to Rs 2,140 in 2019–20 BE. Similarly, funds provisioned under Blue Revolution, meant for fishery sector, have also declined from their already meagre levels (see Table 4).

Budget for Rural Development

Conditions in agriculture are intimately tied to the general state of the rural economy, and that is why public spending on rural development is also crucial for the overall development of agriculture. Here the outlays are hugely disappointing. Total allocation for Ministry of Rural Development or MoRD is slated to increase by only 4.7% over the previous year's revised estimate—not even keeping pace with inflation (Table 5)! Overall, during the Modi Government's five years, the budget for the Department of Rural Development has gone up by 7.01% (CAGR), which is a fall in real terms. This is also reflected in the fact that the budget for this department as a share of the total budget outlay has fallen from 4.6% to 4.2% over this period.

One important head under the Department of Rural Development is the 'Pradhan Mantri Avas Yojana – Grameen'. This scheme is the

Table 3: Budget Allocations for Department of Agriculture, 2014–19 (Rs crore)

	2014–15 A	2018–19 BE	2018–19 RE	2019–20
Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare (incl Interest Subvention)	25,255	46,700	67,800	129,585
<i>Within this:</i>				
<i>Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana</i>	2,598	13,000	12,976	14,000
<i>Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana*</i>	5,580	9,429	8,407	9,677
<i>Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana</i>	8,443	3,600	3,600	3,800

* Subsumed under the Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Land Resources and Ministry of Water Resources

Table 4: Budget Allocations for Department of Animal Husbandry, 2014–19
(Rs crore)

	2014–15 A	2018–19 BE	2018–19 RE	2019–20
Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (1)	1,822	3,100	3,273	3,100
<i>Within this:</i>				
<i>White Revolution</i>	416	2220	2431	2140
<i>Blue Revolution</i>	388	643	501	560
(1) as % of Budget Outlay	0.11	0.13	0.13	0.11
(1) as % of GDP	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01

Table 5: Budget Allocations for Department of Rural Development (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2018–19 BE	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
Department of Rural Development (1)	80,093	1,12,404	1,12,404	1,17,647
<i>of which:</i>				
<i>National Rural Livelihood Mission</i>	4,000	5,750	5,784	9,024
<i>Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna – Grameen</i>	16,000	21,000	19,900	19,000
<i>Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna</i>	14,391	19,000	15,500	19,000
<i>Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme</i>	34,000	55,000	61,084	60,000
<i>National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)</i>	10,635	9,975	8,900	9,200
(1) as a % of total Budget Outlay	4.46	4.60	4.57	4.23

flagship housing scheme of the Modi Government, which replaced the earlier Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) of the UPA government, and promised housing for all by 2022. In his budget speech last year, Jaitley claimed that the government had targeted building 10 million houses by March 2019—51 lakh houses were to be completed by March 2018 and another 51 lakh houses by March 2019. But the allocation for this scheme has fallen from Rs 23,000 crore in 2017–18 BE to Rs 19,900 in 2018–19 RE, a cut

of nearly 20% in real terms (Table 5). Obviously, the government has no intention of constructing many houses under this scheme, it is just another of Jaitley's fibs. This is borne out by figures available on the MoRD website: they reveal that 23.5 lakh houses were constructed in 2017–18 and another 19.1 lakh in 2018–19 (as on April 9, 2019)—that is, the total number of houses built under this scheme is less than half of the target!

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) is a central scheme

to build all-weather roads to connect 1.6 lakh eligible unconnected habitations. The Finance Minister claims in his budget speech that more than 90% of the habitations have been connected with pucca roads, and the task would soon be completed. This, despite the fact that for the last four years, the allocation under this scheme has remained constant at Rs 19,000 crore, and the money actually spent has been 10–20% less than this (Table 5). The CAG recently pointed out several irregularities under this

scheme, including misreporting.³ Clearly, much of these roads are being built only on paper.

MGNREGA

The most important scheme under the Department of Rural Development is obviously the government's rural employment guarantee programme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). It guarantees a minimum of 100 days of employment in a year to every willing household. Significantly, it guarantees time bound employment, within 15 days of making such a requisition, failing which it promises an unemployment allowance. This scheme has the potential to lessen the crisis gripping the rural areas and improve food security. Numerous studies have shown that NREGA has had several positive effects, including increasing rural wages, enabling better access to food and thereby reducing hunger, and reducing distress migration from rural areas.

In its latest 2019–20 budget, the Modi government has cut the MGNREGA budget allocation even in absolute terms, to Rs 60,000 crore, as compared to the 2018–19 revised estimate of Rs 61,084 crore (Table 5). Of this, Rs 7,568 crore will go to meet the unpaid wages of the previous year. This means that just to maintain the budget level at last year, the budget for this year should have been $61,084 + 4,887$ (inflation

at 8%) + 7,568 = Rs 73,539 crore. The budget allocation is 18% less than this.

Even if the Centre had allocated the desired funds to keep the allocation at the same level as last year, it would have been insufficient for a full roll-out of the scheme. MNREGS is a demand-driven scheme, it guarantees 100 days of employment to all those who desire it (one member per household). Of course, this is a very inadequate employment guarantee, but at least it is something. To make available this many days of employment to all those desiring work, and give them timely wage, a minimum allocation of at least Rs 88,000 crore is needed.⁴ But the actual allocation by the Modi government has been way below this. In fact, the allocation by the Modi government has been so low that this scheme has been able to make available an average of just 46 person-days of employment per household during all the five years of Modi rule (Table 6). It is thus clear that the MGNREGS has stopped being a demand-driven programme altogether; its scale depends rather on the amount of resources made available for it—a clear violation of the Act. The primary sufferers of this cut in funds are some of the poorest and most vulnerable workers of rural India.

Total allocation for all agriculture related sectors

Let us now take a look at the

budget for all agriculture related sectors (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Water Resources as well as the Department of Fertilisers). As can be seen from Table 7, the total spending for all these ministries, including the Income Support Scheme, has fallen as a percentage of the budget outlay over the five Modi Government budgets, 2014 to 2018. This year, it has marginally increased, due to the huge increase in income support scheme. Exclude that, and it comes down from 11.58% of the budget outlay to only 9.65%—a fall of nearly 2 percentage points. And that is what really matters—giving an income support which is actually a bribe during elections does not really improve income from agriculture.

Even after taking into account the huge outlay for income support, as a percentage of the GDP, total agricultural spending during the five Modi budgets has significantly fallen; so much so, that even in 2019–20, it has yet to reach the 2014–15 budget estimate level.

But what is more important is that as a percentage of GDP, total spending on all agriculture related sectors is just around 1.6% of GDP. This, for a sector on which more than 50% of the population depend for their livelihoods!

Falling rate of growth of agriculture during Modi regime

It is because of these anti-farmer

Table 6: NREGA Performance Indicators

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
Person-days of employment generated (in crore)	166	235	236	234	268
Average days of employment per household	40	49	46	46	51

Table 7: Budget Allocations for Agriculture Related Ministries (Rs crore)

		2014–15 BE	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
1	Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (incl Income Support Scheme)	37,063	79,026	1,40,764
2	Ministry of Rural Development	83,852	114,400	1,19,874
3	Ministry of Water Resources	13837	7613	8041
4	Department of Fertilisers	73100	70,123	75035
5	Total Agriculture Spending (1+2+3+4)	2,07,852	2,71,162	3,43,714
	(5) as % of Budget Outlay	11.58	11.03	12.35
	(5) as % of GDP	1.67	1.44	1.64

policies of the Modi Government that agricultural growth rate under the Modi government over the five year period 2014 to 2019 has declined to an average of 2.9%, compared to 4.3% during the UPA-II years, and 3.7% for the full 10 years of UPA. This is based on the latest GDP estimates released by the CSO, and is despite the manipulation of GDP data by the Modi Government.⁵

This assault on Indian agriculture pushed the hardy Indian farmers into such despair that even after the Modi Government arm-twisted the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to make major changes in its methodology, the number of farm suicides increased by 40% during the first year of the Modi Government. The government panicked, and got the NCRB to stop releasing anymore data on farm suicides. The Union Agriculture Minister Radhamohan Singh in fact unashamedly admitted in Parliament on December 18, 2018, that the NCRB, which collects such data, has not published figures of farmer suicides since 2016.

Solving the agrarian crisis

What is the best way of solving the agrarian crisis? While the NYAY

scheme of the Congress is welcome, it does not really attack the roots of the agricultural crisis—that agriculture is becoming unprofitable. The other biggest limitation of the NYAY scheme is that it too engages in targeting, and is only targeted at the poorest 20% households, whereas the entire agricultural sector is in crisis.

Therefore, what is more urgently required is that:

- The government should increase its investment in agriculture towards making agriculture sustainable. As discussed above, if the government reduces the enormous subsidies and transfers being given to corporate houses, it can easily double or even triple its total investment on all agriculture related sectors:
 - Outlay for Ministry of Agriculture can be trebled from Rs 65,800 crore (excluding income support) to Rs 2 lakh crore.
 - Outlay for Ministry of Rural Development (excluding NREGA and excluding National Social Assistance Programme – about which we discuss later) can be

increased from Rs 1.34 lakh crore to Rs 2.8 lakh crore in the minimum.

- These investments in agriculture and related sectors will need to be directed towards:
 - Increasing investment in irrigation facilities, especially sprinkler and drip irrigation projects, water shed development and tank rehabilitation.
 - Providing subsidised crop loans to farmers, including to women-headed families and tenant farmers, equal to their cost of production.
 - Providing subsidised and compulsory crop insurance to all farmers through public sector insurance companies;
 - Implementing plans and providing subsidised finance to promote dairy farming and village-based industries to increase rural incomes, and efforts must be made to do this through village cooperatives.
 - Shifting the entire orientation of agriculture from the present chemical intensive, external input oriented

industrial agriculture to alternate technologies that promote sustainable, environment friendly, agriculture. For this, the government will need to give priority to schemes like Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana and National Project on Organic Farming.

- Apart from this, the government will need to boost its investment in the very important rural jobs guarantee scheme or NREGA, and it will need to implement good quality, free / cheap universal basic services including education, health, nutrition and pensions. These measures will of course also call for increasing investment in all these sectors, which as we discuss in a later article are eminently affordable for a government with so many resources as India.
- The Central Government also needs to take the initiative and provide a one time waiver of all farm loans, including private moneylender loans. The moneylender loans should be declared illegal by passing appropriate legislation, and the bank loan waiver – which should cost at the most Rs 3 lakh crore according to estimates by experts – can be financed through issue of bonds like the government has done for recapitalisation of banks, so that the burden can be distributed over many years.
- Government procurement of crops should take place at 50% above cost of production, where cost of production is defined as C2 production cost. It should also expand procurement of foodgrains, and

also expand the procurement to other important crops like oilseeds and pulses, all which it should distribute through a universalised public distribution system. This implies replacing the targeted public distribution system by the previous universal public distribution system, in which, along with foodgrains, government should also distribute other food essentials like pulses and cooking oil to all people. We have discussed the costs for this elsewhere, and they are not much.

What is the real objective of the Modi Government?

Why is the Modi Government only giving empty promises and not taking concrete doable steps to solve the agrarian crisis. This becomes clear from a perusal of two official documents:

A recent document of the NITI Aayog says:

“With the corporate sector keen on investing in agribusiness to harness the emerging opportunities in domestic and global markets, time is opportune for reforms that would provide healthy business environment for this sector. Small scale has been a major constraint on the growth of this industry.”⁶

The paper also calls for allowing corporate sector to side-step the APMCs and procure directly from the cultivator.

Another official document of the government lays out a target of bringing down the population engaged in agriculture from the existing 57% to 38% over the next five years, by 2022.⁷ Interestingly, this is elucidated in a report of the National Skill Development Council. The reason is obvious—

after the farmers have been pushed out of their farms, they will need to be trained to work as workers in the factories.

The orientation is thus clear. Allow agribusiness corporations into Indian farming, let them take control of procurement. Push out the small farmers from agriculture, and transform Indian agriculture into corporate farming.

There is little room for doubt. The Modi Government is the most anti-farmer government that has come to power at the Centre since independence.

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Venezuela: Why is Maduro Still in Power?

Federico Fuentes

For many, it is impossible to understand how, despite presiding over the country's worst economic crisis and facing such intense international and domestic opposition, Maduro remains in the presidential palace.

The answer lies in the enduring strength of Chavismo, a political movement of the working classes that, despite predating former president Hugo Chávez, continues to take his name and political project as its own.

The refusal by Maduro's opponents, inside and outside Venezuela, to acknowledge its existence also goes a long way to explaining why they have remained in opposition for more than two decades.

Chávez

Walking down the main street of San Fernando, capital of the border state of Apure, it did not take long for someone to come up and start talking politics. Within minutes, a group discussion had formed.

I asked them about Chávez. One responded: "Chávez didn't come to power just because he wanted a job. He came to power because we were dying of hunger; Venezuelans were dying of hunger in the '80s and '90s.

"That's why, in '89 the barrios [poor neighbourhoods] came down the hills and looted stores to get food," he said, referring to the February 27 Caracazo uprising, ultimately put down by brutal repression which, according to reports, left thousands dead.

Another said: "The Chávez

era was the most beautiful time in Venezuelan history. Everyone was able to improve their living conditions, not just the poor but even the rich."

"Thanks to Hugo Chávez, we have the opportunity to study, to do a postgraduate [course]," explains another.

"Universities were basically privatised. Unless you were rich you had no chance of being able to go to university.

"Chávez opened up education and started to give students uniforms, shoes, food, computers; kids are given laptops, tablets..."

A young man interrupts: "University students also get a tablet. I have one. I had never seen one before, but now I have one."

Identity

The depth of support for Chávez among working people, however, cannot be simply explained by his association with better times.

Andreina Pino, a local activist with the Bolivar and Zamora Revolutionary Current in the rural state of Barinas, where Chávez was born, says this identification is due to Chávez's ability to "decipher the code of the people."

"Chávez was able to do this," Pino explains "because he came from the people."

"Generally, politicians in this country came from rich families and didn't have that contact with working people. Chávez was able to connect with the sentiment, culture and spirituality of the Venezuelan people... He came to synthesise all of that

culture, that spirituality, that history. Chávez not only identified with that history, he taught us history. Chávez talked about Simón Bolívar and our struggle for independence.

"He also began to build hope in us that we, the people, could construct our own history. Chávez awoke something within the people."

Political subject

Caracas-based Argentine sociologist Marco Teruggi believes the opposition's inability to accept or comprehend this phenomenon is why it "has been making the same error in their analysis for twenty years".

"They don't incorporate the existence of Chavismo as a political subject into their analysis."

Teruggi explained that to understand Chavismo, it is important to look beyond the government and view this political movement in all its complexity.

Emerging from within the popular classes, Chavismo incorporates a gamut of political parties, social movements and organisations, and penetrates deep into the barrios and military barracks.

"We cannot begin to understand how, for instance, the economic crisis has not led to a popular explosion, if we don't understand the deep roots that Chavismo has in the barrios, where it has generated a whole network of organisations that are very strong and that allows it to contain the situation," said Teruggi.

"Importantly, Chavismo has its own political identity. We could say that Chavismo is an identity of a

part of the popular classes. Under Chavismo, the popular classes were not only able to improve their economic situation but to participate in politics, have a public voice, be protagonists.

"Only Chavismo has offered them this. They are defending a process that today has been dealt blows but continues to be the only project that has offered the popular classes in Venezuela a different destiny to the one they had always been condemned to—one of poverty, unemployment, exclusion and marginalisation. The people are not defending Maduro; they are defending the possibility of being able to continue improving not just their economic situation but their lives in general."

Pino agrees: "The people who continue to support Maduro understand that it's Maduro [in these] circumstances . . . who is the current leader of the civic-military process. The right doesn't understand this; they don't understand that what is in dispute here is not Maduro but a project."

No blank check

Teruggi points out, however, that "Chavismo is not a blank check. It's not something that can be used and abused for an indefinite amount of time."

Earlier this year, there were clear signs of this.

Atenea Jiménez, from the National Network of Comuneros, which unites people involved in numerous communes across the country, explained that, in January, between Maduro's inauguration and Guaidó's self-proclamation, "there were many protests . . . but these protests were different as they were in popular sectors, including some

that have historically been very Chavista.

"These were not in middle class sectors, at least here in Caracas; they were protests by people from the barrios who do not agree with Maduro; people who are not with the opposition but who are fed up with having had to deal with this economic situation for so many years."

Jiménez noted that the politics of the protest were, like everything in Venezuela, very complex and contradictory. Some of them "were tied to the actions of armed gangs", while in other cases, members of the police and Bolivarian National Guard were involved.

"These protests did not have a clear leadership, they were not planned or organised by a political sector, although there were right-wing opposition sectors who tried to promote the protests because they saw them as functional to their aims of removing Maduro by any means."

Beyond these complexities, "they were protests about the very real situations that people are facing . . . and in some places, where Chavistas are very angry with the difficulties of everyday life, the protests were huge."

"Many of the people who protested feel that the government has not been capable of resolving their problems. They said: 'We have given [the government] all of our votes, for the National Constituent Assembly, for governors, for mayors, all of them. So what excuse do they have for not resolving our everyday problems such as food and medicine?'"

Teruggi notes that the current situation "cannot last forever. There needs to be responses by the government to these demands,

otherwise it will lose the support it needs to stay in power."

However, Teruggi believes Venezuelans are still some time away from reaching breaking point. "I think this is why the US is attempting to accelerate its actions against Maduro.

"Rather than continuing to . . . wear down support for the government through economic attacks, the US is instead promoting a parallel government. Even if the attacks on the economy are generating a lot of damage and Chavismo has been unable to respond . . . and even contributed to problems through its own errors, the overall balance of forces has maintained itself."

Anti-imperialism

Jiménez notes that "in other circumstances, under neoliberal governments, we would have turned this country upside down."

"But these mass protests dissipated once Guaidó entered the political scene, because that popular force, which is discontent, that has criticism towards the government . . . retreated as a new variable entered into the fray.

"That new variable is imperialism."

Guaidó's US-backed self-proclamation, his appeals for foreign intervention and more sanctions meant that, "those spontaneous protests stopped as people began to say that this is not the way to solve our problems. Among the people there is a very strong anti-imperialist sentiment, independently of the position that people may have towards the government.

"Any threat of foreign intervention immediately generates within our people a spirit of struggle

... people recognise that we can have our criticisms, but that this has nothing to do with [US President Donald] Trump being able to decide who our president should be. The roughshod manner in which the opposition has acted and its open calls for US intervention, together with the almost daily statements coming from Trump's spokespeople, has generated a patriotic sentiment, a conviction that we will resolve this in the way that we want to resolve it."

These sentiments were expressed by many, including one of the women who joined the discussion in San Fernando: "We don't want the Yankees or anyone else to get involved here. We are determined to be free. We don't want any more interference in our country. What we want is to be independent, to be sovereign and for us to be able to decide what happens to our wealth. No one else can tell us what to do with our resources."

Another adds: "We want to resolve our problems ourselves. We are happy to accept suggestions, but good suggestions. Any country can come and make suggestions, but no one can impose themselves on us like the US is trying to. That's not the way it works here. That's not the way to help."

"If the US wants to help us then get rid of the sanctions," says another.

(Federico Fuentes writes for Green Left Weekly, Australia.)

Where Next for the Student Climate Strikes?

Helena Nicholson

The #YouthStrike4Climate movement has exploded in size from its small beginnings just over half a year ago, when one Swedish school student protested alone outside parliament against her government's lack of commitment to the Paris Climate agreement.

Only months later, on 15 March, over 1.5 million students in 125 countries (in more than 2,000 locations worldwide) went on strike together to demand systemic and radical change to stop global warming.

In the UK, the strike turnout more than tripled on the previous national strike in February, rising from 15,000 to 50,000. The number of strike locations increased from 60 to around 150.

This picture was replicated—on an even greater scale—in other countries. There were over 300,000 strikers in Germany, 150,000 in Canada, 100,000 in Italy, 70,000 in Switzerland and 50,000 in Belgium and many hundreds of thousands more across the world.

This marks a qualitative shift in the consciousness of young people internationally. There has been no comparable militant, global and organised youth movement in recent history.

Militant action

Time Is Running Out. It is perhaps surprising—but no less encouraging—that the first reaction of an entire generation around the world to the threat of the climate crisis has been to organise themselves and take unofficial strike action.

This instinctive internationalism and understanding of the power of mass organisation will prove to be an important formative experience for future struggles.

Whatever may come of the student climate strikes, there will be many lessons learnt from this movement. There is now a generation whose main reference point when it comes to demanding political change is mass direct action, involving wildcat strikes and protests involving blocking bridges, stopping traffic, and climbing on buses.

They have been shown very starkly the limits and impotence of democracy under capitalism, in the face of an environmental crisis that threatens our future.

Whilst the movement lacks a clear direction or political programme, there is equally an implicit understanding that the power of a mass movement is necessary to force real change—even if the revolutionary consequences of this have not been fully drawn out.

This reflects the kinds of political struggle which will emerge in the near future.

Organise and strike

The traditional unions in Britain have so far shown little appetite for the kind of radical action seen in this youth movement. But the militant example of the school strikes could act as the spark for a wider movement of mass coordinated strike action in the trade unions against the Tory government, if this political connection is made between

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workers and students—and, most importantly, if a bold, fighting lead is given from the leaders of the labour movement.

The focal point of the struggle in Britain at the present time is clearly on the political plane, around the fight for a Corbyn Labour government. But a mass campaign of protests and strikes must play a part in this, in order to force a general election and kick out the Tories.

At the same time, a new wave of young workers in precarious sectors are starting to organise, particularly in smaller unions. The bakers' union (BFAWU), for example, is organising strikes of McDonald's workers. And there are also more militant and unofficial strikes taking place through the IWGB, UVW and other unions, who are organising outsourced workers.

Young people are militant and angry, and are beginning to see the imperative of getting organised.

The limits of spontaneity

Whilst the spontaneity of the climate strike movement has allowed it to grow rapidly and lent additional militancy to the protests, we should not romanticise this spontaneity. In the absence of any organisation and direction, and without a clear socialist programme and alternative, such a movement can be derailed, co-opted, or can run out of steam.

This can be seen from the gilets jaunes movement in France. The yellow vests too are an explosive and radical mass movement: spontaneous; mobilised largely through social media; and characterised by a deep mistrust of organisation and leadership.

The main reason for this rejection of organisation lies with the betrayals of the leaders of the

French labour movement in previous struggles. Indeed, the big union leaders have actively distanced themselves from the gilets jaunes since the start of the protests last November. This has prevented the movement from realising its tremendous potential power, if workers were united and organised against the bosses and the Macron government.

By contrast, the students in the climate strike protests are instinctively drawing political conclusions. Chants against Theresa May are frequently heard at the demonstrations in Britain, as are slogans in support of Jeremy Corbyn. Labour should therefore take a bold lead in supporting and helping to channel the radical anger of this movement.

Need for revolution

It is important to recognise that there is a sharp contrast between the official demands of the #YouthStrike4Climate movement and the demands and mood seen on the street.

The official organisers make limited calls for greater education and awareness; votes at 16; and the declaration of a 'climate emergency'. But the placards and chants on recent protests have made it clear that the overriding demands is for 'system change not climate change'. It is necessary now to outline what this 'system change' must involve.

Left-wingers in the British Labour Party and the American Democrats have called for a 'Green New Deal' to address the climate crisis. In essence, this is a Keynesian programme of government tax-and-spend. But it does not address the key question of ownership. Tackling climate change requires a rational

and democratic plan of production. But you cannot plan what you do not control; and you do not control what you do not own.

Elsewhere, there have been concerted attempts to depoliticise the movement. Angela Merkel, for example, has voiced some support for the strikes on this basis, hoping to channel the movement into a safe and palatable liberal direction.

At the present time, however, the climate strike movement shows no signs of abating or watering down its demands. Meanwhile, the wider class struggle is only set to intensify.

It is therefore imperative that the youth climate strikes link up with the organised working class, in order to build a mass movement capable of bringing about a fundamental transformation of society.

Liberal environmentalism and tinkering around the edges of the system will not work. We must be clear: capitalism is killing our planet. We need a revolution.

(Helena Nicholson is a UK based socialist activist.)

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People's Power Topples Sudan's Omar al-Bashir

Omar al-Bashir, who was president of Sudan for nearly 30 years, has been forced out by Sudanese army after months of popular protests that rocked the country. Media reports say al-Bashir is under house arrest. Government sources have said that consultations are on to set up a transitional government, which might be led by vice-president Awad Awnaf.

Reports say all political prisoners have been released and some government officials may be in detention.

However, various organizations which have been in the forefront of the protests which finally led to the removal of al-Bashir have made it clear they will not accept a dispensation which has links to the previous regime. The Sudanese Professionals Association said in a statement, "We assert that the people of Sudan will not accept anything less than a civil transitional authority composed of a patriotic group of experts who were not involved with the tyrannical regime."

It asked the armed forces to "hand over power to the people, according to what was expressed in the declaration of freedom and change." The armed forces are expected to make a statement on Wednesday.

With news of Bashir's ouster spreading, thousands of Sudanese thronged the streets of the capital city Khartoum to celebrate. Protesters were heard chanting slogans such as "He is a coward and he has fallen!" There was general bonhomie between the protesters and army personnel. However, experts have

said that a lot depends on whether the army will bow before the will of the people and give up its power, or seek to prop up elements of the current regime.

The past few days saw the biggest mobilizations in the country since December 19, when protests broke out over the hike in the rate of bread prices. These protests soon escalated into a demand for the ouster of the al-Bashir regime. From April 6, thousands of Sudanese mobilized at the headquarters of the army in various States, urging the soldiers to join the protests. Attempts by security forces and militia loyal to al-Bashir to break up the demonstrations failed when some soldiers and junior officers came out and fired at the security forces. As many as 26 peoples were killed and around 160-170 injured since April 6.

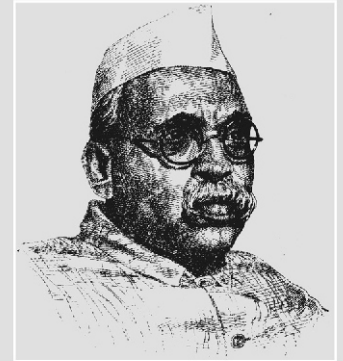
Omar al-Bashir has been convicted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity for being complicit in the massacres in Darfur.

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April 26 marks the 33rd anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. And on March 11, the eighth anniversary passed of the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility. Both anniversaries passed mostly without comment in mainstream media circles. In spite of ongoing radiological contamination that will continue to spread and threaten human health for lifetimes to come, other stories dominate the international news cycle. We give below a transcript of an interview of Dr Helen Caldicott conducted by Global Research in March this year on the health dangers posed by these nuclear disasters.

Global Research: Now the Japanese government is preparing to welcome visitors to Japan for the 2020 Olympic Games, and coverage of the 8th anniversary of the Fukushima disaster is hardly, it seems to me, registered given the significant radiological and other dangers that you cited and your authors cited in your 2014 book, *Crisis Without End*. Now it's been more than four years since that book came out. I was hoping you could update our listenership on what is currently being recognised as the main health threats in 2019 in

relation to the Fukushima meltdown.

Helen Caldicott: Well, it's difficult because the Japanese government has authorised only examination of thyroid cancer. Now thyroid cancer is caused by radioactive iodine and there were many, many cases of that after Chernobyl. And already, they've looked at children under the age of 18 in the Fukushima prefecture at the time of the accident, and by June 2018 last year, 201 had developed thyroid cancer. Some cancers had metastasized (*means spreading of cancer to a different body part from where it started – ed.*). The incidence of thyroid cancer in that population normally is 1 per million. So obviously it's an epidemic of thyroid cancer and it's just starting now.

What people need to understand is the latent period of carcinogenesis, that is, the time after exposure to radiation when cancers develop, is any time from 3 years to 80 years. And so it's a very, very long period. Thyroid cancers appear early. Leukemia appears about 5 to 10 years later. They're not looking for leukemia. Solid cancers of any organ as such appear about 15 years later. The Hibakusha from Hiroshima and

Nagasaki who are still alive are still developing cancers in higher than normal numbers.

The Japanese government has told doctors that they are not to talk to their patients about radiation and illnesses derived thereof, and in fact if the doctors do do that, they might lose their funding from the government. The IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) interestingly set up a hospital—a cancer hospital—in Fukushima along with the Fukushima University for people with cancer, which tells you everything.

So there's a huge, huge cover up. I have been to Japan twice and particularly to Fukushima and spoken to people there and the parents are desperate to hear the truth even if it's not good truth. And they thanked me for telling them the truth. So it's an absolute medical catastrophe I would say, and a total cover up to protect the nuclear industry and all its ramifications.

GR: Now, are we talking about some of the contamination that happened 8 years ago or are we talking about ongoing emissions from, for example . . .

HC: Well there are ongoing emissions into the air consistently, number one. Number two, a huge amount of water is being stored—over a million gallons—in tanks at the site. That water is being siphoned off from the the damaged melted reactor cores. Water is pumped consistently every day, every hour, to keep the cores cool in case they have another melt. And that water, of course, is extremely contaminated.

Now, they say they've filtered out the contaminants except for the tritium which is part of the water molecule, but they haven't. There's strontium, cesium and many other elements in that water—it's highly radioactive—and because there isn't

enough room to build more tanks, they're talking about emptying all that water into the Pacific Ocean. But this will be a disaster. The fishermen are very, very upset. The fish being caught off Fukushima, some are obviously already contaminated.

Water comes down from the mountains behind the reactors, flows underneath the reactors into the sea and always has. When the reactors were in good shape, the water was fine, didn't get contaminated. But now the three molten cores are in contact with that water flowing under the reactors and so the water flowing into the Pacific is very radioactive. Note that that's a separate thing from the million gallons or more in those tanks.

They put up a refrigerated wall of frozen dirt around the reactors to prevent that water from the mountains flowing underneath the reactors, which has cut down the amount of water flowing per day from 500 tons to about a 150. But it's a transient thing anyway so it's ridiculous. So over time the Pacific is going to become more and more radioactive.

They talk about decommissioning and removing those molten cores. When robots go in and try and have a look at them, their wiring just melts and disappears. The cores are extraordinarily radioactive. No human can go near them because they would die within 48 hours from the radiation exposure. They will never, and I repeat never, decommission those reactors. They will never be able to stop the water coming down from the mountains. And so, let the truth be known, it's an ongoing global radiological catastrophe which no one really is addressing in full.

GR: Do we have a better reading on the other cancers, like leukemia

incubation . . .

HC: No they're not looking for leukemia. They're not charting it. So the only cancer they're looking at is thyroid cancer and that's really high, 201 have already been diagnosed and some have metastasized. And a very tight lid is being kept on any other sort of radiation related illnesses and the like. It's not just a catastrophe it's a . . .

GR: . . . a cover up

HC: Yeah. I can't really explain how I feel medically about it. It's just hideous.

GR: Well I have a brother who's a physician, who was saying that the World Health Organisation is a fairly authoritative body of research for all of the indicators and epidemiological aspects of this, but you seem to suggest the World Health Organisation may not be that reliable in light of the fact that they are partnered with the IAEA. Is that my understanding...?

HC: Correct. They signed a document, I think in 1959, with the IAEA that they would not report any medical effects of radiological disasters and they've stuck to that. So they are in effect in this area part of the International Atomic Energy Agency whose mission is to promote nuclear power. So don't even think about the WHO. It's really obscene.

GR: What would the incentive be . . . simply that they got funding?

HC: I don't know. I really don't know but they sold themselves to the devil.

GR: That's pretty incredible. Then, there's also the issue of biomagnification in the oceans, where you have hundreds of tons of this radioactive water getting into the oceans and biomagnifying up through the food chain, so these radioactive particles can get inside our bodies. Could you speak about

what we could expect to see in the years ahead in terms of the illnesses that manifest themselves?

HC: Well number one, Fukushima is a very agricultural prefecture. Beautiful, beautiful peaches, beautiful food, and lots of rice. The radiation has spread far and wide through the Fukushima prefecture, and indeed they have been plowing up millions and millions of tons of radioactive dirt and storing it in plastic bags all over the prefecture. The mountains are highly radioactive and every time it rains, down comes radiation with the water. The radiation is from the elements. There are over 200 radioactive elements made in a nuclear reactor. Some have lives of seconds and some have lives of millions of years, that is to say, the radiation lasts for millions of years. So there are many many isotopes, long-lasting isotopes—cesium, strontium, tritium—on the soil in Fukushima.

And what happens is—you talked about biomagnification—when the plants take up the water from the soil, they take up the cesium also, which is a potassium analog, it resembles potassium. Strontium 90 resembles calcium, and so on. And these elements get magnified by orders of magnitude in the rice and in the plants. And so when you eat food that is grown in Fukushima, the chances are it's going to be relatively radioactive.

Now, these isotopes go into the ocean as well, and the algae bio-magnify them by ten to a hundred times or more. And then the crustaceans eat the algae, bio-magnify it more. The little fish eat the crustaceans, the big fish eat the little fish and the like. Tuna found off the coast of California some years ago contained isotopes from

Fukushima. So, it's an ongoing bio-magnification catastrophe.

And the thing is that you can't even taste, smell or see radioactive elements in your food. They're invisible. And it takes a long time for cancers to occur. And you can't identify a particular cancer caused by a particular substance or isotope. You can only identify that problem by doing epidemiological studies—comparing irradiated people with non-irradiated people—to see what the cancer levels are and that data comes from Hiroshima and Nagasaki and many, many, many other studies.

GR: Chernobyl as well, isn't it?

HC: Oh, Chernobyl! Well, a wonderful book was produced by the Russians, and published by the New York Academy of Sciences, on Chernobyl with over 5,000 on the ground studies of children and diseases in Belarus and the Ukraine, and all over Europe. By now, over a million people have already died from the Chernobyl disaster. And many diseases have been caused by that, including premature aging in children, microcephaly in babies, very small heads, diabetes, leukemia, I could go on and on.

And those diseases which have been very well described in that wonderful book, which everyone should read, are not being addressed or identified or looked for in the Fukushima or Japanese population.

May I say that parts of Tokyo are extremely radioactive. People have been measuring the dirt from roofs of apartments, from the roadway, from vacuum cleaner dust. And some of these samples are so radioactive that they would classify to be buried in radioactive waste facilities in America. That's number one.

Number two, to have the Olympics in Fukushima just defies imagination. Some of the areas

where the athletes are going to be running, the dust and dirt there has been measured, and it's highly radioactive. Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, has set this up as a sort of way to obscure what Fukushima really means. And those young athletes . . . young people are much more sensitive to radiation . . . it's just a catastrophe waiting to happen.

It is being called the radioactive Olympics!

GR: Is there anything that people can do, whether they live in Japan or, say, the west coast of North America, to mitigate the effects that this disaster has had, and may still be having eight years later?

HC: Yes. Do not eat any Japanese food because you don't know where it's sourced. Do not eat fish from Japan, miso, rice, you name it. Do not eat Japanese food. Period. Fish caught off the west coast of Canada and America, well, they're not testing the fish so I don't know what to say. Well, most of it's probably not radioactive, but you don't know because you can't taste it.

They've closed down the air-borne radioactive measuring instruments off the west coast of America. That's pretty bad, because there still could be another huge accident at those reactors.

For instance, if there's another large earthquake, number one, all those tanks would be destroyed and the water would pour into the Pacific. Number two, there could be another meltdown, a release — huge release of radiation, from the damaged reactors. So, things are very tenuous, but they're not just tenuous now. They're going to be tenuous forever.

(Dr. Helen Caldicott is author, physician and one of the world's leading anti-nuclear campaigners.)

Gandhi-Ambedkar Interface . . . When Shall the Twain Meet?

Suhas Palshikar

Gandhi and Ambedkar would have agreed on as many issues as they would have disagreed upon. They could not find much ground for co-operation and collaboration. In popular perception—and in the perception of many of their followers too—they remained opponents. Both indulged in verbal duels in order to expose the weaknesses of each other's thought and actions. This legacy could never be abandoned by the Ambedkaiite political movement even after the 1950s. The disappearance of both personalities from the social scene, and a change in the political context have not altered the standardised positioning of the two as each other's enemies. Against this background it is proposed to enquire into the differences in the discourses of Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Two general points may be noted before we proceed to a discussion of the relationship between the Gandhian discourse and the Ambedkarian discourse. Movements for social transformation are based on emancipatory ideologies. At the present juncture in the Indian society we find that movements for social transformation are weak and localised. Further, the dominant discourse today does not believe in the project of emancipation. In this context it becomes necessary to tap the possibilities of realignment of emancipatory ideologies. It would be inadvisable to be persuaded by the exclusivist claims of any ideology to the project of emancipation.

Secondly, personality clashes need not be the decisive factor in

the assessment of thought. Also, we need to accept that immediate political interests of Gandhi and Ambedkar clashed. Ambedkar began his political career as leader of the untouchables and continued to claim to be the authentic representative of the untouchable community. Gandhi, on the other hand, appeared to be denying the existence of separate interests of untouchables in the context of the freedom struggle. Ambedkar was always suspicious of the social content of freedom struggle and believed that Gandhi was not adequately sensitive to this. Since Gandhi was at the helm of the freedom struggle, Ambedkar thought it necessary to position himself against Gandhi. Given these historical circumstances, is it necessary that we sit in judgment to decide the case in favour of either Gandhi or Ambedkar?

The present note proceeds with the assumption that Gandhi–Ambedkar clashes resulted from their personalities, as well as their respective positioning in the contemporary political contexts. However, beyond these clashes and differences of assessment of contemporary politics, there exists some ground where the agenda of Gandhi and Ambedkar might actually be complementary. To realise this, it is necessary to throw away the burden of proving whose political position was correct or incorrect.

The question of separate electorates for untouchables is a case in point. Was Gandhi wrong in opposing separate electorates

for untouchables? Was he wrong in forcing Ambedkar into acquiescence through the fast? I would tend to argue that such questions are largely irrelevant given the fact that 'separate electorates' do not form the core of Ambedkar's thought. In other words, the Gandhi–Ambedkar relationship needs to be probed in the context not of personalities or political strategies, but in terms of their respective emancipatory projects.

Caste Question

The centrality of the caste question in Ambedkar's thought cannot be overemphasised. He believed that untouchability was an expression of the caste system. Therefore, Ambedkar chose to study the caste system and critically analyse the justification it received from Hindu scriptures. His thought does not deal merely with removal of untouchability which was but one part of the anti-caste movement. He was also concerned with the overall annihilation of caste. Gandhi, of course, was in favour of abolition of caste-based discriminations. In personal conduct too, he did not practise caste. But the caste question does not occupy a place of urgency in his thought. He tended to emphasise untouchability more than the caste question. For Gandhi, untouchability formed the core of the caste system. Once untouchability was removed, there will be no caste system. Gandhi was right in identifying untouchability as the most abhorring expression of caste-based inequality and attendant inhumanity. But the

crucial question is, would caste disappear if untouchability is not practised? If so, why should there be internal differentiation and hierarchical separation among the touchable castes? Gandhi would argue that untouchability stands for everything ugly in the caste system, and therefore, it must go instantly. Extending this logic, he could further claim that untouchability could be fully and finally removed only when caste-consciousness is removed. Removal of untouchability would thus symbolically bury the caste system. In the light of development of Gandhi's views on the caste issue, there is no doubt about Gandhi's ultimate preparedness to abolish caste. And yet, the caste question does not become the core of Gandhi's discourse.

Consequently, Gandhi did not extend the scope of satyagraha to caste and caste-based inequality. Gandhi extended support to temple entry movements but did not allow such movements to occupy the centre-stage in his movement. Similarly, Gandhi undertook fast to convince Hindus of the sinfulness of practising untouchability and exhorted people to abolish the practice. But the philosophy of satyagraha does not adequately answer the question of tackling injustices perpetrated by one's own society and sanctioned by religion. Satyagraha as a political weapon is adequately demonstrated by Gandhi's thought and practice. But if satyagraha is to become a moral purifier, what kind of struggle is necessary against untouchability and caste? In the case of untouchability, Gandhi could argue that the responsibility of removing untouchability lies with the caste Hindus. Hence the reference to sin

and penance. However, as Ambedkar put it squarely, untouchability exists as a stigma on the body of the untouchables. As the ones suffering from injustice, how should the untouchables fight against their plight in the Gandhian framework? Even if they were to offer satyagraha, how could this act prick the conscience of caste Hindus who were under the ideological spell of religious sanction to caste and who were getting material advantages from the caste-based order? Apart from practising untouchability, the caste society presents a number of other possible sites of injustice where different caste groups may be located in antagonistic situations. Gandhi's discourse does not direct intellectual attention and political energies to the question of waging struggle against the caste system and more importantly against caste groups deriving advantages from the caste system; instead, Gandhi tends to search for possible areas of co-operation and integration of castes. Therefore, he refuses to recognise caste divisions even at the analytical level.

Gandhi's constant appeals to caste Hindus not to practise untouchability clearly indicate his awareness that one section of the society was being treated unjustly by another; it was not a 'personal' relationship but a group relationship. In spite of this division of society at the empirical level, Gandhi refused to concede a separate political identity to untouchables through separate electorates. He would allow 'reservation for castes' but the representational character of those elected through reserved seats would not be 'communal', i.e., not as representatives of untouchables but as representatives of the general

electorate. Gandhi's relative neglect of developing satyagraha against caste probably derived from this position of not recognising the political nature of social divisions.

Although he uses the term *harijan* for untouchable 'brethren', Gandhi stoutly refused to recognise that caste-based divisions could actually be analytical categories for understanding the complex network of structures of injustice in the Hindu society. Ambedkar draws the distinction between untouchables and caste Hindus; he also suggests the possibility of using the categories of *savarna* and *avarna*, where the latter would include untouchables and tribals, aborigines, etc. Before him, Phule visualised the categorisation in terms of *shudra-atishudra* and 'trivarniks' or those with 'dvij' status. The logic behind such categorisation is to locate the main contradiction in the caste-ridden society, either as *varna* or as 'dvij' status. While Gandhi would accept the empirical reality of caste, he was not prepared to posit in it the ideological basis of anti-caste struggle. Hence, his insistence on identifying the untouchables as part of the Hindu fold. The relative unimportance of caste question in the Gandhian discourse is prominently expressed in the writings of almost all Gandhian intellectuals who tend to virtually exclude the issue of caste from their expositions of Gandhism

Bane of Capitalism

The Gandhian discourse evolved through and along with his struggles against racism and colonialism. These struggles amply acquainted him with the evil side of western society. Yet, Gandhi was not trapped in formulating anti-west nationalism. He realised that

the malady of the West lay in its peculiar production process. The modern process of production led to commodification and consequent degradation of human character. Therefore, Gandhi directed his attention to the modern lifestyle and the artificial generation of false materiality. The transformation of human beings into consumers from producers was the main step in the degeneration of human society.

In this sense, the Gandhian discourse can be squarely situated in the context of the problematique of capitalism. Although Gandhi rarely attacked capitalism directly, his analysis of modern civilisation unmistakably indicts capitalism. His assessment of the exploitative nature of the modern process of production, dehumanising effects of consumerism and his overall assessment of the modern society do not make sense unless understood as analysis of the capitalist social order. Had Gandhi not been demolishing the claims of capitalism, he would not have given so much prominence to the *Daridranarayan*. His entire project hinges upon the juxtaposition between *Daridranarayan* and the satanical nature of capitalist enterprise. Gandhi's advocacy of a simple life, insistence on abnegation of wants and *swadeshi* must be seen as counterpoints to crass materiality and instrumental interdependence nurtured by capitalism. In this sense, Gandhi's *swadeshi* calls for redefinition of the scope of material development and an outright rejection of capitalism as the instrument of development. It must be borne in mind that Gandhi was not opposed to modern civilisation per se but as a social order based on capitalism.

Where does Ambedkar stand in

relation to this Gandhian position, regarding capitalism and modern civilisation? Two points are striking in this context. Firstly, for the most part of his political career, Ambedkar did not employ his expertise in economics to his political agenda. Secondly, his early economic treatises do not substantially depart from the ideological position and standard wisdom prevalent in economics during his time.

It may be said that the main concern of Ambedkar was to understand sociologically the operation of the caste system and to understand the socio-religious justifications of the same. His political struggles, too, occurred on very different terrain from the economic. Thus, though he was aware of the economic aspects of caste system he chose to concentrate on the social, cultural, religious and political aspects of caste. Besides, Ambedkar's writings manifest a constant vacillation on his part as far as assessment of modern capitalist economy is concerned. For one thing, he was not persuaded by the soundness of communist economics. For another, Ambedkar was wary of any alternative that would tend to glorify or justify a semblance of the 'old order' in which caste occupied a pivotal role. Thus, autonomous village communities, small industry, mutual dependence, etc, were not appreciated by him for fear of indirectly furthering caste interests. He might have looked upon forces of modernity as cutting at the root of caste society and therefore was not convinced of the 'evils' involved in modernity.

And yet it would be wrong to believe that Ambedkar upheld capitalism uncritically. Not only was he critical of many aspects of

capitalist economy, Ambedkar was even prepared to reject it for a more egalitarian and democratic system of production. Ambedkar has noted the political fallout of capitalism, viz, sham democracy. Therefore, it is not correct to say that Ambedkar was against taking up economic issues or developing a critique of capitalism. He was not averse to a search for an alternative economic system although he did not devote his energies to this project. But his emphasis on caste question give an impression that he had no sympathy for a radical economic agenda, and has resulted in many of his followers literally seeing 'red' at the mention of economic issues! This has led to a false dichotomisation between the caste question and economic questions. Ambedkar's speeches and Marathi writings suggest that he did not subscribe to such a dichotomisation. He was aware of the threat to liberty, equality and fraternity not only from brahminism but from capitalism also.

Perspectives on Tradition

It is interesting to see how Gandhi and Ambedkar negotiate with tradition. Gandhi engages in a creative dialogue with tradition. He tries to find out the element of truth in tradition and emphasises it. In many cases he attaches new meanings to traditional symbols. He gives an impression that he is asking for nothing new in substance, but for the continuation of the 'old' tradition. The secret of Gandhi's ability to arouse revolutionary potential among the masses lies partly in this method of not claiming anything revolutionary, and in the appeal to the conscience of the masses through tradition. For this purpose, while choosing popular traditional

symbols, Gandhi emphasised those symbols which have been associated with truth and justice. Assuming the role of interpreter of our 'great tradition', Gandhi takes the liberty of developing his own normative framework on the basis of tradition.

Ambedka, on the other hand, was in search of the ideology of exploitation. He felt that tradition was this ideology. Injustice based on caste could not have continued unless it was legitimised by tradition. He also believed that the tradition of Hindu society was predominated by brahminical interests. As such, he could not ignore the role of tradition in situating caste as a moral code of Hindu society. This prompted Ambedkar to take a critical view of the entire Hindu (brahminical) tradition. It is also possible that Ambedkar realised the role of tradition in the contemporary context. All reform was stalled throughout the 19th century in the name of 'our great tradition' and its correctness. Thus, it was not tradition but forces upholding tradition that must have made Ambedkar a staunch critic of tradition. Yet, did he really forsake tradition in its entirety? Much of Ambedkar's critical attack on tradition was directed against glorification of brahminical tradition. It is possible to argue that Ambedkar was engaged in demolishing the tradition of brahminism and rejecting the Vedic ideological tradition. But he was not rejecting all traditions, or else how could he search in that same tradition the path of the dhamma? Nor was he opposed to liberating traditions in the form of different sects. He was complaining against a lack of adequate emancipatory space within the traditional framework.

Tradition in an unequal society

will always be caught in crossfire. Those defending inequality will cogently place it as part of tradition and will seek to glorify tradition as 'anadi', 'sanatan' and infallible. While those opposing inequality will seek to condemn the same heritage for all the sins in society. Gandhi, sensing the emotional power of tradition, appropriated it in order to save it from chauvinist glorifications. But even an appropriation of tradition requires a strong critique. Such a critique is a constant reminder that tradition may have the potential of aligning with forces which perpetuate inequality. An all-round criticism of tradition further sensitises us to the fact that in many cases, tradition actually gives credence to the system of exploitation. In other words, the supporters of inequality are always comfortable under the umbrella of tradition. Thus, appropriation of tradition and employing it for purposes of building a just society requires a strong will to reject large parts of tradition and situating tradition in a different context from the one historically associated with it. In this sense, Ambedkar's critical assessment of tradition provides a useful counterpoint to the Gandhian attempt of appropriating tradition. And the Gandhian project, too, does not presuppose an uncritical appropriation of all tradition.

Meeting Ground

In a very general sense both Gandhi and Ambedkar strived to visualise a community based on justice and fraternity. The Gandhian discourse seeks to identify the elements of community in the form of love, non-violence, dignity of human life and dignity of physical labour and a non-exploitative process of production symbolised

by rejection of greed. From the vantage point of this vision of the community, Gandhian discourse makes an assessment of colonial and capitalist reality. It develops a trenchant critique of modernity. The Ambedkarian discourse unfolds in a different manner. It commences from the critical evaluation of Indian social reality. Therefore, it concentrates on the Hindu social order, its religious ideology and Hindu tradition. Thus, Ambedkar's discourse takes the form of critique of Hindu religion and society. Ambedkar was constantly aware of the need to situate this critique on a solid basis of communitarian vision. Although liberty, equality and fraternity beckoned him constantly, Ambedkar transcends liberalism and socialism to finally arrive at the conception of the dhamma.

The difference in the structures of their discourses notwithstanding, Gandhi and Ambedkar thus came to share similar visions. Both believed that social transformation could come about only by social action. Therefore, they relied heavily on mobilising people against injustice. Social action perceived by Gandhi and Ambedkar was democratic; it was in the form of popular struggles. Gandhi many times appeared to be favouring compromises and avoiding 'conflict'. Ambedkar, too, is seen by many (even his followers) as a supporter of non-agitational politics. But the core of their politics as well as their position on social action leave us in no doubt that Gandhi and Ambedkar not only pursued popular struggles but they valued struggles as essential and enriching. They did not visualise removal of injustice without struggles and without popular participation. Further, Gandhi and Ambedkar

would have no difficulty in agreeing upon the value of non-violence.

The discourses of Gandhi and Ambedkar respect the materiality of human life. Fulfilment of material needs, and a stable and enriched material life are seen by both as forming the basis of human activity. Moreover, Gandhi and Ambedkar have a striking similarity in their views on morality. They believe moral values to be eternal and necessary for co-ordinating material social life.

At the root of this similarity is the common conception of secular religion. This conception rejected all rituals, bypassed the question of existence of God and the other world, and brought morality to the centre-stage of discussion of religion. It is not a mere coincidence that both Gandhi and Ambedkar are considered as heretics by religious orthodoxies of Hinduism and Buddhism, respectively. Both claim that religion and scriptures need to be understood in the light of conscience and morality. Wherever scriptures contradict conscience, religion demands that conscience should be followed. In this sense they were sceptical not only about scriptures, but 'priestly authorities' deciding the meaning of scriptures. This view cut at the root of any notion of an organised, closed religion. Gandhi and Ambedkar remove religion from the realm of metaphysics and situate it on the terrain of secular matters such as truth, compassion, love, conscience, social responsibility and enlightened sense of morality. Understood thus, Gandhi's sanatan dharma and Ambedkar's dhamma do not confine themselves to individual and private pursuits of good life but operate as the moral framework for social action. Religion becomes

secular and part of the 'public' sphere. When the so-called religious people were busy counting numbers, Gandhi and Ambedkar tried to turn religiosity of the common man into a force for social transformation.

Struggle for truth and non-violence has to incorporate caste struggle because caste is a structure of violence and injustice. Just as Gandhi denounces the satanic culture of the West, Gandhism can be a denunciation of caste-based injustice. Gandhi does not forbid the use of soul-force against the satanic tendencies in one's own society. If contemporary Gandhism fights shy of caste struggles, it has lost the core of Gandhi's discourse. Such a restrictive interpretation of Gandhi will have to be rejected in favour of a creative interpretation. Non-recognition of categories like shudra-atishudra does not form the core of Gandhism. In fact, use of a term like 'daridranarayan' presupposes readiness to understand social reality on the basis of exploitative relations. Therefore, political mapping of social forces on caste basis can be incorporated into the Gandhian discourse. Gandhi's strong rejection of religious authority behind untouchability, his later views on intercaste marriage, his non-orthodox interpretation of varna in his early years and loss of interest in varna in later years, and the constant exhortation to become 'shudra'—to engage in physical labour—all point to the possibility that the caste question can form a legitimate concern of the Gandhian discourse. It should be of some interest that Gandhi does not eulogise the 'trivarniks' or their roles while constantly upholding the dignity of labour. His sanatan dharma is characteristically

uninfluenced by brahminism.

Similarly, Ambedkar's position on capitalism and modernity can be extended and reinterpreted. He located the primary source of exploitation in the caste system in the Indian context. But he never disputed the exploitative character of capitalism. His espousal of socialism (like in the programme of the Independent Labour Party) and state socialism apart, he tended to take the view that concentration of wealth and exploitation gave rise to 'dukkha'. His conception of dhamma makes it clear that Ambedkar made a distinction between material well-being and insatiable lust. This is the ground on which critique of modernist life can be made within his discourse. It is true that Ambedkar's rejection of tradition and traditional life-style appears to be modernistic. But it must not be forgotten that Ambedkar had to take into consideration the immediate interests of untouchables. Thus, his plea to move to cities need not be understood as a modernist project. Also, Gandhi's espousal of village life should not be seen as justification of existing village life. Grounding Ambedkar's interpretation in his conception of dhamma can open up the possibility of bridging the distance between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

The discourses of Gandhi and Ambedkar were not antithetical. Therefore, it is possible to think in terms of common concerns and potential grounds for dialogue between the two discourses. Further, both Gandhi and Ambedkar were concerned with the question of emancipation. As such, a broadening of the scope of their discourses is all the more essential. As mentioned earlier, at the present moment, the

very legitimacy of their emancipatory project is being challenged. The dominant discourse today tends to underplay the caste question and legitimises capitalism. On

the other hand, the movements of social transformation appear to be fragmented or stagnant. The theoretical strength required to meet this challenge can be gained partly

by building bridges between the two rich discourses of our times.

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More Than a Reformer, Jyotirao Phule Was an Architect of Ideas

Umesh Kumar

B.R. Ambedkar's fascination with Jyotirao Phule goes beyond the fact that he considered him a guru. Ambedkar, recognising the intellectual legacy of Phule, wished to project him on the national scene. More particularly, Ambedkar may have been influenced by Phule's radical anti-caste movements, his uplifting of the conditions of peasantry and his liberation of women.

Indian society is in a state of flux today—the way it was during the time of Phule (1827–1890). Issues surrounding caste, inferior status of women, the pathetic condition of farmers are all problems that continue to haunt India since colonial times. And so continues the country's quest to break from these chains of oppression, mental slavery and subjugation.

In today's time, we must revisit the thought and ideology of an indigenous thinker like Phule. Such an attempt, it is argued, has the potential to (re)interpret our contemporary social reality.

Taking on Brahmanical supremacy

As an iconic and revolutionary intellectual from Maharashtra, Phule's organising principles were both inclusive and dichotomous. He addressed stree-shudra-atishudra (women, OBCs, Dalits and tribals in today's vocabulary) as one category which was dichotomously fighting

against Brahmanical supremacy (he rarely used the word Hindu or Hinduism. He preferred Brahmanism instead).

He called it *brahmanache varchaswa or brahmanvarchaswadi* in Marathi. Moreover, Phule was the first intellectual to realise that Brahmanism did not necessarily mean exclusively related to the Brahman caste, but a kind of ideological, religious (*dharmic*) (super)structure that perpetuates and naturalises the exploitation of the majority.

Phule sought to reform society through revolutionary means. His renaissance desire for societal transformation was a break from his contemporaries. With the establishments of Prarthana Samaj, Poona Sarvajanic Sabha, Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj in Maharashtra and elsewhere, Phule's contemporaries were trying to reform Hindu society by remaining within the sacredness of the Hindu fold—a hallmark of the first-generation Indian renaissance thinkers.

Phule did not break entirely from this tradition but he did not believe in the sacredness of Hindu religion either. Staying within the Hindu fold, Phule's intellectual faculty first attacked the twin concepts of dharma and caste—the central pillars of Brahmanical supremacy. And this attack was in full—not in bits and pieces like that of his half-hearted

contemporaries.

According to him, the best way to deal with this repressive structure was to oppose it completely and dilute its sacredness. He decoded that Brahmanism derives its legitimacy from its sacred texts and that, in turn, rely heavily on the *avatar-kalpna* (imaginative incarnation).

In his book titled *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), Phule debunks different Brahmanical godheads. With such writings, he attempted to provide an intellectual and ideological foundation for a sustained critique of the caste system. Phule's writing is not history in the normative sense. For him, history writing was not truth-writing but a mere utilitarian device for the subversion, debunking and destruction of the established truth(s) perpetuated by the Brahmanical supremacy.

Social reforms

However, devastating criticism was not the only weapon in Phule's armoury of social reform. He also attempted to reform the stree-shudra-atishudra from within. The establishment of Satyashodhak Samaj (the society of truth seekers) in 1873 was a crucial step. It reflected Phule's intellectual rationalism where the primary emphasis was on 'truth-seeking' by positioning the individual at the centre.

The other vital mandate of the

samaj was to conduct ‘religious’ ceremonies sans Brahman priests and to compulsorily educate the next generation. When the orthodox of the times charged that the samaj could not be called a religious body because it has no religious text (*dharmagranth*) of its own, Phule wrote *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (Book of the Public Religion of Truth). As an alternative, the emphasis of *Satya Dharma* was again to outset the Brahman from his overriding position.

Phule’s concept of dharma was rather simple and unambiguous. For him, it was a platform of passionate equalitarianism minus any discrimination. Further, Phule clearly saw the role of dharma and caste in the production relations of Indian society.

Phule lays bare these production relations with his careful investigations of the peasant question in colonial India. He is perhaps the first Indian intellectual who made agriculture—its process and production—a major concern for his thought experiment. His book *Shetkaryacha Asud* (The Cultivator’s Whipcord) familiarises us with the graphic description of farmers’ conditions—their hungry bellies and rag-wrapped bodies coupled with the continuous harassments from moneylenders.

He recommended the active role of the state in agrarian policies—the need for soil conservation, rain harvesting and building of bunds (*bandhara*), usage of advanced technology for cattle breeding and specific professional education for peasants and their children, etc.—so as to relieve peasantry from its miserable condition. However, as a pre-industrial thinker, the glaring limitation of Phule’s agrarian scheme

is that he understood peasantry as a monolithic category.

Education and gender

Another area in which Phule contributed immensely is India’s gender question. He invariably linked the liberation of women with education. He himself taught his young wife Savitribai. Later, with her and some liberal associates, Phule opened a string of schools from 1848–1855, including a special school for all caste girls. He was a staunch advocate of widow remarriage and a front-runner for child adoption. The Phule couple themselves adopted the son of a Brahman widow.

He openly defended Pandita Ramabai’s decision to convert to Christianity and Tarabai Shinde’s polemical monograph *Stree Purush Tulana* (A Comparison between Women and Men), amidst Brahmanical orthodoxy. Gail Omvedt makes an interesting observation that Phule does not use the common salutation of *manoos* (human being)

but rather *streepurush* (women and men). By using such a salutation, Phule challenges the subsumed status of women within men. The word *streepurush* accentuates the gendered differentiation and pleads for the quest of equality at the same time. Further, he did not make any distinction within the category of *stree* (women)—stressing the fact that a Brahman woman is as much prone to gender discrimination as of any other caste.

Phule’s intellectual heritage—which sowed the initial seeds of India’s social revolution—remains unfulfilled even today. More than a reformer, he was an architect of ideas. By building an alternative system of ideas he attempted to decode the nuances of our social reality. The questions that bothered Phule continue to haunt us today. Perhaps with greater intensity. There is an immediate need to engage with Phule in a way we have never before.

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Noam Chomsky and the Question of Individual Choice

Anjan Basu

A broad theme that runs through everything that Noam Chomsky has written over 50 years or more is individual choice.

The choice, Chomsky was convinced early, is as compelling as it is narrow. In the 2017 book *Optimism over Despair*, when the political economist C.J. Polychroniou asks him, “Are you overall optimistic about the future of humanity, given the kind of creatures we are?”, Chomsky gives

nearly the exact same answer he had given 17 years earlier to a young journalist at Chennai’s Asian College of Journalism who had wondered if the venerable professor was being “a little too optimistic” in a world which seemed to hold little promise of positive change:

“We have two choices. We can be pessimistic, give up, and help ensure that the worst will happen. Or we can be optimistic, grasp the opportunities that surely exist, and

maybe help make the world a better place. Not much of a choice."

"Not much of a choice", Chomsky has never tired of reminding everyone who cares to listen. He makes it plain—without saying it in these words, for he hates to declaim or sound dramatic—that, to be human, one has to stick with that narrow choice.

It was true in the mid-1960s, when he plunged into anti-Vietnam War activism; and it remains true today when vast communities are struggling to come to terms with the devastations caused by corporate greed and climate change. Chomsky continues to engage without let-up with the most basic questions confronting human society—inequality, injustice and unfreedoms of many different kinds. When the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement erupted across US cities in September, 2011, pitting "(w)e (who) are the 99%" against the insanely-rich 1% who manipulate public policy with impunity, he joined in with gusto, speaking at rallies and public meetings and writing about what it was all about.

Moral values matter

As a scientist, Chomsky always locates the question of rational choice at the centre of any debate about issues of real public interest. That is not to say, though, that he is concerned with rationality alone. Far from it, in fact. Chomsky has written extensively about how a 'rational' debate can be so constructed as to completely undermine—indeed, subvert—the irreducible moral values implicit in a choice.

With withering scorn, he wrote in his 1969 classic, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, about well-known American liberals who

managed to successfully mask the immorality of the war on Vietnam, projecting the debate around the war as primarily one about the proportionality of its costs to its likely outcome. In a talk given at Harvard in June 1966 in the course of the anti-war protests—later published as the celebrated essay *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*—Chomsky argues that Americans "can hardly avoid asking (themselves) to what extent the American people bear responsibility for the savage American assault on a largely helpless rural population in Vietnam." He closes the essay with these memorable words:

"Let me . . . return to (Dwight) Macdonald (the American writer-activist) and the responsibility of intellectuals. Macdonald quotes an interview with a death-camp paymaster who bursts into tears when told that the Russians would hang him. 'Why should they? What have I done?', he asked. Macdonald concludes: 'Only those who are willing to resist authority themselves when it conflicts too intolerably with their personal moral code, only they have the right to condemn the death-camp paymaster.' The question, 'What have I done?', is one that we may well ask ourselves, as we read, each day, of fresh atrocities in Vietnam—as we create, or mouth, or tolerate the deceptions that will be used to justify the next 'defence of freedom'."

This is the moral code that Chomsky assimilated early on. He lives his life by it, and his own judgment of others is premised in the same code. He tells us why:

"Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyse actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions. In the Western

world at least, they have the power that comes from political liberty, from access to information and freedom of expression. For a privileged minority, Western democracy provides the leisure, the facilities and the training to seek the truth lying hidden behind the veil of distortions and misrepresentation, ideology, and class interest through which the events of current history are presented to us."

It follows from here that

"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies. This, at least, may seem enough of a truism to pass without comment. Not so, however. For the modern intellectual, it is not at all obvious."

The intellectual, then, has a simple—but also stark—choice to make: he can either ask himself if he is being true to his calling (by speaking the truth and exposing lies); or, if he is willing to be suborned by the powers-that-be, he may end up asking himself someday, à la the Nazi death-camp pay-master, 'What have I done?'

Chomsky's own journey

Chomsky's choice had been made as an undergraduate in the mid-1940s, for his political and moral consciousness had been formed, as he himself places on record, "by the horrors of the 1930s, by the war in Ethiopia, the Russian purges, the China incident, the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi atrocities, the western reaction to these events and, in part, complicity in them . . .".

His astringent, unceasing critique of American foreign policy through the 1970s and 1980s earned him a place on Richard Nixon's infamous 'Enemies List'. His formidable reputation as the foremost language

theorist/philosopher of the 20th century (as well as the most-often-cited humanities scholar in all academic work across the world) probably saved his job at MIT, but the doors to mainstream media and publishing were firmly barred to him for much of his life. Even the funding of the many frontline research programmes that he helmed at the MIT's School of Modern Languages and Linguistics (including in such cutting-edge areas as psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics) ran into rough weather often enough.

The question of choice has taken on a special sense of urgency in relation to the culture of mass media today, in India as much as, say, in the US. Chomsky has always believed that the much-vaunted freedom of expression in liberal democracies is largely a sham, because powerful interest groups, solidly invested in maintaining and strengthening the status quo, manage to limit the spectrum of public discourse with great skill. Once the contours of debates have been firmly drawn—and any outliers irrevocably 'demonstrated' to be deviant—public opinion is conditioned to stay within those clearly-marked boundaries and not stray beyond them. Chomsky famously called this process 'the manufacturing of consent'.

If mainstream US media have finessed this process over many years, the Indian media today is no longer behind them. Thus, when under-trial, or simply jailed-without-trial, prisoners are killed in 'encounters' with the police, the media often think nothing of underplaying these state-sponsored murders, and report in punctilious detail on the 'unsavoury antecedents' of the victims. At a time

like this, something as routine as the discharge of basic journalistic duties—reporting what is really happening on the ground and nailing lies peddled by officialdom—itself becomes an act of deliberate and careful choice.

The need for resistance

At the height of the anti-Vietnam War protests, Chomsky recognised active resistance as a valid choice for dissenters, though he freely admits that activism per se does not quite agree with him personally. In the concluding chapter of *American Power and the New Mandarins*, he has this to say on the options in the specific context of the US in the 1960s:

"Given the enormous dangers of escalation (of the Vietnam conflict) and its hateful character, it makes sense . . . to search for ways to raise the domestic cost of American aggression, to raise it to a point where it cannot be overlooked by those who have to calculate such costs. One must then consider in what ways it is possible to pose a serious threat (to the war effort). Many possibilities come to mind: a general strike, university strikes, attempts to hamper war production and supply, and so on. . . . Resistance is in part a moral responsibility, in part a tactic to affect government policy. In particular, with respect to support for draft resistance, I feel that it is a moral responsibility that cannot be shirked. . . ."

In the event, Chomsky did participate in civil disobedience movements himself, marching on Washington with tens of thousands of others to return thousands of draft cards to the attorney general's office. He also campaigned widely across university campuses and

participated in some memorable teach-ins, including one electrifying episode just outside the gates of the Pentagon which has entered modern American folklore, in a manner of speaking.

In his *essay On Resistance*, Chomsky quotes the great civil rights leader A.J. Muste in the context of the Vietnam War: "The problem after a war is with the victor. He thinks he has just proved that war and violence pay. Who will now teach him a lesson?"

One of the brightest minds of the post-second-world-war world and a consummate teacher himself, Chomsky has spent the best part of his life teaching lessons to successive American administrations. It is remarkable how he retains his penchant for teaching lessons to the arrogant and the powerful even at the age of 90. Incredibly, he has also agreed to teach a term (presumably to undergrads) at Arizona State University-Tempe in the upcoming academic year, his first major academic commitment outside of the MIT. The choices that Noam Chomsky makes have sometimes baffled some people, but look closely, and you will find a unity of purpose in all of them.

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Modinomics = Corporatonomics Part III: Modi’s Budgets and the Social Sectors

Neeraj Jain

In the previous four issues of Janata, we first published two articles on Modinomics = Falsonomics, and then in the next two articles, we have analysed Modinomics. We have shown that the Modi Government, if it wants, can raise enough resources to increase its expenditures on the social sectors. Instead, it is giving away huge subsidies to the tune of several lakh crore rupees to the corporate houses. In this article, we discuss the overall allocation for the social sectors during the past five years of Modi’s rule, and then specifically discuss budget allocations for education.

Public social sector expenditures: India vs other countries

Most developed countries have a very elaborate social security network for their citizens, including unemployment allowance, universal health coverage, free

school education and free or cheap university education, old age pension, maternity benefits, disability benefits, family allowance such as child care allowance, allowances for those too poor to make a living, and much more. Governments spend substantial sums for providing these social services to their people. The average public social sector expenditures of the 34 countries of the OECD have been around 20% of GDP for the last many years, and for the EU-27 have been even higher at around 30% of GDP.¹

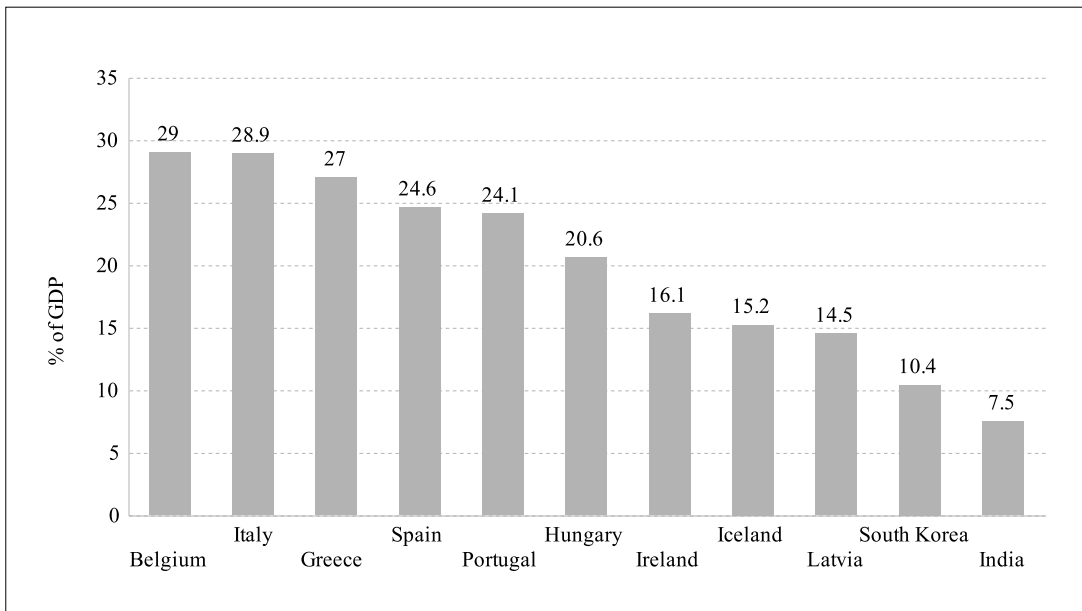
In contrast, India’s social sector expenditures are just around 7% of GDP. They are not only way below the developed countries, as a recent report of the Reserve Bank of India admits, India’s social sector expenditures are also “woefully below peers” (see Chart 1).²

The major part of the social

sector expenditure in the country is done by the States. The *Economic Survey 2017–18* puts the total social sector expenditure of Centre and States combined (2017–18 BE) at Rs 10.94 lakh crore, which is around 6.6% of GDP. Of this, the Centre’s share is Rs 1.95 lakh crore (2017–18 Budget document), which works out to only 17.8% of the total social sector expenditure, Centre and States combined. This figure of Rs 1.95 lakh crore is 9.08% of the total budget outlay. The social sector expenditure of 2018 and 2019 are not specifically mentioned in the budget, but assuming that as a percentage of the total budget outlay, they are constant, then it means the social sector expenditures in 2018–19 and 2019–20 would be around Rs 2.22 lakh crore and Rs 2.53 lakh crore respectively.

Is it not possible for the Modi Government to increase the total social sector expenditure of the government (Centre + States combined) to at least 15% of GDP? That is actually not much; it is only half the level of EU-27. That would require a total social sector expenditure of Rs 31.5 lakh crore in 2019–20. Assuming that the Centre spends 25% of it, this would require the social sector expenditure of the Centre to go up to

Chart 1: Social Sector Expenditures as % of GDP³



Rs 7.88 lakh crore from the Rs 2.53 lakh crore at present—an increase of just Rs 5.3 lakh crore. The Centre, if it so wants, can easily afford this by reducing the loan write-offs of the corporate houses, or reducing the tax concessions to the rich, or by cancelling the mineral leases given to corporate houses at very low royalty rates, or . . .

Boosting demand by increasing social sector expenditures

Let us for a moment drop this fact-based critical examination of the budget from a socialist perspective, and examine it purely from the perspective of mainstream capitalist economics. In the *Economic Survey 2017–18* presented by Arvind Subramanian, the Chief Economic Advisor of the Government of India, he devotes a good deal of space to a discussion of the serious decline in gross investment in India as a proportion of the GDP. The Survey notes: “The ratio of gross fixed capital formation to GDP climbed from 26.5% in 2003, reached a peak of 35.6% in 2007, and then slid back to 26.4% in 2017.” It admits that such sharp swings in investment rates “have never occurred in India’s history”, and that while “the past 15 years have been a special period for the entire global economy, no other country seems to have gone through such a large investment boom and bust during this period.” The Survey frankly and ominously adds: “India’s investment decline seems particularly difficult to reverse . . . The deeper the slowdown, the slower and shallower the recovery.” And as we have pointed out in a previous article⁴, government data shows that the economy has further slowed down in 2018.

The way out of this economic slowdown is to boost demand, and one way of doing it is by boosting

social sector spending. It is now fairly well established that government spending on social sectors such as education and health has significant positive multiplier effects.⁵ [The fiscal multiplier is an estimate of the effect of government spending on economic growth. A multiplier greater than 1 corresponds to a positive growth stimulus (returning more than Re 1 for each rupee invested), whereas a multiplier less than one reflects a net loss from spending.]

However, as we show below, the government has not attempted to give a boost to the economy by expanding its social sector expenditures.

Jaitley/Goyal have no problem in giving lakhs of crores of rupees as subsidies to the rich in the name of ‘tax incentives’, or ‘investment subsidies’, or bank loan write-offs, and so on. But when it comes to increasing welfare spending on the poor, they claim that the government cannot afford that as the fiscal deficit needs to be curbed.

This is precisely what neoliberalism is all about—it means running the economy solely for the profiteering of giant foreign and Indian corporate houses, including shamelessly cutting down the public welfare expenditures on the poor and transferring the savings to the coffers of the corporate houses. Every government that has come to power at the Centre since the beginning of globalisation in 1991 has dutifully implemented these policies; the Modi Government is even more unashamedly implementing these policies.

Such is the nationalism of the BJP–RSS. It is confined to unfurling giant sized flags in universities, and forcing people to stand up while the national anthem is being played in cinema halls—while on the ground, it is doing shastang

dandavata before the international financial institutions and giant foreign corporations, betraying the interests of the common people.

Let us now take a look at the budget allocations for some of the more important social sectors.

More detailed analysis of social sectors under Modi rule

School education: Back to the dark ages

No country in the world has developed without making provisions for providing free, compulsory, equitable and good quality elementary education to ALL its children in the initial stages of its development, and later expanding it to secondary and higher secondary education. Since the private sector will only invest for profit, all countries, including the avowedly capitalist countries of the West, have done this entirely through public funding.

Unfortunately, because of inadequate spending on education since Independence, the condition of India’s education was dismal even when the BJP came to power. India has not been able to provide this to a majority of its children seven decades after independence.

- According to the Planning Commission of India, 42.4% children drop out of school before completing elementary education.⁶

And for those attending schools, the conditions in a majority of the schools are simply terrible:

- In a majority of the primary schools in the country, a single teacher is teaching two or three different classes at the same time in a single room (data for 2015)!⁷
- Even for all schools, upto higher secondary, 42% schools have 3 or less than 3 classrooms, and

50% schools have 3 or less than 3 teachers!⁸

- Nearly one-third of the schools do not have usable toilet facilities.⁹
- 47% primary schools do not have electricity; and 38% of all schools do not have electricity.
- An amazing 44% of primary schools do not even have a boundary wall, while 35% of all schools do not have a boundary wall.¹⁰
- With such dismal conditions, is it any wonder that a survey found that 48% of Class V students were unable to read Class II-level text; and 43% of Class VIII students could not divide numbers.¹¹

On the other hand, for the well-to-do classes, there are a wide range of private schools of varying quality, both in terms of educational and extra-curricular facilities, with fees varying from Rs 1 lakh per year to as much as Rs 15 lakh per year and more.

Because of such a discriminatory school education system, only 15–17% of those enrolled in Class I are able to clear Class XII. The situation is worse for the marginalised sections: only about 8% of SCs and 6% of STs, about 10–11% OBCs and around 9% Muslims cross the Class XII barrier. This also means that almost 92% of Dalits and 94% of tribals and 90% of OBCs never become eligible for the benefits of reservation under the social justice agenda.¹²

The BJP came to power, promising to rectify the situation, and increasing spending on education (Centre + States combined) to 6% of GDP during their 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign. It has turned out to another jumla.

The above data of the state of India’s schools were for 2015–16.

Yet, during its five years in power, the BJP has made an unprecedented 38% cut in its budget for school education (see Table 1). This only implies that the condition of government schools must have worsened considerably. The reason for this huge budget cut for school education is simple: the BJP wants to privatise school education completely. For this, the strategy adopted is simple: ruin the quality of government school system by cutting the funding of school education and keeping teaching posts vacant; children will automatically exit government schools, and those who can afford it will join private schools. The consequence: more than 2 lakh government schools have closed down till date.¹³

Business of higher education

Coming to higher education, the number of students in colleges, defined by the Gross Enrolment Ratio or GER (number of students as a percent proportion of the youth population in the age group 17–23 / 18–24) is way below the developed countries—the GER for India is only around 20, whereas for developed countries it is above 60, with several countries having a GER above 70.¹⁴ An important reason for this

is the accelerating privatisation and commercialisation of higher education since the neoliberal reforms began in India in 1991—even before the BJP came to power, by 2011–12, total number of private higher educational institutions (including both degree and diploma institutions) accounted for more than two-thirds of all higher educational institutions, and for nearly 60% of student enrolment.¹⁵

Private higher educational institutions are all for-profit institutions; therefore, very few students can afford their fees. But the BJP has further slashed higher educational spending – during its five years in power, it has cut its spending on higher education (2018–19 RE over 2014–15 BE) by as much as 18% in real terms (see Table 1). Because of this, most government funded colleges are starved of funds and so, to meet their expenses, are being forced to increase student fees using all kinds of excuses. Consequently, studying in government funded educational institutions too is becoming unaffordable for students from poor families.

To cover up for this cut in higher education spending, Jaitley last

Table 1: BJP Budget Allocations for Education, 2014 to 2019 (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE (1)	2018–19 RE (2)	2019–20	Reduction: (2) over (1), CAGR
Department of School Education and Literacy	55,115	50,114	56,387	38%
Department of Higher Education	27,656	33,512	37,461	18%
Ministry of Human Resource Development: Total	82,771	83,626	93,848	31%
MHRD Budget as % of GDP	0.66	0.44	0.45	
MHRD budget as % of total budget outlay	4.61	3.40	3.37	

year (2018) once again resorted to his standard ‘smoke-and-mirrors-routine’. In his budget speech, he announced: “Technology will be the biggest driver in improving the quality of education. We propose to increase the digital intensity in education and move gradually from ‘black board’ to ‘digital board’.” But how serious is he about this can be gauged from the fact that the allocation for ‘Digital India e-learning’ was reduced from an already inadequate Rs 518 crore in the 2017–18 RE to an even lower Rs 456 crore in the 2018–19 BE; the 2018–19 RE shows a marginally increased spending of Rs 511 crore.

Even within the limited higher education budget, most of the funding is going to elite government institutions like the IITs and IIMS. The allocation for the University Grants Commission, that regulates the higher educational institutions in the country and provides grants to more than 10,000 institutions, has been halved in the five Modi budgets, from Rs 8,978 crore in 2014–15 BE to just Rs 4,687 crore in 2018–19 RE. The allocation for the All India Council for Technical Education, the regulator of engineering education in India, has remained dismally low during all the five Modi years and is a lowly Rs 452 crore in the 2018–19 RE. On the other hand, more than half of the higher education budgets have gone towards funding the so-called ‘institutions of excellence’ such as the IITs, IIMs and the Central Universities.

Last year (2018–19), the finance minister announced a new initiative, ‘Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education’, or RISE, to “step up investments in research and related infrastructure in premier educational institutions”. He announced an investment of Rs 1,00,000 crore for this over the

next four years. The catch is, this investment is not going to be from the budget. Educational institutions will be given loans from a new non-bank finance company set up last year by the government, the Higher Education Financing Authority (HEFA), which will borrow money from the market for this. The college will have to repay the principal, the Central government will bear the interest costs. The budget will only fund the interest costs, for which the budget allocation for HEFA was Rs 2,750 crore in 2018–19 RE and Rs 2,100 crore in 2019–20. This means that universities and colleges will have to borrow from HEFA for upgrading themselves, which in turn means that they will have to increase student fees to repay the loans, making higher education even costlier. Yet another fraud on the people!

It was way back in the 1960s that the Kothari Commission had recommended that “if education is to develop adequately”, the proportion of GDP allocated to education should rise to 6% by 1985–86. Successive governments have continued to ignore this recommendation, and the total educational expenditure only gradually inched up to reach 3.31% in 2012–13 BE.¹⁶

Educationists estimate that given the huge under-spending on education over the past decades, the country probably needs to spend around 8% of the GDP today to achieve even modest goals in education development.

Be that as it may, Narendra Modi and the BJP had promised to increase spending on education (Centre + States combined) to 6% of GDP during their 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign. However, the Economic Survey 2017–18 admits that this has actually fallen under Modi rule, from 3.1% of GDP in 2013–14 to below 3% during the first four years of Modi rule, and was 2.7% in 2017–18 BE. With the Centre’s educational budget as a percentage of GDP falling from 0.48% in 2017–18 (A) to 0.44% in 2018–19 RE, the combined spending of Centre and States on education must be even lower in this year.

Can’t Modi–Goyal increase the education budget?

If Modi was indeed serious about implementing his election promise, it would require a total educational spending (Centre + States) of Rs 12.6 lakh crore in 2019–20. Even if the Centre spends 25% of this so as to give a boost to total educational spending in the country (the Centre had spent 17.4% in 2017–18 BE), it would require Jaitley to allocate Rs 3.15 lakh crore for education, an increase of Rs 2.2 lakh crore over the actual allocation made in the

Table 2: Allocation for Elite Higher Education Institutions (Rs crore)

	2018–19 RE
Department of Higher Education	33,512
<i>Within this:</i>	
<i>IITs</i>	5,715
<i>Central Universities</i>	6,499
<i>IIMs</i>	372
<i>NIT</i>	3,721
<i>IISERs</i>	650
<i>IIIT</i>	440
Total	17,397
<i>University Grants Commission</i>	4,687

budget—not an unaffordable amount for a government that gives several times this amount as subsidies to the rich every year.

This increased spending would have to be directed towards:

- Gradually eliminating the multi-layered discriminatory school education system and replacing it by an egalitarian school system with equivalent norms and standards of at least the level of Kendriya Vidyalayas.
- Scrapping the policy of appointing contractual teachers; taking steps to ensure that all teachers, without exception, are fully qualified and appropriately ‘trained’ (i.e. educated) before recruitment and paid a regular salary scale with social security that is comparable throughout the country, as is the case with senior government officers.
- So far as higher education is concerned, government must increase its expenditure on higher education, open more government higher education institutions, and charge only affordable fees, with adequate number of scholarships for all students who cannot afford these fees. No student must be denied education in a higher education institution for lack of money.

Cogs in corporate wheel

The neoliberal model looks at everything, including education, from the perspective of maximising corporate profits. There is no need to look at education from the perspective of human development, as a means of unlocking the inherent potential of human beings, so that

they can enjoy an enhanced quality of life. All this is gibberish. The sole aim of education must be to prepare youth for employment in the assembly lines of multinational corporations. For this, the youth must be imparted the necessary skills, so that they can become cogs in the corporate wheel.

This philosophy also fits well with the fascist philosophy of the BJP–RSS regime, which wants to transform our youth into mindless automatons in the service of virulent Hindutva.

And so, while on the one hand, the Modi–Jaitley regime is slowly strangulating our higher educational institutions by starving them of funds, on the other hand, the government has hugely increased funding for skill development. The BJP Government inaugurated the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship soon after coming to power in 2014. Its main programme is the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, the allocation for which has trebled since its inception in 2015–16 (Table 3).

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Table 3: Budget Allocations for Skill Development (Rs crore)

	2015–16 A	2018–19 RE	2019–20
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana	991	2,765	2,932

Who are Venezuela's Colectivos?

Federico Fuentes

The media calls them armed thugs and US Senator Marco Rubio wants them put on the terrorist list, but who are Venezuela's colectivos (collectives)? Green Left Weekly's Federico Fuentes met with some of them to find out.

As we walked around the 23 de Enero barrio in Caracas, an announcement came through Cucaracho's walkie talkie: "We are in a war and the main target of this offensive is the popular movements, the colectivos. This is no coincidence: they know the colectivos are their main obstacle and 23 de Enero is the tip of the iceberg."

Cucaracho—"that's what they call me"—is a member of the Alexis Vive colectivo, which is active in this historically militant neighbourhood strategically located close to the presidential palace. Its history and location means 23 de Enero is regularly referred to as one of the main bases for the colectivos.

Demonised by the international media and targeted by the opposition, the colectivos have become a symbol of scorn for President Nicolas Maduro's opponents. They are regularly portrayed in the media as armed gangs and the last bastion of support for Maduro's government. But the reality of the colectivos—like almost everything in Venezuela—is vastly different.

Many of the groups today labelled as colectivos predate Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chavez. Others, like Alexis Vive, emerged during the Chavez presidency.

Origins

Almost all of them are community organisations that

have flourished under Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution.

"They view the colectivos as similar to the insurgent groups in the Middle East that resisted invasion," explains Cucaracho. "That is why they demonise us. They see us as a barrier, as a final line of defence, but they don't come to see our reality."

Alexis Vive was instrumental in establishing the Panal 2021 commune. Promoted by Chavez, communes have become the main form of democratic community organising across the country.

The Panal 2021 commune, which incorporated about 3600 families in a sector of 23 de Enero, has its own self-managed enterprises such as a bakery and sugar-packaging plant, its own radio and cable TV station, its own transport and food distribution centres, and even its own local currency. Profits from all of the commune's enterprises are deposited in the communal bank and redistributed to projects decided upon by the community.

"The idea of the commune is to disperse power", explains Cucaracho, "so that the people are the ones who make the decisions. Our role is to train cadre and teach people about the strategic vision of the commune. But we are just like everyone else in the community: we join the same queues as everyone else, we help the elderly, we are part of the community."

This does not mean that colectivos limit themselves solely to community work.

In San Fernando, the capital of Apure state, I spoke to members of the Union of Motorizados—motorbike couriers who are regularly labelled as colectivo members.

"The opposition are the violent ones," one of them said. "They loot shops, set houses on fire. So what happens? We, the motorizados, come out and then they run away, they don't come back. You won't find us looting shops or creating chaos. But we are also not going to let others set people's houses on fire."

"The last time they protested," another said, referring to the wave of violent opposition protests that rocked the country in 2017, "they burnt down a nursery. What sort of protest is that? Those kids have got nothing to do with what is going on, so why are they being targeted?"

Junior is a member of the Bolivar and Zamora Revolutionary Current (CRBZ), another group denounced in the media as a colectivo, but which has its origins in a group of campaigners for peasant rights formed in the '90s. He was among those present on the Venezuela–Colombia border on February 23, when the United States sought to violate Venezuelan sovereignty under the pretext of bringing in "humanitarian aid".

Junior explained that the CRBZ decided to send some members to the border during those days. "It was an internal decision. Those of us who are the most politically clear, the most prepared, were the ones who went.

"We didn't go because the government told us to go. It was our political consciousness that took us there."

The build-up to the events on February 23 meant that the possibility of violence was ever present. Not knowing what to expect, Junior explained that they "psychologically prepared for the worst, for anything

that might come.

“You couldn’t go there thinking about your family, your children. So you had to go there thinking about your contribution to the revolution, to defending your country, the fact that you are going there to fight for your mum’s future, your dad’s future, the future of my children and the children of my children. We went to defend our sovereignty, the sovereignty of our country, of our nation. If a military intervention had occurred, we were there, ready, and they would have had to go through us, because we are a people willing to defend our sovereignty, willing to fight back to defend every centimetre of this territory.”

In the end, the opposition’s mission failed. Even the media’s lie that the Venezuelan armed forces had burnt trucks carrying humanitarian aid was revealed to be false when videos emerged showing opposition protesters had caused the fire.

According to that same media, colectivos had attacked protesters on the Venezuelan side of the border. But Junior recounted a different version of events.

“The border region of Tachira is very complicated,” he said. “The Venezuelan opposition there works with Colombian paramilitaries to increase their strength. On February 23, there were some small protests on this side of the border in disputed areas, areas where you have Colombian paramilitaries who are struggling to gain control of the area because it’s a strategic region for them. Their presence provides the opposition with logistics and force.”

Despite the paramilitary presence, the opposition was unable to generate the kind of violence they hoped for, though Junior explained that he, along with others from the CRBZ had to find alternate means to get home after opposition protesters set some of their vehicles on fire.

Media Bias

“The media generally does not portray the reality of events. The reality is that the violence overwhelmingly comes from the opposition,” Junior said.

“The opposition always tries to provoke violence because they know the media will simply say the government is responsible, that the government represses the people, and use this as an excuse for intervention. The media always take the side of the opposition; they don’t tell the truth. They sell a message to the rest of the world that is false. They are not balanced in regard to their information and their reporting on what is happening here.”

Colectivo members I spoke to acknowledged that, in some cases, state intelligence agents had either infiltrated certain colectivos or masqueraded as ones to attack and intimidate opposition protests. But, although this was more the exception rather than the rule, it is these groups the media have focussed on.

Rafael Ramos, a postgraduate student at the Institute for High Studies in Diplomacy Pedro Gual explained that the media’s portrayal of the colectivos has a clear intention.

“This editorial line is pushed to make international public opinion believe that Chavismo has lost all its support. They are introducing the idea that Venezuela is supposedly a dictatorship, with no freedom of speech, and that Chavismo is just limited to a few remaining supporters who potentially have to be exterminated. Because they’re just a few people, then violence against Chavistas, the colectivos, is justified. The media dehumanises them, portrays them as non-human, so in the end it doesn’t matter if they treat them like animals or kill them.

“The image they are trying to portray internationally is an attempt

to justify violence.”

The colectivo members I spoke understand this.

“We are human beings, like everyone else,” said Robert Longa, whose voice I had heard through Cucaracho’s walkie talkie. “We live in the community, participate in the commune, attend assemblies, study and look for ways to produce food to deal with the crisis.

“But we are conscious that we are in a war. Not against the opposition because opposition doesn’t exist, they cannot overthrow Maduro. We are up against imperialism.

“They attack the colectivos because we are willing to defend our model. The colectivos are organised with the aim of deepening the Bolivarian Revolution through popular organisation and the creation of the communal state. We are strongly convinced that this is the correct way forward: a government of the people based on participatory democracy.

“We will resolve our problems within the revolution. We are Chavista and we will not betray Chavez.

“There are people that claim to be Chavista but that are killing Chavismo. There are people who have infiltrated state institutions and who work against us.

“The people want the revolution to be deepened. They want the bureaucrats kicked out once and for all; for the land to be given to the peasants and the factories to be taken over by the workers. We want a radicalisation of the revolution. We want all power to the people: that is what we seek.

“But for now our problem is with the gringos. Once we resolve this issue, then we will deal with our own internal problems.”

[Federico Fuentes writes for Green Left Weekly, Australia.]



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On May Day . . .

Gary Snyder

“Let’s drink a toast to all those farmers, workers, artists and intellectuals of the last 100 years who without thought of fame and profit . . . worked tirelessly in their dream of a worldwide socialist revolution, who believed and hoped that a new world was dawning and that their work would contribute to a society where one class does not exploit another, where one ethnic group or one nation does not try to expand itself over another, and where men and women live as equals. The people who nourished these

hopes and dreams were sometimes foolishly blind to the opportunism of their own leadership, and many were led to ideological absurdities, but the great majority of them selflessly worked for socialism with the best of hearts. . . . The failure of socialism is the tragedy of the 20th century and . . . we should honor the memory of those who struggled for the dream of what socialism might have been. And begin a new way again.”

(Gary Snyder is an American poet.)

The Capitalist Workday, the Socialist Workday

Michael A. Lebowitz

On May Day, there are four things that are worth remembering:

1. For workers, May Day does not celebrate a state holiday or gifts from the state but commemorates the struggle of workers from below.
2. The initial focus of May Day was a struggle for the shorter workday.
3. The struggle for the shorter workday is not an isolated

struggle but is the struggle against capitalist exploitation.

4. The struggle against capitalist exploitation is an essential part but not the only part of the struggle against capitalism.

What I am going to do in this talk today is to set out some ideas about the capitalist workday and the socialist workday which I hope can be useful in the current struggles around the world.

Transcript of a talk given in Venezuela on May Day.

The Capitalist Workday

What is the relation between the capitalist workday and exploitation? When workers work for capital, they receive a wage which allows them to purchase a certain amount of commodities. How much is that wage? There is nothing automatic about the wage level. It is determined by the struggles of workers against capital.

Those commodities which form the worker's wage contain a certain quantity of labour, and those hours of labour on a daily basis are often described as the "necessary labour" of the worker—the hours of labour necessary for workers to produce the commodities they consume on a daily basis.

But, in capitalism workers do not just work their hours of necessary labour. Because they have been compelled to sell their ability to work to the capitalist in order to survive, the capitalist is in the position to demand they work longer than this. And the difference between their hours of necessary labour and the total work that workers perform for capital is surplus labour—the ultimate source of capital's profits. In other words, capitalist profits are based on the difference between the workday and necessary labour; they are based upon surplus labour, unpaid labour, exploitation.

So, the more the capitalist is able to drive up the workday, the greater the exploitation and the greater the profit. Marx commented that "the capitalist is constantly tending to reduce wages to their physical minimum and extend the working day to its physical maximum". How true. Marx continued, though, and noted "while the working man constantly presses in the opposite direction". In other words, class

struggle: workers struggle to increase wages and to reduce the workday; they struggle to reduce exploitation by capitalists.

Of course, your workday is more than just the time spent between clocking in and clocking out. There is the time it takes you to get to work, the time it takes to buy the food you need to survive, the time to prepare that food—all this is really necessary labour and part of the worker's workday. But since this labour is free to the capitalist, since it is not a cost for him, it is therefore invisible to him. So, when the capitalists want to drive down necessary labour by driving down wages (or by increasing productivity relative to wages), it is not the labour he does not pay for that he wants to reduce. Rather, he wants as much free labour as possible, as much unpaid labour as possible.

It is not surprising that workers want to reduce their unpaid labour for capital and do so by struggling to reduce the capitalist workday. But it is not only the unpaid labour in the workday that is a burden for workers; it is also the paid labour that they are compelled to do for capital. In other words, the problem is not only exploitation. It is the way that capitalist production deforms working people. In the capitalist workplace, the worker works for the goals of capital, under the control of capital and with an organisation of production which is designed not to permit workers to develop their capabilities but, rather, has the single goal of profits. "All means for the development of production", Marx stressed about capitalism, "distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him" and "alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process". In other words,

the process of capitalist production cripples us as human beings. Life in the capitalist workplace is a place where we are commanded from above, where we are mere tools that capital manipulates in order to get profits.

That is why we want to reduce the capitalist workday. That is why we cannot wait to escape. It is not only the exploitation, the unfairness and the injustice in the distribution of income. Time away from capitalist production appears as the only time in which we can be ourselves, a time when our activity can be free time, time for the full development of the individual.

This is what it necessarily looks like within capitalism. But we have to recognise that so many of our ideas within capitalism are infected. The most obvious example is the phenomenon of consumerism—we must buy all those things! What we own defines us. The socialist answer, though, is not that everyone should own the same things—in other words, equalisation of alienation; rather, the socialist idea is to end the situation in which we are owned and defined by things.

The battle of ideas, which is central to the struggle for socialism, is based on the alternative conception of socialism. Its focus is not to reform this or that idea that has developed within capitalism but, rather, to replace ideas from capitalism with conceptions appropriate to socialism. So, is our idea of the workday within capitalism infected? And, can we get any insights into the workday by thinking about the workday within socialism?

The Socialist Workday

Firstly, what do we mean by socialism? The goal of socialists has

always been the creation of a society which would allow for the full development of human potential. It was never seen as a society in which some people are able to develop their capabilities and others are not. That was Marx's point in stating clearly that the goal is "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." And this is clearly the point, too, of Venezuela's Bolivarian constitution where it stresses in article 20 that "everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality" and in the explicit recognition in article 299 that the goal of a human society must be that of "ensuring overall human development".

In contrast to capitalist society, where "the worker exists to satisfy the need" of capital to expand, Marx envisioned a socialist society where the wealth that workers have produced "is there to satisfy the worker's own need for development". So, what is the nature of the workday in a society oriented toward ensuring overall human development?

Let us begin by talking about necessary labour—quantitatively. There is the labour which is contained in the products we consume daily—just like before. To this, however, we need to add the labour that workers want to devote toward expanding production in the future. In socialism, there are no capitalists who compel the performance of surplus labour and invest a portion of the profits in the search for future profits. Rather, workers themselves in their workplaces and society decide if they want to devote time and effort to expanding satisfaction of needs in the future. If they make this decision, then this labour is not surplus to their needs;

it forms part of what they see as their necessary labour. Thus, the concept of necessary labour changes here.

In a socialist society, further, we recognise explicitly that part of our necessary labour is labour within the household. In other words we acknowledge that our workday does not begin after we leave the household but includes what we do within the household. Article 88 of the Bolivarian constitution recognises the importance of this labour when it notes that labour within the household is "economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth".

The concept of necessary labour and our workday within a socialist society also includes the labour which is required to self-govern our communities. After all, if socialism is about the decisions we make democratically in our communities, then the time we need to do this is part of our necessary labour. Similarly, if socialism is about creating the conditions in which we are all able to develop our potential, then the process of education and of developing our capabilities is also activity which is necessary.

When we think about the socialist workday, in short, we think about the workday differently. Our view of the quantity of necessary labour, for example, is not distorted by the capitalist perspective of treating as necessary only that labour for which capital must pay. That is the difference between the political economy of capital and the political economy of the working class. From the perspective of workers, we recognise as necessary labour all the labour that is necessary for "the worker's own need for development".

But the difference is not only

quantitative. In socialism, the workday cannot be a day in which you receive orders from the top (even in strategic industries). Rather, it is only through our own activity, our practice and our protagonism that we can develop our capabilities. Article 62 of Venezuela's constitution makes that point in its declaration that participation by people is "the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective". In other words, in every aspect of our lives (the traditional workplace, the community, the household), democratic decision making is a necessary characteristic of the socialist workday; through workers' councils, communal councils, student councils, family councils, we produce ourselves as new socialist subjects.

Thus, when we look at the workday from the perspective of socialism, we see that the simple demand for reducing the workday is a demand from within capitalism. Its message is simple—end this horror! This is an "infected" conception of the workday. It starts from a view of labour as so miserable that the only thing you can think of doing is reducing and ending it.

When we think about building socialism, however, we recognise that the demand is to transform the workday—to recognise all parts of our workday explicitly and to transform that day qualitatively. Rather than only "free time" being time in which we can develop, from the perspective of socialism it is essential to make the whole day time for building human capacities.

In short, there are two ways of looking at the demand for the reduced workday: one way talks simply about a shorter work week

and thus longer weekend vacations; in contrast, a second way stresses the reduction of the traditional workday in order to provide the time on a daily basis for education for self-managing, for our work within the household and our work within our communities. In other words, it is the demand to redefine and transform our workday.

The first of these is simply a reform within capitalism. For socialists, May Day should be the day to struggle for the whole worker's day, to struggle for the socialist workday.

(Michael A. Lebowitz is professor emeritus of economics at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.)

Glorious Tradition of Sacrifices

Sandeep Pandey

The freedom struggle of this country witnessed a band of youth inspired by a zeal willing to put their lives at stake. Number of them were arrested, tried in court and executed by the British. Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Thakur Roshan Singh, Rajendra Nath Lahiri, Shivaram Rajguru, Sukhdev Thapar, Jatindra Nath Das are common household names in India of revolutionaries who sacrificed their lives. Most of them were hanged. Chandrashekhar Azad shot himself dead to escape arrest and Jatindra Nath Das died after a 63 day hunger strike inside Lahore prison, where Bhagat Singh also fasted with him, for better living conditions for political prisoners.

Post-independence, Potti Sreeramulu, a freedom fighter, died after fasting for 58 days in Chennai for a separate Andhra state for Telugu speaking people in 1952. Even though this demand had popular support, the reason why Jawaharlal Nehru government eventually agreed to it, Potti Sreeramulu's effort was an individual decision.

Probably one of the most epic fasts in recent times is the one by Irom Sharmila, who fasted for 16 long years in Manipur, while being force fed, demanding repeal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Her decision to go on fast and to withdraw was again individual. Fortunately, she survived the long ordeal.

All the above mentioned revolutionaries had staked their lives for a greater cause. Today, we are

witnessing a similar phenomenon among saints for the conservation of river Ganga. Most of these are associated with Matri Sadan Ashram in Haridwar. 60 fasts unto death have been organised by this Ashram so far, in which two saints, Swami Nigmanand and Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, who was earlier known as Professor G.D. Agrawal at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, died after fasting for 115 and 112 days, respectively, in 2011 and 2018. Brahmachari Atmabodhanand is currently sitting on fast for over 190 days and is going to give up water on 3rd May, 2019. Baba Nagnath had died in 2014 in Varanasi after 114 days of fast for the same demand. Swami Gokulanand, who sat on the first fast against illegal mining in Ganga in 1998 along with Swami Nigmanand on behalf of Matri Sadan was murdered in 2003. The head of Matri Sadan, Swami Shivanand, who has himself fasted against illegal mining in the past, has taken a decision that one saint after another will sit on fast until the demand of Professor G.D. Agrawal to let Ganga flow uninterrupted and clean is met by the government. While the Manmohan Singh government had agreed to some demands of Professor G.D. Agrawal when he fasted five times, the present government has chosen to ignore the sacrifices of saints.

It is a pity that most of the people who put their lives at stake were not able to generate enough mass support for themselves. That is the reason they died while fasting. They

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received very limited support from society even though the cause that they espoused for was public and would benefit the society at large. Except for Mahatma Gandhi and Anna Hazare, whose fasts attracted public attention and people were moved by them, most of the people who fasted unto death received a very feeble response from society. In fact, the society was cruelly insensitive towards them.

However, these fasts have proved that when there is darkness everywhere, when people and organisations are willing to make compromises for petty gains or are soaked in corruption and when most of the society is either submissive or afraid of authorities, there are people who come out, take a stand and face the repressive regimes. They become the hope for society and continue to inspire generations. They are icons of struggle against injustice and uphold values of truth, integrity, simplicity and adherence to universal principles for the benefit of the entire human race.

The above mentioned people who gave up their lives were the most intelligent, committed and finest human beings of our society. Their untimely demise was society's loss. This is irrespective of the fact that the great souls who made the highest sacrifice never bothered about their own lives. But what is most unfortunate is that whereas nobody expected any mercy from the governments of the day, even the larger society didn't do enough to save their lives. We are all guilty in this.

The society will always remember them for their ideals. These martyrs will continue to inspire new idealists. They will probably be never enough in number

to change the society for the better but will remind the lesser mortals like us that there are higher ideals to live for. We must not keep ourselves tied up in smaller things as to lose the sight of a bigger objective of a humane society, much less bother ourselves with unscrupulous things. If we cannot do any good for the society, we must not at least cause

harm to it. This is the least we can learn from these great souls who gave up their lives for our cause.

(Sandeep Pandey is a social activist, Magsaysay Award recipient, Ph.D. from the University of California, and has taught at several prominent educational institutions in the country.)

Surgical Strike Against Science and Scholarship

Ramachandra Guha

A term greatly beloved of the Narendra Modi government is 'surgical strike'. It was first invoked in September 2016, after a cross-border raid undertaken by the Indian army on camps in Pakistan. Notably, the army itself did not use the term; it was the prime minister and his propagandists who did. In November of the same year, the prime minister's sudden, cataclysmic withdrawal of the Rs 1000 and Rs 500 currency notes was also termed a 'surgical strike' (against black money) by spokespersons of the ruling party.

The surgical strike against terror was ineffective. For our security forces have continued to battle incursions by militants from Pakistan on a more or less daily basis. The surgical strike against black money was counterproductive. While demonetization failed to eliminate black money, it did eliminate—by sending into bankruptcy—many small enterprises whose transactions were conducted partly in cash. It also hurt millions of farmers who suddenly found themselves without the money required to buy seeds or fertilizers for their economic survival.

There is, however, one set of surgical strikes conducted by the present regime about whose efficacy there can be no argument. Since May 2014, the Modi government has waged an almost continuous war against the intellect, by wilfully undermining, one by one, our best universities and research institutes. These attempts have been extremely successful, leading to a loss of morale and credibility within these institutions, which are rapidly losing the status they once enjoyed in India and the world.

The contempt with which the current prime minister holds scholars and scholarship is manifest in the cabinet ministers he has chosen in these spheres. The two HRD ministers he has thus far appointed have absolutely no background in education or research; nor any interest in listening to experts in these fields. They have, sometimes, taken their cue directly from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, as witness the appointment of sanghi ideologues with zero scholarly pedigree as the heads of the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Indian Council of Social Science

Research, respectively. At other times, they have taken their cue from the RSS's student front, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, as witness the unrelenting hostility expressed by the HRD ministry towards two of our finest public universities, the Hyderabad Central University and the Jawaharlal Nehru University—in each case prompted by the ABVP, which is desperate to make inroads into institutions whose student bodies have not been particularly receptive to its propaganda in the past.

Some right-wing ideologues claim that all this is merely by way of course-correction—that in the past these universities were dominated by foreign-inspired Marxist ideologues who are now being replaced by swadeshi patriots. This argument would hold some water if the Modi government's war on the intellect was restricted to the social sciences and the humanities. But it is not; this is a war that has wholeheartedly taken on the natural sciences as well. The lead has come from the very top, with the prime minister himself claiming that the ancient Indians invented plastic surgery as well as in-vitro fertilization. Further, he has appointed as his minister for science and technology a man who believes that “every modern Indian achievement is a continuation of our ancient scientific achievement”, and, indeed, that the Vedas anticipated the theories of Albert Einstein.

These claims by our S&T Minister were made not in private conversation, nor in an RSS shakha, but in the Indian Science Congress. In recent years, this annual event, supposed to showcase the latest trends in modern science, has instead seen presentations by the minister's ideological kinsmen claiming that

the ancient Hindus invented the airplane as well as stem-cell research (the Kauravas apparently being the first test-tube babies).

All this would be funny were it not so tragic. Since the visionary Jamsetji Tata helped found the Indian Institute of Science more than a century ago, scientific research in this country has been guided by reason and experimentation—rather than by superstition or myth. Institutes such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the National Centre for Biological Sciences have a well deserved international reputation. Meanwhile, the IITs have played a critical role in maintaining a decent standard of technical education, with their graduates contributing to the country's economic progress in a multitude of ways. The hocus-pocus, mumbo jumbo, now promoted by Union ministers (and encouraged by the prime minister), has caused grievous and possibly irreparable damage to scientific thinking in India.

Critics of this government's war on the intellect tend to contrast our present prime minister with our first prime minister. Thus, writing in the Deccan Herald of February 7, 2019, Prasenjit Chowdhury remarks: “Nehru left India with the world's second-largest pool of trained scientists and engineers. Men like Homi Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai built the platform under Nehru's tutelage for Indian [scientific] accomplishments . . . Modi, in his attempt to negate Nehru who was noted for his vision to inspire a scientific temper, has chosen instead to mainstream pseudo-scientific orthodoxies.”

I would add that that the Modi government has also put at risk India's high quality traditions of

social science research. Contra sanghi ideologues, Marxism was merely one of several intellectual currents in the Nehruvian academy. Thus D.R. Gadgil and André Béteille were the Bhabha and Sarabhai of their fields, economics and sociology, respectively. Both were staunch liberals, as well as anti-Marxist. Gadgil and Béteille (and others like them) inspired serious research on such subjects as inequality, education, health and rural development, enabling the framing of public policies based on evidence rather than ideology. This too has now been placed at risk by the sanghi infiltration of our academic institutions.

When it comes to promoting science and scholarship, the Modi government is markedly inferior even to the first National Democratic Alliance government. Quite a few of the ministers chosen by Atal Bihari Vajpayee had a high regard for learning and expertise. The HRD minister in the first NDA government, M.M. Joshi, had a PhD in physics himself. His cabinet colleagues, George Fernandes, Yashwant Sinha and L.K. Advani, were all keen, not to say obsessive, readers of books on history and public policy. Jaswant Singh and Arun Shourie not only read serious books but wrote them as well. By contrast, I do not believe there is a single minister in this government (the prime minister not excepted) who has a deep interest in history, literature or science. I wonder if any of them read more than the daily newspaper; some may not even venture further than Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter. Little wonder then that when appointing vice-chancellors of universities or directors of research institutes, they

choose third-rate ideologues rather than first-rate scholars.

The Modi government's malevolent attitude to knowledge has not damaged this writer's career, since I left the academy 25 years ago. Yet it has left me with an abiding sense of sorrow. For I was entirely educated in India, in public universities whose autonomy was (at the time I was within them) respected and even encouraged. Now, as an unaffiliated freelancer myself, I have seen my scholarly friends and colleagues suffer, personally as well as professionally, from these politically motivated attacks on the institutions to which they have devoted their own lives.

A year after Narendra Modi came to power in New Delhi, I wrote that his government was the "most anti-intellectual" this country has seen. Since then, the Modi regime has done nothing to make me reconsider or reverse this judgment; and many things do confirm and consolidate it. From the moment it came to power, the government led by Modi has carried out a series of surgical strikes on science and scholarship, which (tragically) have been far more effective than those conducted against terrorism or black money.

By so systematically undermining our finest institutions that produce knowledge and breed innovation, the Modi government has gravely undermined the nation's social and economic future. Indians now living as well as Indians yet unborn will bear the costs of this savage, unrelenting, war on the intellect.

(Ramachandra Guha is an Indian historian and a much acclaimed biographer of Mahatma Gandhi.)

No, Mr Modi, Ram Manohar Lohia Would Not have been Proud of BJP Government – He was an Anti-Fascist

Ruchira Gupta

On March 26, Narendra Modi claimed in a blog post that Gandhian socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia would have been proud of the BJP government. Perhaps the prime minister is not aware that Lohia was ferociously anti-fascist, anti-imperialist and anti-hierarchy. He also rejected authoritarianism in all its forms.

Lohia was a PhD student in Berlin between the crucial years of 1931 and 1933 that saw the rise of fascism in Germany.

When he returned to India, the first article he wrote was titled "Hitlerism".

In the article, published in *The Hindu* on March 25, 1933, he expressed his concern about how "personal assaults by the Storm Troopers on their adversaries" had decimated the Opposition. The *Sturmabteilung*, also referred to as stormtroopers, was a paramilitary group of the Nazi Party that played an important role in Hitler's rise to power.

The Reichstag fire

Lohia defended his thesis on February 25, 1933, three days after Hermann Goering, then a minister without a portfolio in Hitler's cabinet, set up an auxiliary police force staffed with stormtroopers to attack members of other parties, dissidents, communists, feminists and, of course, Jews and Romas. Hitler had been Chancellor of

Germany for almost two months at that time.

On February 27, 1933, the German Parliament building or Reichstag went up in flames after an arson attack suspected to have been carried out by Hitler's stormtroopers. The next day, Hitler used the fire to consolidate his power through an emergency decree that said:

"Restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press; on the rights of assembly and association; and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications and warrants for house searches, orders for confiscations as well as restrictions on property, are also permissible beyond the legal limits otherwise prescribed."

Lohia, then 23 years old, was witness to the first big Nazi roundup that followed. Truckloads of stormtroopers roared through the streets of Germany, bursting in on the hangouts of liberals, socialists and communists, barging into private homes. Thousands of communists, social democrats, feminists, trade unionists and liberals were taken into what was described as "protective custody", only to be tortured.

Lessons from Germany

During his three years in Germany, Lohia saw how Hitler won over big business and exploited the political haggling between

the communists, socialists and conservatives to gain power.

German Chancellor Heinrich Bruening, who was seeking an end to war reparations, had proposed that the huge estates of bankrupt aristocrats be divided up and given to peasants. He issued a decree banning the SA (Sturmabteilung) and SS (Schutzstaffel) all across Germany in April, 1932. The Schutzstaffel, another paramilitary squad, were originally Hitler's bodyguards but later became the elite guard of the Reich.

Within a month, under pressure from business families and warring political parties, Bruening was removed from office by President Paul von Hindenberg. By June 15, the ban on the SA and SS was lifted.

Lohia wrote in *The Hindu*: "Financial help from capital and heavy industry and Herr Thyssen and Hugenberg controlling iron and coal industries of Germany being in active sympathy with Nazis, has been of the greatest assistance to the [Nazi] party . . . For though the National Socialist programme should have Socialism in it, on the basis of its name, it contains instead the assurance that private property shall exist under Nazi regime . . ."

Lohia was repulsed by the changing atmosphere in the universities. He wrote: "It was one of my most common experiences that otherwise educated and cultured German students expressed their glee even upon personal assaults by the Storm Troopers on their adversaries".

Lohia must have witnessed with pain, how one of his favourite professors, Hermann Oncken, "to whom many like me of the Berlin university owe the taste for history", was being hounded by his pro-Nazi

students in collaboration with the new administration.

Walter Frank, one of Oncken's former students, an unscrupulous Nazi upstart, accused his old teacher of distortion in an article. This gave the Nazis the pretext to suddenly retire the great scholar from his professorship in 1935.

Lohia, however, took forward the teachings of the famous "socialist of the classroom". Lohia was sympathetic to his teacher's affinity to the founder of German Social Democracy, Ferdinand Lassalle, whose political philosophy, based on Hegel's teachings, was to have a universal outlook and to bridge the abyss between the state and the working class.

Understanding fascism

Lohia had gained firsthand insights into the link between anti-rational mysticism and fascism in Europe during his time in Germany.

One of Lohia's professors, the German philosopher, Max Dessoir, was an amateur magician and parapsychologist quoted by the likes of Freud. His lectures provided students like Lohia insights into how the fascists used magic and irrational mysticism to influence the sub-conscious memory.

Dessoir's article, *Psychology of the Art of Conjuring*, was banned by the Nazis. Dessoir was also forbidden from teaching. The excuse was that he was "quarter-Jewish".

Lohia must have found the conditions in Germany unbearable and so he decided to leave Germany just a few weeks after passing his PhD, without even waiting to pick up the actual degree itself.

On his return to India, he went to work for the Indian National Congress in Allahabad at Jawaharlal

Nehru's invitation, and promptly joined the party's socialist caucus.

Lohia, Nehru and all the socialist leaders were opposed to the anti-rational mysticism of some of the members of the Indian National Congress. Both had a deep understanding of fascism and aversion to it.

Lohia stayed in Anand Bhawan, Nehru's home in Allahabad, for the next few years. During that time, he edited the party's monthly paper, the *Inquilab*, and contributed several articles to the magazine, *Congress Socialist*.

Three years on, in 1936, a 46-year-old Nehru asked Lohia, who was then 26 years old, to start the foreign cell of the Congress. The first pamphlet that Lohia wrote as secretary of the party's foreign department was titled, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, with a foreword by Nehru. Both leaders must have surely discussed the importance of laying out this treatise at a time when the party was being built. By then, Nehru had already been jailed by the British eight times for a cumulative total of more than six years. Lohia was yet to begin his jail terms.

Lohia on civil liberties

Modi has obviously not read this pamphlet in which Lohia wrote: "The persecution of racial minorities is obviously a reflection of unequal laws, as also unequal dispensation of justice and is, therefore, an attack on the civil liberties of a section of citizens."

Or when he explained that,

"On the ruins of the Bastille [the notorious French prison] was reared the imposing structure of civil liberties . . . Bastilles, of one type or the other, had been built to frighten people into submission and

acceptance of conditions as they obtained. When, finally the peoples had gathered sufficient strength to smash the state and its economic and social laws, they overthrew the Bastilles . . . To restrict, therefore, the factual authority of the State, all manners of trenches should be dug and citadels fortified in defence of people's freedom. The agitation for civil liberties is such a trench and a citadel."

Modi and his cohort have certainly not noticed Lohia's views on lynching in the same pamphlet. He wrote:

"In Alabama, the Courts and the State administration are ridden by race-hatred and the fiendish desire legally or illegally to lynch Negroes. The Negroes are underprivileged and live under the dictatorial rule of their economic masters, the former slave-owners of the South."

In 1951, on a tour of the American South, Lohia convinced officials of the Highlander Folk School, the Tennessee retreat where many civil rights activists learned to confront oppression, to include civil disobedience in the curriculum.

Four years after Lohia's visit, Rosa Parks, a seamstress from Montgomery, Alabama, who attended the Highlander course, engaged in her own Gandhian act of civil disobedience by refusing to give up her seat on a city bus to a white passenger.

Parks' single act of defiance launched movements across America to end public segregation and led to the 381-day long Montgomery bus boycott, during which African Americans refused to travel on the city's buses to protest against segregated seating. The bus boycott brought Gandhian civil disobedience to the attention of Martin Luther

King Jr.

American attorney and civil rights activist Harris Wofford, who was a friend of Lohia, later said: "I've been thinking a lot lately about causal chains. If I hadn't taken Ram Manohar Lohia to Highlander, there wouldn't have been a Rosa Parks who went to jail; there wouldn't have been a Martin Luther King to put in jail; and there wouldn't have been a phone call to Coretta [Scott King] for [John F] Kennedy to make. If you remove just one link from the chain, even one that seems insignificant, you can change the whole course of history."

Modi either fails to understand Lohia foundationally, or, as the

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is wont to do, is deliberately appropriating leaders who have played a significant role in building India, since the RSS has a paucity of such leaders.

Lohia died in 1967 at the age of 57. He had devoted his short life to laying the foundation of democratic socialist politics. His submission of a no-confidence vote against his erstwhile mentor, Nehru, in 1963, stemmed from his commitment to establishing a robust Opposition, a cornerstone for any democracy.

(Ruchira Gupta is a feminist campaigner and visiting professor at New York University.)

If War Is an Industry, How Can There Be Peace in a Capitalist World?

Vijay Prashad

On 26 April 1937, twelve bombers of the German Condor Legion and the Italian Aviazione Legionaria flew low over the Basque country of Spain in the midst of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). They tore down over the small town of Guernica, where they let loose their fiery arsenal. Almost two thousand people died in this defenceless town. Noel Monk of the *Daily Express* (London) was one of the first reporters to enter the town, hours after the bombers dropped their ordinance. In *Eyewitness* (1955), Monk wrote, "A sight that haunted me for weeks was the charred bodies of several women and children huddled together in what had been the cellar of a house. It had been a refugio (refuge)". Pablo Picasso, the artist, was so moved by news of the fascist bombing raid on this town that

he painted his most powerful work—*Guernica* (1937)—which now hangs in Madrid's Reina Sofia.

At the entrance of the United Nations Security Council in New York City hangs a tapestry of Picasso's *Guernica* that had been made by the weaver Jacqueline de la Baume Dürrbach in 1955. When US Secretary of State Colin Powell came to the UN in early 2003 to make his—false—comments about weapons of mass destruction about Iraq, the UN staff covered the tapestry with a blue cloth. In 1923, Picasso told Marius de Zayas, "art is a lie that makes us realise truth". The lies that led to the US war on Iraq could not be told with *Guernica* as backdrop.

Lies lead to war and then lies are needed to cover up the horrors of war. Over the past few years, the

International Criminal Court (ICC) had diligently begun to investigate war crimes in Afghanistan conducted by the armed forces of the United States of America, Afghanistan and the Taliban. The ICC's special prosecutor Fatou Bensouda was convinced that there is adequate evidence for the ICC to move the investigation along (including evidence provided by *Wikileaks* from various US army secret investigations). But the Trump administration, in the mode of the mafia, put immense pressure on the ICC. First, US National Security Adviser John Bolton threatened to sanction the judges and lawyers at the court and then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denied Bensouda a visa to come to New York City to deliver her report to the UN Security Council. On 12 April, therefore, a pre-trial bench of the ICC decided to stop the investigation. They said that an investigation into US war crimes in Afghanistan "would not serve the interests of justice". So it goes.

It has become impossible to hold states to account. The ICC cannot move on powerful states, such as the United States and its allies (notably Israel). No other avenue remains open to the victims of permanent wars. They will march for justice, but they will get little attention. In 2011, Haji Bismillah's son was killed by a US helicopter strike in Nangalam (Afghanistan). "My son Wahidullah's head was missing", he said with great sadness. "I only recognised him from his clothes."

Global military spending is over \$2 trillion, with the United States by itself spending almost half this amount. Total US military spending is now at \$989 billion. This number includes not only the formal expenditure on the US

military, but also expenditure on the Veteran's Administration, the Department of Energy, the National Nuclear Security Administration, the Cybersecurity component of the Department of Justice, Homeland Security and the military aspects of the State Department. It does not include the immense secret budget of the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency. Add these up and the US military budget is already over \$1 trillion, as the noted US socialist magazine *Monthly Review* found in 2007. The United States spends more on its military than the next nine highest-spending countries combined: China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, India, France, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and South Korea. 'Security' or 'deterrence' are not the main aims of such formidable military spending. A world awash with weapons leads to tragedies, such as the recent massacre in Sri Lanka, where military-grade explosives were used in the terrible murder of over three hundred and fifty innocent people.

Focus on the arms industry is sporadic, with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and others like it lonely in their work. Recent reports from SIPRI show that the volume of arms transfers—a major part of the business of the arms trade—has been rising over the years, with the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China as the biggest exporters of weapons (they account for 75% of all world arms sales). The United States, by itself, sells 36% of the world's arms—with a focus on combat aircraft, short-range cruise missiles and ballistic missiles and guided bombs. The top ten arms companies in the world are:

1. Lockheed Martin (\$44.9 billion) [USA]
2. Boeing (\$26.9 billion) [USA]
3. Raytheon (\$23.9 billion) [USA]
4. BAE Systems (\$22.9 billion) [UK]
5. Northrop Grumman (\$22.4 billion) [USA]
6. General Dynamics (\$19.5 billion) [USA]
7. Airbus Group (\$11.3 billion) [Europe]
8. Thales (\$9 billion) [France]
9. Leonardo (\$8.9 billion) [Italy]
10. Almaz-Antey (\$8.6 billion) [Russia]

Why do governments spend such a vulgar amount on weapons? In his monumental *Grundrisse* (1857), Karl Marx made the offhand, but accurate remark, "The impact of war is self-evident, since economically it is exactly the same as if the nation were to drop a part of its capital into the ocean." A permanent war economy is a waste, even if there are massive profits to be made by these warfare companies. So much can be done with \$2 trillion—a mere \$30 billion per year to end world hunger, as the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation noted in 2008. Last year, the UN began a campaign to raise \$10 billion to eradicate illiteracy. But even these meagre funds have been impossible to raise, the promise of 'billions into trillions' from the much-heralded public-private partnerships falling flat. There is always money for war, but never enough money to build the scaffolding for peace.

There is always the illusion that military spending is for security, when it appears to be more for profit. The entire industry is lubricated with bribes. Joe Roeber of Transparency International said that the arms trade is "hard-wired for corruption". "In 1997, I was told in Washington that

a mid-nineties report by the CIA concluded”, he wrote, that “arms trade corruption then accounted for 40–45% of the total corruption in world trade.” The national security argument, Roeber suggested, “throws a veil of secrecy around arms deals”, whose scale is so large that even small percentages of bribes make for large dollar amounts. Bribery is normal, the deals that are revealed are startling—bribes running from \$300 million (the South African–BAE deal from 1997–98) to \$8 billion (the Saudi–BAE deal from 1985–2007).

A few days ago, I joined a group of Iraqis (such as the writer Haifa Zangana and Thuraiya Muhammed of Tadamun: Iraqi women solidarity), journalists who covered the Iraq war and those who led solidarity campaigns for the Iraqis in signing the following note:

*Thank You, Julian Assange.
Thank You, Chelsea Manning,*

For exposing the human rights violations, criminality and horrors of US war on Iraq.

For Wikileaks that told us the truth about what was actually happening.

For providing us with The Iraq War Logs that would help us, in the near future, to hold those responsible for launching the war of aggression on Iraq as war criminals.

We had in mind the terrible bombardment of Iraqi society and civilisation. We had in mind Chelsea Manning, sitting in a prison cell, refusing to testify against Julian Assange. We had in mind Julian Assange, who is in Belmarsh prison, 20 kilometres from the headquarters of BAE systems (Britain’s main arms dealer).

And we had in mind Ola Bini, who is in El Inca prison in Quito (Ecuador), who has no role in any of this but seems to be collateral damage for the frustration of the ruling elites that their mendacity was revealed by the Afghan War Logs and the Iraq War Logs and so many more leaks.

It is not what is in these Logs that bothers the powerful, whose indignation is reserved for those brave people who expose their crimes and call them to account. A Gestapo officer barged into Picasso’s apartment in Paris. There was a photograph of Guernica on the wall. The Gestapo officer asked if Picasso had done the painting. “No”, Picasso replied. “You did.”

(Vijay Prashad is the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the Chief Correspondent for Globetrotter.)

Argentina Mobilises Against Government Policies in National Strike

Tanya Wadhwa

On April 30, as part of the National Strike, hundreds of thousands of workers, small and medium scale businesspersons and social leaders mobilised across Argentina against the economic policies of the government. “We have no other way. Plan to Fight. General Strike. Economic policy must change,” they chanted.

In Buenos Aires, over 200,000 marched to the Plaza de Mayo. The protesting workers interrupted traffic between the Crovara and General Paz avenues. The La Noria bridge and Pueyrredón bridge were also blockaded.

The strike affected transportation services the most. All the subway and metro lines were shut. Some

80 bus lines and several trains did not operate. In case of airlines, no domestic or international airline operated, except for the Flybondi. Bank workers, public administrators as well as university professors joined the strike. The attention in public hospitals was similar to that on a Sunday.

The National Strike was called by over 30 different working sector and workers’ movements, including the Trade Union Front for the National Model (FSMN), the Federal Workers’ Movement (CFT), the Argentine Workers’ Central Union (CTA) and the Argentine Workers’ Central Union-Autonomous (CTA-A).

The central agenda of all trade unions in Argentina today, whether

agricultural, banking, educational or transportation, is to fight against rampant inflation, mass dismissals, loss of purchasing power and growing poverty. For the last several months, the Argentinian working class has been continuously mobilising to reject the harsh economic adjustments and the increase in tariffs of basic public services, imposed by the right-wing government of the Cambiemos coalition, led by president Mauricio Macri. Marches, demonstrations and protests have been staged across Argentina against the neoliberal policies of Macri that have led to concentration of wealth and destruction of national industry.

Several trade union leaders addressed the protesters. Pablo

Micheli, the general secretary of the CTA-A, in his speech, referred to the upcoming general elections in Argentina. He said that the workers want the former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner back. “We want Peronism and a national and popular government to come back. Do not give up struggling [even for] a minute and accompany the road to elections with the workers’ movement on the street,” he said. José Rigane, the assistant general secretary of CTA-A, called for all Argentines to unite and “confront this government and regain sovereignty and change the energy model that is based on privatisation and foreign investment.”

Following the massive mobilisation, many continued their day of struggle and marched to the Venezuelan Embassy where members of the Venezuelan right-wing opposition were attempting to occupy the embassy, accompanying the coup d’état attempt staged by Juan Guaidó. Activists from Argentine organisations were inside and outside the embassy safeguarding it from attacks. After several hours, the Police (who had been present throughout the day protecting the group who wanted to occupy the embassy by force) began to repress the mobilisation and attacked activists with tear gas and batons. Several were injured and four were arrested and have since been set free.

Mauricio Macri: false promises and a return to the IMF

Macri’s 2015 campaign for president was centered around messages of change and progress, he promised to reduce inflation and provide better employment opportunities. However, his promises

fell flat, his government’s policies created an unstable and vulnerable economy which tanked when the the US Federal Reserve Bank raised interest rates. In 2018 alone, the Argentine peso’s value fell more than 50%. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina, the country experienced a 47.6% inflation in 2018, the highest in past 27 years.

Macri’s response to the economic crisis was to put the Argentine economy and people at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In May 2018, Macri announced that his government would initiate negotiations with the IMF for a \$30 billion loan to tide over the country’s financial crisis. A month later, after Macri met with Christine Lagarde, the IMF managing director, they reached an agreement on a \$50 billion loan, and in October 2018 the amount was increased to \$57 billion.

As expected, the IMF demanded that Argentina reduce its fiscal deficit and apply severe budgetary adjustments between 2018 and 2019. Across the board, there have been mass layoffs in the public sector, the budgets for education, health and social welfare have been slashed and the tariffs have been increased on basic services such as water, electricity, residential gas and transportation. Figures published by the Citizen’s Unity Party, a coalition of Argentine left-wing organisations, show that the tariffs of electricity have increased by 3624%, natural gas by 2401%, water by 1025%, road tolls by 1118%, inter-municipal train tickets by 601%, train tickets by 500%, metro tickets by 400% and buses by 494%.

With tens of thousands out of work, access to quality health

and education threatened due to budget cuts, loss of social welfare policies, rapid devaluation of the national currency, and costs for basic services soaring, the situation for the Argentinian working class has become a matter of day to day survival.

The widespread misery has fueled the resentment of Macri across sectors and across the country. The symbolic impact of a return to the IMF is also key to understanding their disgust for Macri. The IMF was responsible for the serious economic and political crisis that Argentina faced in the 1990s which led to a popular insurrection in the country.

And so, today, in Argentina, all working sectors, agriculture, banking, business, education, health care, transport, workers of the people’s economy, and others, have been taking the streets against Macri’s policies of hunger, misery and despair. Alliances and fronts have been forged between trade unions, social and political organisations, cultural groups, student movements and community organisations in order to come up with strong campaigns and plans of mobilisation that have the capacity to build power and momentum and defeat the regressive neoliberal government.

(Tanya Wadhwa writes for People’s Dispatch.)

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Modinomics = Corporatonomics

Part IV: Modi’s Budgets and the Social Sectors: Health

Neeraj Jain

In the previous issues of Janata, we have analysed Modinomics and shown that the Modi Government, if it wants, can raise enough resources to increase its expenditures on the social sectors. Instead, it is giving away huge subsidies to the tune of several lakh crore rupees to the corporate houses. In this article, we specifically discuss Modi’s budget allocations for health.

State of India’s Health System

India's health system is in “crisis”. India is the disease capital of the world:

- More than 2 lakh people in the country die of malaria every year, while TB kills 3 lakh;¹
- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India accounts for nearly one-fourth of the deaths in the world due to diarrhoea, more than one-third of the deaths due to leprosy and more than half of the deaths due to Japanese encephalitis;²
- India's under-five child mortality rate is the highest in the world, with 12 lakh such deaths in 2015; a majority of these deaths are preventable;³
- India is also in the grip of an epidemic of non-communicable diseases (long-term diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases [such as hypertension, heart attacks and stroke], chronic respiratory diseases (such as asthma

and cancers], which account for more than 60% of the deaths in the country.⁴

The reason for this ‘health emergency’ is the dismal state of India’s public health services. India spends barely 1.02% (in 2015–16) of its GDP on public health services, lower than even most low income countries, and far below the world average of 6% (see Chart 1). The WHO World Health Statistics 2015 ranked India at 187 out of 194 countries in public health spending.⁵

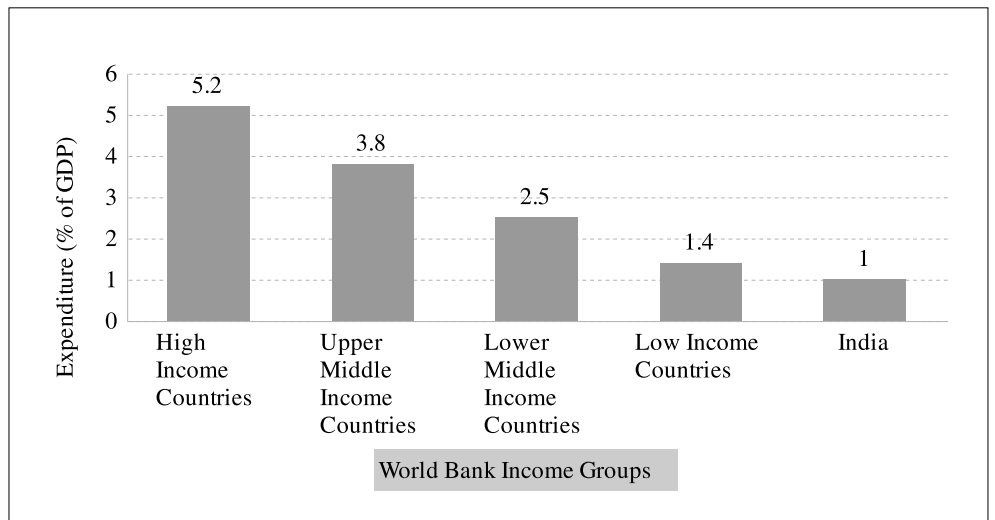
The difference between the health expenditure of developed countries and India becomes even starker when we compare the per capita GDP expenditure on health. The public health expenditure in the developed countries is as high as \$3000–5000 per capita; it comes down sharply for developing countries like Thailand (\$166 per capita), Sri Lanka (\$63) and Indonesia (\$38), but is only \$16 per

capital for India.⁷ This is equivalent to Rs 1,100 per person per year, less than the cost of consultation in one of the country’s top private hospitals. It works out to Rs 93 per month, or Rs 3 per day.

Consequently, the public health system in India is in bad shape. Around 33% of the population lives in urban areas. Since the focus of public health has been on rural areas since independence, primary urban health infrastructure remains grossly neglected. On the other hand, secondary and tertiary health care facilities are well developed in urban areas, and more than 60% of the government hospital beds in the country are located there (4.31 lakh out of 7.11 lakh, according to National Health Profile, 2018).

The rural health care infrastructure in India is a three-tier system—a sub-centre, a Primary Health Centre (PHC) and a Community Health Centre (CHC). The sub-centre is the first contact

Chart 1: Public Expenditure on Health, by Countries Income Groups⁶



point between the primary health care system and the community, caters to a population of between 3000–5000 people, is required to be staffed by at least one auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM)/female health worker and one male health worker, and provides services related to maternal and child health, family welfare, nutrition, etc. The PHC is the first base for doctors, and is the referral unit for around 6 sub-centres, and thus caters to a population of around 30,000. Therefore, it must have one medical officer, supported by paramedical and other staff, including one female and one male health assistant. The PHCs are supposed to screen and feed the more serious medical cases to CHCs (4 PHCs to 1 CHC), which are supposed to be staffed by at least four medical specialists, that is, surgeon, physician, gynecologist/obstetrician and pediatrician, along with supporting staff.

Even by standards set by the government, there is a 18% shortfall in the number of sub-centres, 22% in PHCs and 30% in CHCs in rural areas, as on March 31, 2018, according to Rural Health Statistics (RHS) Bulletin, 2017–18 (see Table 1).⁸

Worse, of these currently functioning health centres, only 7% sub-centres, 12% PHCs and 13% CHCs are functioning as per Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS). The condition of the sub-centres is so bad that 16% do not have regular water supply, while 24.7% do not

have electricity.⁹

These health units are also severely deficient in hospital staff:

- Of the 1.58 lakh sub-centres functioning: 7,194 do not have ANMs, and 1,04,318 (66%) do not have male health workers, while 5,089 do not have both.
- Of the 25,743 PHCs functioning: 10,557 (41%) do not have female health assistants and 16,981 (66%) do not have male health assistants, while 3,673 do not even have a doctor.
- The 5,624 functioning CHCs suffer from a whopping 82% shortage of specialists (they have only 4,074 specialists out of the required 22,496). This huge shortfall makes redundant the rural health infrastructure. For instance, with no surgeons to man them, the 4,696 CHCs with functional operating theatres can only exist as empty structures.¹⁰

Including both rural and urban areas, the population–doctor (allopathic doctors only) ratio in India in 2017 was 11,082:1 in government hospitals, 25 times higher than the WHO recommendation of 25 professionals per 10,000 population. Likewise, the average population to government hospital ratio in the country was 55,951, which is also very high.¹¹

This dismal state of public health care has forced citizens to depend upon the private sector for treatment. Of the total health spending in the country, public

health spending accounts for only 31.3%, households undertake the rest—at 65.6%, private expenditure on health care by Indians was the sixth highest in the world (among 184 nations surveyed), with the world average being 22.8% (see Chart 2). [This does not include health expenditure financed by private insurance; including this, private health spending by Indians increases to 68% of total health spending.]¹²

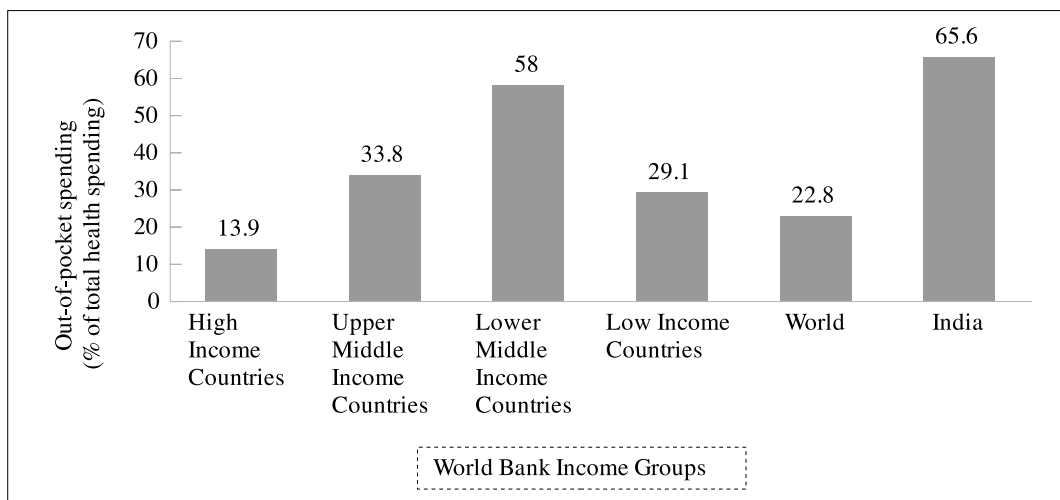
Because of lack of affordable medical services and high cost of private health care, an analysis based on data from NSSO 2014 showed that 3.6 crore households, or around 14% of total households in the country, incurred health expenses that exceeded the annual per capita consumption of those households. These figures underestimate the extent of health shock faced by the people of the country, as many people are simply too poor to go for any treatment even when a member faces a life-threatening disease. How many? This is difficult to say, but some clues can be had from NSSO data. The data says that while among the richest 5% people in the country, 98% received some kind of treatment before death, for the bottom 25%, a staggering 39% do not receive any medical attention before death. Maybe many of these poor people could have been saved had good quality and affordable health care been available in the country for all.¹⁴

Another study based on analysis

Table 1: State of Rural Health Infrastructure

	<i>Health Sub-centres</i>	<i>PHCs</i>	<i>CHCs</i>
Functioning, as on March 31, 2018	1,58,417	25,743	5,624
Shortfall	32,900	6,430	2,188

Chart 2: Out-of-Pocket Spending as % of Total Health Spending¹³



of NSSO survey data of 2004 and 2014 estimates that more than five crore people were pushed into poverty over the decade 2004–14 due to out-of-pocket health spending.¹⁵

Modi–Jaitley Total Allocation for Health Care

The BJP came to power in 2014 promising to increase public health spending. Its manifesto stated that if it was voted to power, it would ensure that the orientation of the health care system would be to provide “Health Assurance to all Indians” and “reduce the out-of-pocket spending on health care”. Soon after assuming power, it released the

draft National Health Policy (draft NHP 2015) that promised to increase the public health expenditure of the country to 2.5% of GDP, of which 40%, that is 1% of GDP, would be borne by the Centre. It promised to achieve these spending targets by 2020. Considering the dismal state of public health care in the country, this is obviously a very inadequate level of public health spending.¹⁶ The government took more than 2 years to finalise this report, and the final National Health Policy document was released only in 2017. It kept the spending target the same as that in the draft NHP 2015, but advanced the date for the target to

be achieved to 2022.¹⁷ As we have mentioned above, this target is less than half the global average public expenditure on health.

Be that as it may, since then, three budgets have gone by. The total expenditure on health care as a percentage of GDP has seen no increase during Modi’s five years and in 2018–19 BE was at the same level as in 2014–15 BE (at 0.31%); in 2019–20 BE too, it has remained at that level. Minus the allocation for the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme which does not go to improve the public health infrastructure in the country (discussed below), the health budget

Table 2: BJP Budget Allocations for Health (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2017–18 A	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare: Total	37,965	53,114	56,046	63,298
Ministry of AYUSH	1,272	1,531	1,693	1,740
Total Health Budget = (1)	39,237	54,645	57,739	65,038
(1) as % of GDP	0.31	0.32	0.31	0.31
Ayushman Bharat PMJAY = (2)	–	–	2,400	6,400
(1) – (2) = (3)	39,237	54,645	55,339	58,638
(3) as % of Budget Outlay	2.19	2.55	2.25	2.11
(3) as % of GDP	0.31	0.32	0.29	0.28

as a percentage of GDP has actually fallen, from 0.31% in 2014–15 BE and 0.32% in 2017–18 (A) to 0.29% in 2018–19 RE and 0.28% in 2019–20 BE—less than one-third of the target set in NHP 2017 (Table 2).

But then what about the Modi Government's ambitious health programme, Ayushman Bharat or National Health Protection Mission, rolled out by the government last year? It hit the headlines in both the print and electronic media, and has been called a game-changer in terms of providing health care to the poor and needy.

Let us take a closer look at this much tom-tommed programme. It has two components: Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY).

Health and Wellness Centres

In his 2018–19 budget speech, Jaitley announced a provision of Rs 1,200 crore for converting all the 1.5 lakh health sub-centres into Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs). He said that these would provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services. He added that these centres will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic

services. The allocation for these HWCs is probably under the sub-head 'Health Systems Strengthening' within the head 'National Rural Health Mission', for which the budget had been increased by Rs 1,357 crore in the 2018–19 BE (over 2017–18 RE). The revised estimates show that the government spent Rs 1,000 crore on this. This works to an investment of Rs 63,000 for upgrading each health sub-centre.

Considering the terrible state of our rural health services, it is obvious that this allocation is simply too inadequate. *The Rural Health Statistics 2017–18* point out that of the 1.58 lakh health sub-centres functioning, 16% do not have regular water supply and 24.7% do not have electricity; 7,194 health sub-centres do not have a female health worker, 1,04,318 do not have a male health worker, and 5,089 do not have both. For a sub-centre to become a Health and Wellness Centre, at the least, these basic facilities and human resources need to be provided. It is hard to understand how this can be done with the meagre funds allocated. The number of health sub-centres functioning is also less than required—the *RHS* points out that there is a shortage of 32,900 health sub-centres. Clearly, the finance minister has no intention of opening

up new health centres to make up for this shortfall.

Further, what is the point in only improving the health sub-centres, if the referral centres for these basic health units, which are supposed to provide medical care by a qualified doctor, are not in good condition. As we have mentioned above, the conditions in the PHCs and CHCs are simply abysmal. More than 50% of the PHCs do not have health assistants, 3,673 do not have a doctor, and the CHCs suffer from 82% shortage of specialist doctors! But the finance minister has increased the allocation for Health System Strengthening by only 10.66% over the last two years, barely enough to beat inflation (Table 3).

Actually, a closer look at the budget allocations reveal that like his several other announcements, this announcement of the finance minister regarding HWCs is also only a 'jumla'. That he is absolutely non-serious about the improvement of rural health services becomes clear from the fact that the total budget for the National Rural Health Mission has actually decreased over the last two years even in nominal terms, which works out to an effective cut of 16% in real terms (see Table 3). The finance minister has succeeded in cutting total

Table 3: Budget Allocations for National Rural Health Mission, 2017–20 (Rs crore)

	2017–18 A	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
Total Budget for National Rural Health Mission	26,178	25,243	25,789
<i>Within this:</i>			
<i>RCH Flexible Pool including Immunisation Programs</i>	7,640	5,729	5,254
<i>Flexible Pool for Communicable Diseases</i>	3,206	1,829	1,928
<i>Flexible Pool for Non-Communicable Diseases, Injury and Trauma</i>	923	566	717
<i>Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres</i>	–	1,000	1,350
<i>Health System Strengthening under NRHM</i>	8,444	9,188	10,282

allocation for rural health services, while allocating money for HWCs, by slashing the budget allocation for other important rural health care programmes, such as ‘Flexible pool for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), injury and trauma’ which are the largest cause of death in the country,¹⁸ and the important program for maternal and child care—‘RCH flexible pool including routine immunisation program and pulse polio immunisation program’ (see Table 3).

Urban Health Mission

The NRHM’s urban counterpart is the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM). The Union Cabinet had estimated the share of Central funding for this scheme to be around Rs 3,400 crore per annum way back in 2013 when it had given approval to this scheme aimed at addressing health care challenges in towns and cities with focus on the urban poor.¹⁹ However, the allocation for this has remained at much below this during the Modi regime: it was Rs 950 crore in the 2016–17 BE, but actual expenditure was only half of that, Rs 491 crore; allocation for it fell in subsequent years, and then rose back to Rs 950 crore in the 2019–20 BE. Clearly, the Modi Government is not serious about this scheme too.

While the Modi Government has reduced the budgets for the important rural and urban health missions, the budget allocation for the deceptively named Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)—which is actually a scheme for building AIIMS-like institutes and upgrading government medical colleges—has been significantly increased in successive budgets. The allocation for this has gone up from Rs 2,450 crore in 2016–17 BE to Rs 3,875

crore in the 2018–19 RE to Rs 4,000 crore in 2019–20.

When we examine this increase in the backdrop of the reduction in the budgets for rural and urban health missions, it becomes clear that this is in tune with the overall approach of the Modi Government—build a few high quality facilities, amidst a huge expanse of neglect and ruin. This is what is happening in every sector—build a few airports, while neglecting basic transport infrastructure like the public bus transport system; build a few IITs, while neglecting school and college education, and so on. This does not mean that airports and IITs are not needed, but if funds are limited, priority should be given to improving primary transport and education facilities. Similarly, it is not that new high quality public tertiary hospitals are not needed—the problem is that this is being done while the primary health care sector is being neglected. If primary level health services are good—that is, if the PHCs and CHCs are running well—most illnesses can be taken care of at this level itself, and this will not only improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of delivery of public health services, it will also improve the overall health status of the people. Therefore, priority should be given to improving primary health care; but as we have discussed above, this has been neglected in the successive Jaitley budgets.

Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance Scheme

The other component of the Ayushman Bharat scheme is the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). Jaitley proclaimed it to be “the world’s largest government funded

health care programme”. Under this scheme, the government promised to provide medical insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per family to 10 crore poor families (roughly 50 crore people) in case of hospitalisation (that is, out-patient care is not covered).

It is proof of the vacuity of our media that this announcement was highlighted by every TV news channel and hit the headlines of nearly every newspaper the next day. It was actually the biggest hoax of the budget.

Last year, Jaitley spent Rs 2,400 crore on this scheme as given in the 2018–19 RE, and this year, he has hiked the allocation to Rs 6,400 crore.

Even assuming that the finance minister is serious about providing medical insurance to the poor for hospitalisation, this increased allocation is simply not enough to provide the required insurance cover to 10 crore households. Various estimates suggest that the scheme could end up costing the government anywhere between Rs 12,000 crore to Rs 50,000 crore; with Jaitley allocating much less than even the lower of this estimate, obviously the government has no intention of meeting its target of providing health insurance to 10 crore people.²⁰

Do the poor really benefit from such health insurance schemes like the PMJAY? Some idea of it can be had from data regarding how many have benefited from the previous insurance scheme for the poor, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), which provided an insurance cover of Rs 30,000 per year to every BPL household in case of hospitalisation. The government has not been very willing to release RSBY data, and so comprehensive evaluations have not

been done. Independent evaluations of the RSBY based on NSS data for 2014 show that only 1.2% of the hospitalisation cases of the rural population and 6.2% of the urban population received even part reimbursement. Studies have also shown that private hospitals often force people to pay extra money even after receiving RSBY insurance funds.²¹ Therefore, it is too early to say as to what extent will this new avatar of RSBY—PMJAY—will benefit poor families with regards to their hospitalisation expenses.

But the most serious problem with PMJAY is that it is not a universal health care scheme even for the poor. It does not cover out-patient costs, and these constitute 63.5% of the health related out-of-pocket expenditure (that is, personal spending by people) in India (data for 2014).²² As mentioned above, India's health-related out-of-pocket expenditure, which pushes families into indebtedness and deeper poverty, is among the world's highest.

PMJAY: Excuse for Privatisation of Health Care

PMJAY does not cover out-patient expenses of the poor. It only meets their hospitalisation expenses—and past experience with similar insurance schemes raises legitimate doubts as to what extent will the poor benefit from this scheme. But the sectors that are undoubtedly going to enormously benefit from PMJAY are private hospitals and private insurance companies. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the real purpose of the PMJAY is to benefit them. The chief of the Ayushman Bharat scheme tweeted some time ago that private hospitals should

quickly get themselves empanelled with the scheme as, "We are offering you business of 50 crore people!"²³

The Modi Government is in fact using the PMJAY as an excuse to accelerate the privatisation of health care in the country. The government has already announced incentives for the private sector to set up hospitals in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. These incentives include allotting unencumbered land for such hospitals, providing viability gap funding (VGF)—a euphemism for providing them grant of up to 40% of the project cost—and speeding up clearances. In November 2018, the Centre sent a note to all states asking them to sanction loans at agricultural rates of interest and provide electricity at residential rates to these private hospitals.²⁴

The private hospital business is one of the most profitable in the country. Most of our readers will have at least a few stories about how their friends and relatives have been fleeced by private hospitals. And yet the government wants to incentivise the setting up of more private hospitals, and even provide them a grant (not a loan) of up to 40% of the cost of the project!

As if this was not enough, Niti Aayog and the health ministry have recommended to all states that they partially privatise their district hospitals, and transfer sections of these hospitals, including land and a certain number of hospital beds, to private players.²⁵ The Niti Aayog guidelines for these 'public-private-partnerships' (PPPs) imply that the staff of these district hospitals would now be basically engaged in PPP implementation, referring patients to the private doctors and facilitating the reimbursement of expenditure of individuals incurred

in PPP facilities.²⁶

Hospitalisation constitutes only a small part of the total health expenses of any individual, as not every disease needs hospitalisation. Even diseases like diabetes and respiratory problems and heart problems only require hospitalisation if the patient's condition takes a turn for the worse. And since PMJAY covers only hospitalisation costs, this means that as the privatisation of government hospitals advances, out-patient costs are going to go up sharply, which the poor will not be able to afford—it is going to further worsen the health crisis gripping the country.

Additionally, many lower middle class and middle class families not covered by PMJAY also go to government hospitals as they cannot afford private medical care. Privatisation of government hospitals is going to mean that in case they fall seriously ill and need to be hospitalised, it would mean catastrophic medical expenses for them.

Under the guise of rolling out the world's largest health care initiative, the anti-people Modi Government is actually seeking to destroy whatever that remains of India's failing public health care system and privatise it. It is going to have terrible consequences for the people.

Can't Jaitley Increase the Health Budget?

The only way in which reliable and good quality health care can be provided to ordinary people is by strengthening public health care facilities—and thereby provide them both out-patient and hospitalisation care free or at affordable rates. That is what governments have done

around the world. To do that in India, the Indian government needs to increase its health care budget.

The NHP promises to increase Central government health spending to 1% of GDP, and total Central and State government spending on health to 2.5% of GDP. That is a very low target, it should be increased to at least 3% of GDP, and more subsequently. Presently, the expenditure on health is 1% of GDP; so that means the total initial increase in spending on health by the Centre + States should be at least 2% of GDP or Rs 4.2 lakh crore. As we have shown in our previous articles, it is not that the government cannot raise the required funds to make this allocation; it is a question of priorities—whether priority should be given to profiteering of corporations, or providing essential health and education facilities to the people.

The media headlines have got it all wrong. The Modi Government's health budget is not about the world's largest health protection plan. It is about a country which has the highest number of deaths in the world due to disease, a country with the highest number of child and maternal deaths in the world, criminally neglecting this health 'crisis' and spending less than almost all other countries in the world on improving public health facilities—while at the same time giving lakhs of crores of rupees as subsidies to its uber rich.

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Hemant Karkare Does Not Need a Certificate From Sadhvi

S. S. Virk

**Why Janata Party Parted with
Jan Sangh over RSS**

Madhu Limaye

**The Billionaire Beneficiaries of
BJP's Schemes**

Bodapati Srujana

**ILO Criticises Venezuela for
Raising Minimum Wage**

Nino Pagliccia

The King Who Loved Himself

Chitra Padmanabhan

Modinomics = Corporatonomics

**Part V: Other Social Sectors:
Lies, Deceit, Budget Cuts**

Neeraj Jain

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Sadhvi Pragya Thakur, the BJP's candidate from the Bhopal parliamentary seat, made an irresponsible and controversial statement on April 18. While addressing a meeting of party workers, she targeted the late Hemant Karkare, who had arrested her for her alleged role in the Malegaon blast case in 2008. She claimed that it was her curse ("tera sarvnash hoga"), which ended Karkare's life soon afterwards. The resultant controversy and its fallout in the press, including the withdrawal of her statement, took me back in time by nearly 11 years. About a month before his death, I discussed the issue of violence by Hindu reactionary groups or the so-called "saffron terror" with Hemant. I had known Hemant as my cadre-mate and he was posted to New Delhi on deputation. A fine officer, he had the reputation of being an outstanding and professional cop.

Having worked in Punjab and fought militancy/terrorism there for more than a decade, terrorism was surely a subject that interested me, irrespective of its hues. One day, in October 2008, I bumped into Hemant at the reception of Maharashtra

Sadan in New Delhi. I asked him about this new form of terrorism. Was it real? If so, how serious was the matter, what were its parameters and what was its potential? We sat for about two hours in my room where Karkare enlightened me about the acts of violence undertaken by groups consisting of radical Hindu youths, which were for quite some time attributed to Muslim militant groups.

He told me that some blasts took place accidentally in some parts of Maharashtra without any reason, which set him thinking. Some of the blasts were in the rural areas of Marathwada in Hingoli and Nanded districts. These cases of accidental blasts had resulted in injuries to some persons but no satisfactory explanation for the blasts was forthcoming. So Karkare, as chief of the Anti-Terrorist Squad of the Maharashtra Police, visited some of the blast sites and also probed into the backgrounds of the persons who were injured. Interestingly, his enquiries revealed that the injured persons were close to some ultra Hindu groups closely associated with the RSS. Probing deeper, Karkare widened the scope of his enquiries

and started verifying similar cases in other parts of Maharashtra. These enquiries confirmed his earlier impression and deeper probes established the emergence and existence of radical Hindu groups forming terror modules to meet the challenges posed by pro-Islamic terror groups.

These groups had formed Abhinav Bharat, which began as a social organisation that engaged young Hindu boys, radicalised them and made them aware of threats posed by Islamic forces and the need to forge a hardened group from within the Hindu population which would pose a challenge to the hitherto dominant Islamic groups. It also created groups who indulged in blasts in Muslim areas and operated in such a manner that the needle of suspicion would point towards the Muslim groups. In fact, the police were already looking for the culprits among Muslims. But this revelation completely changed the direction of the investigation. In several cases, the complicity and participation of Hindu groups was clearly established soon.

Karkare successfully investigated the Malegaon blast case, in which the Hindu group was involved. It was established that the motorcycle used in the blast was registered in the name of Sadhvi Pragya, who was arrested. The investigation also established the active role of several other persons, including a serving officer of the Indian Army, holding the rank of lieutenant colonel. Karkare and his team collected evidence and arrested many of them, including Lt Colonel Purohit.

Karkare also told me that several groups from political as well as administrative circles put pressure

on him not to implicate these groups as these were the “forces of nationalism”. But Karkare did not relent. Later, those who put pressure also tried to accuse him of being pro-Muslim or anti-Hindu, a charge that he vociferously countered, “Sir, I am a Maharashtrian Brahmin and a high-caste Hindu. But does it mean that only Muslims and Sikhs are terrorists and violent acts of Hindu groups needed to be condoned?” He took strong objection to such bulldozing for religious reasons. He stood his ground.

Unfortunately, Karkare was killed on the night of 26/11/2008 during the terrorist attack in Mumbai. Due to his sudden death, the dedication and commitment that he had put into the case slackened to some extent. Similarly, the changed political equations played their role and the investigation of the case was transferred to the NIA. Later, similar political changes took place in Maharashtra too and the grip on the case became loose.

Another development is that the main accused, Pragya Thakur, is out on bail. Not only that, the hidden forces which tried to pressure Karkare then have become more assertive now. They have not only accepted Thakur but have even adopted her as the candidate of the ruling party from Bhopal. The hidden hand is no longer hidden. I feel that blaming Hemant Karkare has just begun, it will pick up. Thakur said that it was her curse that killed Karkare. Condoning her own role, she tried to put the entire blame on a professional and duty-conscious officer who had sacrificed his life in the line of duty.

Thakur perhaps forgot that besides Karkare, 15 other officers and men of the Bombay police

and dozens of innocent citizens were also killed on 26/11. Is it not strange that the fulfilment of her curse came through the bullets fired by emissaries of Masood Azhar? Truth is that Sadhvi and Masood Azhar both wanted to kill Karkare; both celebrated his death, though for different reasons.

In democracies, many wrong things do happen. But this is too blatant. An accused facing trial is presented as a party candidate and a national hero who sacrificed his life is denigrated. Will such irresponsible behaviour on the part of rulers not harm society or its secular fabric? How insensitive and apoplectic do we want to make our society?

Rest in peace, Hemant. You surely do not need a certificate either from Sadhvi who cursed you or from the emissaries of Masood Azhar, whose bullet claimed your life. You gave the ultimate sacrifice. I am sure that coming generations of cops will always look to you to determine their direction and goals. My salute to you.

(The writer is former DGP of Punjab and Maharashtra.)

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Why Janata Party Parted with Jan Sangh over RSS

Madhu Limaye

I entered political life in 1937. Quite active in Pune in those days were the RSS and the Savarkarites (followers of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar) on the one hand and nationalist, socialist and leftist political organisations on the other. On May 1, 1938, we took out a march to observe May Day. The marchers were attacked by the RSS and Savarkarites when, among others, the well-known revolutionary Senapati Bapat and our socialist leader, S.M. Joshi, were injured. We have had serious differences with these Hindutva organisations ever since.

Our first difference with the RSS was over the issue of nationalism. We believed that every citizen had equal rights in the Indian nation. But the RSS and the Savarkarites came up with their notion of Hindu Rashtra. Mohammad Ali Jinnah too was a victim of a similar world view. He believed that India was made up of two nations, the Muslim nation and the Hindu nation. Savarkar too said the same thing.

The second major difference between us was that we dreamt of the birth of a democratic republic while the RSS claimed that democracy was a western concept that was not appropriate for India. In those days, members of the RSS were full of praise for Adolf Hitler. Guruji (Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar) was not only the sarsanghchalak (head) of the RSS; he was its ideological guru as well.

There is amazing similarity between the thoughts of Guruji and the Nazis. In one of his best known books, *We or Our Nationhood*

Defined, that ran into several editions, Guruji explicitly says that all non-Hindus must be treated as non-citizens. He wanted all their citizenship rights taken away. Incidentally, these ideas of his were not newly formulated. From the time we were in college (in the mid-1930s), members of the RSS were inclined to follow Hitlerian ideals. In their view, Muslims and Christians in India deserved to be treated the same way that Hitler treated Jews in Germany.

The extent of Guruji's sympathies for the views of the Nazi Party is evident from the following passage from *We or Our Nationhood* Defined: "To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

Our third major difference with Guruji and the RSS has to do with the caste question. They are supporters of the caste system while a socialist like me is its greatest enemy. I am of the firm view that there can be no economic and social equality in India until the caste system and the inequalities based on it are demolished.

The fourth issue on which we differ is that of language. We are in favour of promoting the languages of the people. All regional languages, after all, are indigenous.

But what does Guruji have to say on this? Guruji says that for now Hindi should be made the common language for all while the ultimate objective should be to make Sanskrit the national language.

Fifth, the national movement for independence had accepted the idea of a federal state. In a confederation, the centre would definitely have certain powers on specific matters but all others would be a subject matter for the states. But following partition, in a bid to strengthen the centre, the Constitution stipulated a concurrent list. As per this list, several subjects were made concurrent, subjects over which both the centre and the states have equal jurisdiction. Thus the federal state came into existence.

But the RSS and its chief ideologue, Guru Golwalkar, have been consistently opposed to this basic constitutional provision. These people ridicule the very concept of 'a union of states' and maintain that this Constitution, which envisages a confederation of states, should be abolished. Guruji says in his *Bunch of Thoughts*, "The Constitution must be reviewed and the idea of a unitary state should be written into the new Constitution." Guruji wants a unitary or, in other words, a centralised state. He says that this system of states should be done away with.

Another issue was the tricolour, the flag chosen by the national movement. Hundreds of Indians sacrificed their lives, thousands bore the brunt of lathis for the honour and glory of our chosen national flag. But surprisingly, the RSS has never accepted the tricolour as the national

flag. It always swore by the saffron flag, asserting that the saffron flag has been the flag of Hindu Rashtra since time immemorial.

Guruji had no faith in a democratic system. He was of the firm view that democracy is a concept imported from the West and the system of parliamentary democracy did not jell with Indian thought and Indian civilization. The RSS believes in the one leader principle. Guruji himself maintained that the RSS creates a mind-set which is totally disciplined and where people accept whatever they tell them. This organisation operates on the principle of one leader. As for socialism, that for Guruji was a totally alien idea. He repeatedly said that all isms, including socialism and democracy, were alien ideas which should be rejected, that Indian society should be founded on Indian culture. Speaking for ourselves, we believe in parliamentary democracy, in socialism, and we aspire to establish socialism consistent with Gandhian principles in India through peaceful means. On the other hand, the RSS specialises in casting young minds in a particular mould from a very young age. The first thing they do is 'freeze' the minds of children and of youth, making them impervious. After this they are rendered incapable of responding to other ideas.

Guruji felt no compassion for the poor. In his *Bunch of Thoughts*, he expressed unhappiness over the abolition of the zamindari system in India. He was deeply saddened, deeply disturbed by the abolition of the zamindari system.

It is a fact that we formed an alliance with these people (RSS and Jan Sangh) when Mrs. Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency. Lok Nayak Jaiprakashji believed

that if the opposition did not unite under the banner of a single party it would be impossible to defeat Mrs. Gandhi. Choudhary Charan Singh was also of the view that we should come together and form a united party. While we were in jail, we were all asked to give our opinions on the need to form such a party and contest elections. I recall sending a message that in my view we must contest elections. Millions of people would participate in elections. Elections are a dynamic process. As the electoral tempo builds up, the shackles of emergency are bound to snap and people are bound to exercise their democratic right. Therefore, I stressed, we must participate in elections.

Since Lok Nayak Jayprakash Narain and other leaders were of the view that without coming together under the banner of one party we could not succeed, we (socialists) too gave it our consent. But I would like to stress that the understanding that was arrived at was between political parties—the Jan Sangh, the Socialist Party, the Congress (O), the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) and some dissident Congress factions. We did not come to any arrangement with the RSS, nor did we accept any of its demands. What is more, through a letter by Manubhai Patel that was circulated among all of us in jail we learnt that on July 7, 1976 Choudhary Charan Singh had raised the issue of a possible clash of interests because of dual membership when members of the RSS also became members of the new party. In response, the then acting general secretary of the Jan Sangh, Om Prakash Tyagi, had said that the proposed party should feel free to formulate whatever membership criteria it wanted. He even said that since the RSS, having faced many constraints had been

dissolved anyway, the question of RSS membership did not arise.

Later, when the constitution of the proposed Janata Party was being drawn up, the subcommittee appointed to draft the constitution proposed that members of any organisation whose aims, policies and programmes were in conflict with the aims, policies and programmes of the Janata Party should not be given membership to the new party. Given the self-evident meaning of such a membership criterion, there was no question of anyone opposing it. However, it is significant that the sole opposition to this came from Sunder Singh Bhandari (Jan Sangh). At a meeting convened in December 1976 to thrash out issues, reference was made to a letter written by Atal Bihari Vajpayee on behalf of the Jan Sangh and the RSS, stating that a section of leaders of the proposed party had agreed that the RSS issue could not be raised in connection with membership of the Janata Party.

But several leaders told me that no such assurances were given because the RSS was nowhere in the picture at the time when the idea of a merger of opposition political parties was mooted. I want to clarify that I was in prison at the time and even if there was some secret understanding, I had no part in it.

I can categorically assert that the election manifesto of the Janata Party did not in any way reflect the concerns of the RSS. In fact, each point in the manifesto was clearly spelt out. Is it not a fact that the manifesto of the Janata Party spoke of a socialist society based on secular, democratic and Gandhian principles and in which there was no mention of Hindu Rashtra? The manifesto assured the minorities equal citizenship rights and vowed to safeguard their rights. Did the

manifesto state that it upholds the caste system? Did it maintain that the Sudras' duty was to devote their life in the service of others? On the contrary, the manifesto not only promised that the backward castes would have full opportunity to progress, it pledged special policies for them: 25–33 per cent reservation for them in government jobs.

The Janata Party was committed to decentralisation while Guruji was a hardcore proponent of centralisation. He wanted to abolish separate states, abolish state legislatures and ministries while the Janata Party emphasised the need for greater decentralisation. In other words, the Janata Party had no desire to snatch away the autonomy of states.

Yes, it is true that members of the RSS did not genuinely accept the provisions of the party's election manifesto. It was my contention and I had once even complained in writing to Kushabhau Thakre that during discussions you people (RSS, Jan Sangh) very readily agree on matters that you at heart totally disagree with. That is why your motives are suspect. I wrote this letter to him a long time ago and I have always had doubts about the RSS.

Since it was Lok Nayak Jayprakashji's desire that all parties should merge for a united opposition to dictatorship and since the party manifesto did not make any compromises, I consented to our coming together. At the same time, I would like to say that from the beginning I was very clear in my mind that to emerge as a unified and a credible body the Janata Party would have to do two things. One, the RSS would have to change its ideology and accept the ideal of a secular democratic state. Two, the various organisations that are part

of the sangh parivar, such as the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and the Vidyarthi Parishad, would have to dissolve themselves and merge with the secular-minded trade union and student wings of the Janata Party. I was very clear about this from the beginning and as the Janata Party had given me the responsibility to manage the affairs of its trade union and student wings, it was my consistent attempt throughout to ensure that the Vidyarthi Parishad and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh ended their separate existence.

I told members of the RSS that you must abandon your ideal of organising Hindus alone and find a place for people of all religions within your organisation, that you must merge your different class-based organisations with those of the Janata Party. They responded by saying that this could not be done so soon, that there were very many difficulties involved but they did want to change, bit by bit. They continued to give such evasive replies.

From their behaviour I concluded that they had no intention of changing. Especially after the assembly elections of June 1977, when they managed to gain power in four states and one union territory, they began to think that with this newly acquired clout they had no need to change. Now that they had already captured four states, they would gradually also gain control of other states and finally even the centre. The leaders of other political parties in the Janata Party were older leaders who would not live long; and they would ensure that no younger (non-RSS, non-Jan Sangh) leader emerged at the top.

Still, I tried. On one occasion I convened a meeting of all trade union leaders. The representatives

of all constituents of the Janata Party attended but the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh boycotted the meeting. Not just that, they hurled abuses at me for no apparent reason.

Similar efforts were made with the Vidyarthi Parishad and the Yuva Morcha but despite all attempts at a merger, they held aloof. This is only because of the RSS' desire to function as a "super party".

Their aim is not only to enter into every aspect of people's life but also to control it. Similar views have been repeatedly asserted by Guruji in his *We or Our Nationhood Defined* as also in *Bunch of Thoughts*. No totalitarian organisation allows any space for freedom, its tentacles reach everywhere: art, music, economy, culture. This is the essence of any fascist organisation.

What these people (the RSS) do on the odd occasion is however of little importance. Has the RSS ever said that they have abandoned Guruji's way of thinking? These people pleaded for pardon while in prison; Balasaheb Deoras congratulated Indira Gandhi when the Supreme Court ruled in her favour in the Raj Narain case. So I have no faith in the utterances of these people. I am of the firm belief that I could only have trusted these people (erstwhile Jan Sangh leaders in the Janata Party) if they had ousted RSS leaders from the party, expelled them from the working committee, placed restrictions on RSS activities and, in particular, expelled people like Nanaji Deshmukh, Sunder Singh Bhandari and company from the party.

(Madhu Limaye was veteran freedom fighter, Socialist leader and Parliamentarian. Though dated, many of the issues he raises in this article are relevant even today.)

The Billionaire Beneficiaries of BJP's Schemes

Bodapati Srujana

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government's numerous schemes meant for ordinary Indians—farmers, youth, women and others—have received a great deal of publicity from the government and a fair amount of criticism from the public for their failure.

Yet, there is one highly successful scheme of the BJP government under PM Narendra Modi, that has not received any media attention. This is the 'Pradhan Mantri Billionaire Badhao – Billionaire Bachao – Billionaire Banao Yojana'.

It is true that the Pradhan Mantri's employment programme has not created any new jobs. If anything, there is a net loss of employment under the BJP government. The Fasal Bima Yojana benefitted the corporates more than the kisans (farmers) and Skill India brought no jobs to those who have got skills.

But, the success of the 'Billionaire Badhao – Billionaire Bachao – Billionaire Banao Yojana' eclipses the failure of the rest of the schemes.

The success of this scheme is even more remarkable for the fact that it has never been publicly announced by the government. We have come to perceive the existence of the scheme only through the results it has achieved. As such, there is a need to understand and appreciate this scheme.

Under this scheme, already thriving billionaires added more billions to their net worth. Those who were not doing so well were given a helping hand to retain their wealth. Those who were not billionaires to

begin with, were lifted to be included in the billionaire wealth bracket by the Modi government.

So, let us take a look at some of the important beneficiaries of this scheme.

Mukesh Ambani Seva Yojana

India's richest man Mukesh Ambani has become doubly richer within the first four years under the Modi government. Between 2014 and 2019, his wealth more than doubled—from about \$23 billion to \$55 billion. This means that Mukesh Ambani accumulated more wealth in the five years of BJP rule than all the wealth he made and inherited in the entire 58 years of his life before Modi became Prime Minister.

No doubt, Ambani worked really hard to earn Rs 122 crore per day in the last five years. Yet, credit should be given where it is really due. He has to concede that without the BJP government's policies, his billions would have been fewer.

This all began with Ambani's launch of Reliance JIO in September 2016. All of us remember the launch of JIO with full-page newspaper advertisements. The person endorsing the JIO brand was none other than Prime Minister Modi, who appeared on the advertisements wearing a dress that was colour coordinated to match with the JIO logo. There were the usual denials that the pictures were used without the Prime Minister's permission. But most of us know that Reliance would not have dared to use Modi's image without some tacit prior understanding.

Since its commercial launch in September 2016, JIO's subscriber base skyrocketed within two years—like never before in India's telecom history—thanks to Telecom Regulator Authority of India (TRAI) tweaking its policy for the undue benefit of Reliance JIO. One month after JIO was launched, TRAI announced a steep cut in interconnection charge, resulting in a fall of these charges by less than 50%. This meant that JIO had to pay very little to connect the calls of its subscribers to the much larger subscriber base of its competitors. This was a blow to existing telecom operators like Airtel and Vodafone, and a boon to Reliance JIO.

When JIO's competitors started complaining of its predatory pricing behaviour, TRAI tweaked the rules once again in 2018 for the benefit of JIO. Because the rules on predatory pricing behaviour apply to only a company with significant market power, TRAI changed the rules of determining market power, in favour of JIO again. Till then, market power was calculated on the basis of four metrics—revenue market share, subscriber market share, volume of traffic and capacity. But, to benefit JIO and to show its market power lower than it actually was, TRAI simply removed the volume of traffic and capacity as metrics of market power. As a result, JIO, with its deep pockets, could continue its predatory behaviour by undercutting its competitors.

In appreciation of his efforts to benefit JIO, the Modi government

reappointed R.S. Sharma as TRAI chairman for two more years. This is the first time in the history of TRAI that somebody has been reappointed as the chairman.

There is no doubt, Mukesh Ambani's doubled billions are the result of the government's and TRAI's 'fatherly' interest in Reliance JIO. A look at the chronology of Mukesh Ambani's net worth makes this clear. From 2014 to 2016, there was hardly any change in his net worth—it remained at about \$23 billion. After Reliance JIO's commercial launch, his net worth skyrocketed and reached \$55 billion in 2019. One can imagine the miracles Ambani may have in store if Modi is given another five years in office.

Adani Kalyan Yojana

Another of Modi's beneficiaries is Gautam Adani, his BFF (best friend forever). The rise of Adani in the business world seemed to have gone hand in hand with Modi's ascent to power in Gujarat in 2001. As a 'true friend', Modi has been relentless in improving the lot of his 'good' friends. During his tenure in Gujarat, Adani Enterprises' assets grew by 5,000%. We are not sure if any ordinary Gujarati has seen such growth in his income under Modi.

By the time Modi ended his tenure in Gujarat, Adani was a billionaire with a net worth of \$2.6 billion. This friendship continued to bear fruits after Modi's shift to Delhi. In just the first four years of Modi rule, Adani's net worth more than quadrupled to \$11.9 billion.

How did this happen?

Do you remember all the foreign countries the PM visited over the last five years in a bid to shore up India's standing in the international arena?

While he was at it, our PM also managed to drum up some business for his friend. Thanks to this, Adani was able to ink 15 deals related to defence, logistics and power with many of the countries that Modi visited.

The infamous Carmichael mine project, which has been witnessing protests in Australia since its inception for financial irregularities and tax evasion, was pocketed by Adani during Modi's visit to that country just a few months after he became PM. In the same visit, it was announced that State Bank of India, India's largest public sector bank, would provide a loan of \$1 billion to Adani for this Australian project.

A \$15.5 billion project as well as an easy to loan to execute it! What more can a friend ask for. Yet, there were more goodies waiting for Adani.

The rapid expansion of the Adani group over the last decade was built on large loans Gautam Adani took from the banking system. In 2015, the Adani group had Rs 92,000 crore debt on its books, earning a place in a list called 'House of Debt'—compiled by Credit Suisse. According to the report, Adani is in the august company of Anil Ambani as one among the top four Indian corporate groups with the highest level of unsustainable debt. Credit Suisse categorised 1/3rd of Adani group's debt as 'highly stressed', which means that the group was not in a position to make repayments.

In 2017, Adani power alone had total borrowings of Rs 53,000 crore, with an interest cover as low as 0.7%. For every Rs 70 that Adani Power was making, it had to make interest payments of Rs 100—implying that it was defaulting on loan payments.

Despite this desperate situation, the Adani group did not seem to have any NPAs (non-performing assets or bad loans) with the banking system. What is the secret behind such an extraordinary feat?

Here is the secret. Within two months of Modi coming power, public sector banks under the Reserve Bank of India's 5/25 refinance scheme have restructured and refinanced loans of many corporates—extending the loan repayment periods from 10 years to 25 years. The Adani group has been one of the main beneficiaries of this scheme. From the financial press, we know that at least Rs 15,000 crore of Adani power's loans have been restructured, extending the loan repayment period from 10 years to 25 years with a 15-month moratorium on interest payments. No doubt, more such loans of the group have been restructured on similarly benevolent terms. This is also the reason why, despite its mountain of highly stressed debt, the Adani group's market valuation has been growing.

The list of favours given to Adani under the BJP government may seem endless. Yet, there is one that stands far above others, for it involves subversion of government institutions.

In 2014 and 2015, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) issued notices to three of Adani's power sector firms regarding diversion of Rs 5,000 crore to tax havens through over-invoicing of power equipment.

DRI's evidence showed that Adani power companies purchased power equipment from abroad, which was shipped by their Chinese and South Korean sellers directly from their ports to Indian ports, with no diversion in the middle.

But, on paper, it was shown that the equipment was first purchased by a Dubai-based firm called Electrogen Infra, a company owned by Adani's brother, Vinod Adani. Again on paper, Electrogen Infra sold the same equipment to Adani power companies, at a price as high as 800% of the original price. DRI said that through this scam, Adani illegally diverted more than Rs 5,000 crore to overseas tax havens.

To those following the scam, it seemed like an open and shut case. Yet, inexplicably, DRI's adjudicating authority summarily dropped all the proceedings against Adani on August 21, 2017.

Rafale Tonic for Anil Ambani

This billionaire, sadly, has not done so well under PM Narendra Modi's regime. It is universal knowledge that the younger Ambani brother has been seeing rough times these last few years. His net worth dropped from \$6.3 billion to \$1.8 billion in the last five years.

Yet, one can completely absolve the BJP government of any blame in the younger Ambani's loss of billions and slide into billionaire poverty. In fact, PM Modi put in a commendable effort to restore the Junior Ambani's lost billions.

It is no secret that Anil Ambani's group owed a great deal of money to the Indian banking system, and that his group is one of the main contributors to the NPA woes of the banking sector. One of his group companies, Reliance Communications, has at least Rs 14,000 crore of NPAs with banks. The actual figure may be higher, but has not been made public yet. Another group company, Reliance Naval and Engineering, defaulted on its loan of Rs 9,000 crore to the

banks, most of which is to public sector banks.

This is the only information in the public domain. Much of the information regarding the bad loans is shrouded in secrecy. Only the government knows the actual amount of NPAs of the entire Anil Ambani group.

A less compassionate government would have initiated action against Anil Ambani, the promoter of these companies. It may well have taken steps to confiscate his assets. After all, the government is the owner of public sector banks, as well as the representative of Indian citizens, whose deposits have been lent by these banks to Ambani.

But, not Mr Modi, who has instead chosen to help junior Ambani recover his lost fortunes. The result being the Rafale deal, or shall we say, scheme. Though most readers would be familiar with this scheme, there is no harm in recounting its salient features.

In 2012, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government negotiated with the French company Dassault for 126 Rafale fighter jets, to add to the fleet of Indian Air Force (IAF). According to this agreement, which was almost finalised, out of the 126 aircraft, India would buy 18 in finished form directly from Dassault. While, the rest 108 Rafale jets will be manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), with technology transfer from Dassault.

HAL is one of India's Navratna public sector companies. It has more than half a decade experience of manufacturing and supplying fighter aircraft to IAF.

In 2015, Modi decided to scrap this deal and make a new one. Why? So that the experienced HAL can be

replaced by an Ambani company, which has 'zero' experience in any kind of defence manufacturing. Moreover, the Ambani company was set up just 12 days before Modi's visit to France to discuss the deal.

The special consideration given to Anil Ambani's company at the expense of HAL is obviously part of Modi's 'Billionaire Bachao' scheme. As with any other government scheme, this too had its costs. The Modi government agreed to buy a smaller number of aircraft (36) at a much higher cost, just so that Reliance could be brought into the deal. Different estimates have put the loss to the government due to the Rafale deal at Rs 12,000–42,000 crore.

Unlike the one negotiated in 2012, the new Rafale deal does not include any technology transfer to India. This is looked at by many defence analysts as a big setback for India's efforts to become self-reliant in defence manufacturing.

One Rafale deal, no matter how much it costs the government and the people, is clearly not enough to restore the Ambani fortunes. So, apart from the Rafale deal, Modi found time to fix up at least five more deals for Anil Ambani in Sweden, Russia, Israel, the US and other countries, during his globe-trotting. We must accept that Modi has shown a good deal of magnanimity towards Anil Ambani who once hobnobbed with BJP's arch enemy in Uttar Pradesh—the Samajwadi Party. Just goes to prove that Modi is everyone's prime minister—as long as they are rich and capable of keeping the BJP flush with campaign funds.

The 'Baba' Billionaire

Last, but not the least, comes a

most unique accomplishment of the Modi government, a combination of saffron agenda and crony capitalism, that of turning a baba into a billionaire—Baba Ramdev. Unlike others who were billionaires before Modi came to power, the PM can claim credit for singlehandedly turning this baba in to a billionaire.

During the 2014 parliamentary elections, Ramdev was one of the most vocal non-political party campaigners for Modi. The elastic-limbed yoga guru, who had become a TV celebrity through his shows, openly exhorted and herded lakhs of his followers into voting for Modi. This alliance of Ramdev's spiritual Hindu nationalism with BJP's political Hindu nationalism has been fruitful for both the parties. Modi swept to power at the Centre, while Ramdev expanded his spiritual empire into the economic realm.

The PM has shown his gratitude by employing the might of government machinery in turning the yogi baba into the frontman for a multi-billion dollar FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) empire called 'Patanjali'.

From what one can glean from news reports, 'Patanjali'—which was founded by Ramdev—is at the moment officially owned by his second-in-command and disciple 'Acharya Balakrishna'. The actual ownership may seem a bit murky, with the 'Patanjali' brand being controlled by some 34 companies and three trusts with large dividend payments (up to 60% of the profits) going to Ramdev's brother and his close aide Balakrishna. Whatever may be the finer details, there is no doubt that Ramdev is the 'super boss' at Patanjali.

Between 2014 and 2018, Patanjali went from being a relatively fringe enterprise to a billion-dollar company,

making its owner among the 20 richest people in India with a net worth of more than \$6 billion. From making obscure herbal powders and jellies, the company leapfrogged into manufacturing household products like soaps, detergents, toothpastes, kitchen supplies, baby powders, wet wipes, digestive biscuits, cookies, corn flakes, vermicelli and what not. You name it, Patanjali makes it. The Ramdev brand jeans, apparently designed with *bharatiya sanskar* (Indian values) in mind, are also now in the market.

The consequence is that within a span of four years, 'Patanjali' ate into the market share of established FMCG giants such as Hindustan Unilever, Dabur and others, which have been around for decades.

This skyrocketing growth of Patanjali happened under the benevolent gaze of PM Modi and Shah. They have leaned on the government machinery to fully support Ramdev's commercial endeavour. The BJP government served Patanjali products on Parliament's dining tables. It pushed Patanjali products in government-owned Kendriya Bhandars, army canteens and fair price shops in various states ruled by BJP. Patanjali was given lucrative government contracts. Since 2014, it has received about 2,000 acres for setting up factories and other facilities at throwaway prices. Its factories have even got security at the expense of the public exchequer. CISF (Central Industrial Security Force) protection, which is not usually provided to the private sector, was given to the Patanjali food park in Haridwar. The list of favours goes on and on.

The government's excuse for such disproportionate affection shown to Patanjali has been that

it is trying to promote 'swadeshi' products in India. Yet, it is perplexing why these favours were not done to other swadeshi-owned companies like Dabur, Emami and others.

Modi gets votes of his beneficiaries

The benevolence to billionaires has not gone unrewarded. The billionaires have already voted in with their money. More than 70% of corporate donations given to national parties during Modi's term went to BJP, not to forget the copious and completely uncritical air time Modi has been getting in the corporate-owned media.

If only ordinary Indians can stop hankering after paltry benefits like employment, minimum support prices, farm loan waiver, affordable healthcare and education, cheap electricity, cooking gas, etc. etc., under the Modi regime will they get the opportunity to become billionaires one after another (that is, if they survive long enough).

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ILO Criticises Venezuela for Raising Minimum Wage

Nino Pagliccia

Venezuela is being ostracised in every possible conceivable way by Western governments and institutions short of an actual military invasion, although threats to that effect have also been made by the US government.

The newest threat has been issued by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The organisation reported on March 21: “ILO Governing Body decides to appoint Commission of Inquiry for Venezuela.”

The ILO inquiry “refers to the non-observance of ILO Conventions No. 26 (Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery Convention, 1928), No. 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948) and No. 144 (Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards), 1976).”

But here is what would make Karl Marx rise from his grave and shout again, “Workers of all lands, unite!” (words inscribed on his tombstone). The complaint “alleges lack of consultation with Fedecamaras on laws that affect the labour and economic interests of the employers, and the adoption of numerous increases to the minimum wage without consultation with employer and worker representatives.”

It goes further to state, “The [ILO] Governing Body has discussed this complaint six times since 2015 and had asked the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on several occasions to take measures to put an end to the alleged interference, aggression and stigmatisation

directed against Fedecamaras, its affiliated organisations and its leaders.”

Fedecamaras is the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Production, that represents the interests of Venezuelan business and corporations. That is a legitimate role in a country where the private sector still has a strong presence, which is fully recognised by a government that is otherwise labeled as “socialist”, “communist”, “authoritarian”, and “dictatorial”.

However, Fedecamaras had more ambitious interests than trade and commerce for its “affiliated organisations” when former Fedecámaras president Pedro Carmona became de facto president of Venezuela for 47 hours during the failed coup against the government of president Hugo Chavez in April 2002.

Since its founding in 1919, the ILO has opened 12 Commissions of Inquiry. Of those, only 3 involved Latin American countries: Chile (1975) during the early days of the Pinochet regime repression; the Dominican Republic (1983) related to the employment of workers from Haiti; and Nicaragua (1987). Interestingly, the inquiry instituted against Nicaragua refers exactly to the same issues as Venezuela today; keep in mind that in 1987, Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista Liberation Front was president.

The specific violations investigated in Nicaragua were “murder, physical aggression, and torture” among others. But the ILO has remained silent at the

slaughter of more than 2,800 labour leaders and union members since 1986 in Colombia. The danger for union leaders continues to this day. According to a report by pulitzercenter.org, “As a result of attacks on unions and other pressures, the percentage of unionised workers in Colombia has dropped from 15 percent 20 years ago to about 4 percent today.”

What is striking in the case of Venezuela is that those same corporations that claim “aggression and stigmatisation directed against Fedecamaras, its affiliated organisations and its leaders,” are responsible for lobbying for economic sanctions, hoarding of goods, creating an induced inflationary process through a parallel manipulated exchange rate, all of which is undermining the purchasing power of the Venezuelan working class.

The critics call the manufactured economic crisis in Venezuela a “humanitarian crisis”. If that were indeed so, why are they critical of the Venezuelan government’s move to increase the minimum wage level to protect the most vulnerable population, why are they dubbing it inappropriate? Paradoxically, the main drivers of the economic crisis maintain that they were not consulted, and claim to be the victims of a labour transgression.

The Canadian government absurdly issued a news release stating that the “Maduro regime robs its people of their fundamental democratic and human rights, and denies them assistance to meet

basic humanitarian needs.” Yet, in a totally contradictory statement, it announced support for the ILO inquiry “to examine allegations that the Maduro regime failed to comply with international labour conventions on . . . setting of minimum wages.”

This may be a rare case where a government increase of the minimum wage is considered an offense because it affects “the labour and economic interests of the employers”. The real crime, however, is being committed by applying sanctions against Venezuela. Alfred de Zayas, a UN independent expert for the promotion of an international democratic and equitable order, stated that “it is time” for Venezuela to ask the International Criminal Court “for an investigation into the crimes against humanity committed by the United States for imposing sanctions against it.”

(Nino Pagliccia is an activist and freelance writer based in Vancouver.)

The King Who Loved Himself

Chitra Padmanabhan

Once upon a time there was a king who loved himself to distraction morning, noon and night—24/7 as they say these days—seven days a week, 365 days a year. He preferred leap years because he gained an extra day for self-adulation. To be a narcissist is no mean task, it takes a lot of hard work, and he justifiably gained the reputation of being an immensely hard-working ruler.

Somehow Raja saheb had convinced everybody that his act of self-love was an austere act of *fakiree*—asceticism—that he was undertaking for his subjects. Despite the fact that he was unencumbered by what one would call an emotional life, he managed to convey to them that his very existence was for them—he was that good a communicator.

The king had an unerring knack for zeroing in on the deep anxieties of his subjects and dovetailing them with ‘larger’ issues of loyalty to the kingdom—in other words, him. At the same time he directed the subjects’ attention towards other aspirants to the throne, declaring that they were entirely responsible for the subjects’ woes. He ensured that the pretenders who roamed around sulkily could never touch him. As he periodically told his subjects, he was them and they were him.

In return, many of his subjects made him the object of their adoration. They saw him as he saw himself—an epochal man who stood head and shoulders above everybody else. People refused to believe that he was a ruthless ruler who did not trust anyone; who had no qualms about neutralising anyone who might ask

even the most innocuous question or make some casual remark. Since everything was about him, it stood to reason that every comment, remark alluded to him.

Once a courtier mentioned that the sky was overcast. That was the last statement he ever made because he was never found. His only belonging which mysteriously reached his family were his jootis caked in mud, overcast as it were.

From that day onwards nobody in the kingdom used that word. The minute a subject formed an ‘o’ shape with her lips, she found an angry member of the royal guard telling her to be careful about the word she was going to pronounce.

Fawning chroniclers at Raja saheb’s court warbled that he was a *swayambhu* (self-manifested), the *itihasa* of the kingdom—its past, present and future. Once a court balladeer offered the original thought that the king needed no guru, he was his own role model. People were thrilled the way the raja coyly smiled, turned his head to one side and nodded, as if overcome with humility. Of course, he knew he was on camera and that every projection mattered.

We all know Samson’s source of strength was his hair. In the case of our Raja saheb, it was his image. The television camera was his lifeblood. As a wise man once said, the camera is the most powerful sun of our universe today. No one knew better than the king the hard work he put in for close to 20 hours daily, changing clothes to come before the camera, show his best profile, take

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credit for and announce every single achievement notched up by subjects toiling for years. His subjects needed to see his image, he said. In fact, he dedicated his image to the subjects so that they could feel patriotic towards their king who was the kingdom.

If there was a drought, he was on camera shedding tears for the farmers, attired in immaculate clothes, his humungously expensive watch shining like a diamond, his state of the art spectacles no doubt allowing him to see the plight of his subjects better. 'See, you have reduced me to tears, my heart is so soft I am afraid it will break this instant,' he would say. His fans would marvel, 'what a saint, what a saint!'

From time to time he would plan events where he would 'spontaneously' come upon a woman whose life was an endless loop of drudgery and exclaim, 'Is this what we have reduced our women to? Forgive me mother, I am your son. Let me wash your feet today.' Of course, the courtiers would have ensured that her feet were washed at least ten times (not the rest of the body, too much work) so that the king did not soil his hands while washing her feet, enacting a gesture that was deeply embedded in the collective memory.

But even the most cunning communicator does not always have absolute control over his body language, and the haughty set of shoulder and the lack of any emotion on his face that day told its own story to those who looked hard.

Then there was the time when his *vaigyaniks* achieved a breakthrough on a new generation of *sudarshan chakra* that destroyed the enemy's satellites. They had been working on

it for a long time, much before our royal became the king. But he was convinced that the breakthrough was entirely due to him.

That was the day which had no night—Raja *saheb* was before the cameras for 24 hours, beaming from ear to ear saying that what could not be accomplished earlier had been accomplished by him; the kingdom was safe from external enemies. Striking an ominous note, he said he would now concentrate on internal enemies, for their attacks on him were attacks on his subjects.

It was a time when the kingdom was facing its third successive drought. Stories of distress had been filtering into the capital—an old kisan preferred to die by his hand than see his family reduced to a subhuman status; another farmer jumped into a river with his small son strapped to his chest; one decided to hang himself. The number of widows swelled.

The king came on camera and broke down. He wailed that their distress was his distress but that was that. Among the subjects from village 'A' who looked on that day were some women whose husbands, farmers, had committed suicide (names withheld to protect the identity of the persons concerned). Somehow the king's statement did not affect them the way it used to earlier. They were thinking about the visitor who had come to their village from the neighbouring kingdom with some startling news—she had told them that in her kingdom drought was seen as a sign of the king's failure to protect his subjects. It was the king's *rajdharm* to help his subjects. Something had stirred inside them then.

For the first time, therefore, when Raja *saheb* scrunched up his

face, as if in agony, it left the women unmoved. It was as if there was a tear in the universe the king had created through his myth-making enterprise, and the women saw reality for what it was. They acknowledged the king's spell for what it was—an exercise in self-love, out of sync with their everyday concerns.

It is not easy to admit that one has been completely under someone's spell, even if that someone happens to be a king. Like an underground river finding its way to the surface, stories started circulating of people having intense experiences. A group of farmers realised that being together and discussing their concerns gave them greater strength than the king's televised flourishes did. Somewhere else a group of youngsters looked up at the sun and declared that it outshone the television camera. And as it often happens, an outspoken 14-year-old exclaimed in a gathering—'but the king only talks about himself, nothing else!'

It is not that the scales have fallen from the eyes of each subject. There are people and people. Many subjects still feel he is 'the one', others like his style. And still others say he makes them forget they are small. Some do admit there are kingly role models around the world who are not as self-obsessed and actually utter pronouns other than 'I', but they can't see such personages in their midst.

Never mind. Some women from village 'A' have told me that there is a growing ripple of skepticism about the king who loved himself and became his own image. They await the day the ripple will turn into a riptide.

(*Chitra Padmanabhan is a journalist and translator.*)

Modinomics = Corporatonomics

Part V: Other Social Sectors: Lies, Deceit, Budget Cuts

Neeraj Jain

In the previous issues of Janata, we have analysed Modinomics and shown that the Modi Government, if it wants, can raise enough resources to increase its expenditures on the social sectors. Instead, it is giving away huge subsidies to the tune of several lakh crore rupees to the corporate houses. In this article, the last of this series, we discuss Modi's budget allocations for nutrition, pensions and women-oriented schemes.

1. ALLOCATIONS FOR NUTRITION

Hunger and Malnutrition 'Emergency'

India may be one of the world's fastest growing economies, but its hunger levels are amongst the worst in the world. The Global Hunger Index (GHI), a multidimensional statistical tool designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger globally and by country and region, ranked India at a very low 103 out of 119 countries for which the GHI was calculated in 2018.¹

India is also at the epicentre of a global stunting crisis, due to child malnutrition. According to recently released data from the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16), 38.4% of children under the age of five are stunted (low height for age, indicating chronic malnutrition), and 35.7% are underweight (low weight for age, indicating both chronic and acute malnutrition).²

Unless one has gone chronically and repeatedly hungry to bed, it is

hard to imagine what that can do to one's body and mind. But even we keep aside such (what some may call) 'sentimentalism', malnutrition and hunger also have enormous economic costs. How can hundreds of millions of Indians become productive members of society unless they are given the conditions needed to develop their inherent capacities, and obviously, the most basic of these is food?

Clearly, for a country facing such a massive hunger and malnutrition crisis, this should be THE MOST IMPORTANT crisis facing its policy planners, and they need to urgently address it.

Food Subsidy

The most important programme in the country to tackle this hunger and malnutrition crisis facing the country is the food subsidy programme, wherein the government provides essential food and non-food items to the poor at subsidised rates through the public distribution system (PDS). This food subsidy programme is mandated under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), passed by the Parliament in 2013.

As we have discussed elsewhere,³ the NFSA is a very inadequate Act. We have argued in several articles printed in *Janata Weekly*⁴ that the best way to overcome these shortcomings of the NFSA and also effectively address the hunger / malnutrition crisis is to universalise the PDS (the PDS presently provides subsidised foodgrains only to 67% of the total population), and also include distribution of other food essentials in it. (Discussing this issue in greater detail is beyond the scope of this essay.)

The BJP, when it was in the opposition and during its election campaign of 2014, had promised to modify the NFSA and bring in 'universal food security', and BJP leaders had gone on record demanding the expansion of the Act to include other food essentials in it.⁵ But after coming to power, the BJP Government has gone completely silent on all these issues. Forget expanding the PDS, in the five budgets presented by Jaitley (2014-15 A to 2018-19 RE), the food subsidy as a percentage of budget outlay and as a percentage of GDP has actually declined (see Table 1).

Table 1: Budget Allocations for Food Subsidy, 2014 to 2018 (Rs crore)

	2014-15 A	2018-19 RE	2019-20
Food Subsidy	1,17,671	1,71,298	1,84,220
Food Subsidy as % of Budget Outlay	7.07	6.97	6.62
Food Subsidy as % of GDP	0.94	0.91	0.88

How much would Universalisation and Expansion of PDS cost?

In an article published in an earlier issue of Janata, we have shown that the total increase in food subsidy required for universalising the PDS and providing all citizens 35 kg of wheat /rice and 5 kg of millets per household per month will cost the exchequer an additional Rs 85,000 crore at the most (calculation made for 2017–18). Additionally, if the government decides to distribute 2 kg of pulses and 1 kg of edible oil to all families through the PDS at subsidised prices, that would cost the exchequer at the most Rs 40,000 crore. This means that universalising and expanding the PDS would only lead to a total increase in the food subsidy bill of Rs 1.25 lakh crore.⁶ That was calculated for two years ago. Assuming inflation of 8% per annum, this amount today would be Rs 1.45 lakh crore. As we have shown in our previous articles, the government can easily raise enough resources to finance this increase.

Yet More Cuts in Food Subsidy Planned . . .

Not only has the Modi Government made a complete U-turn on its promise to universalise food security, and kept the food subsidy at very inadequate levels, it is now

planning further cuts in food subsidy. The government's plan is to gradually eliminate the PDS, identify the poor through Aadhaar, and provide direct cash transfers to the poor into their bank accounts. Defending the plan, the government's Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian stated that this will enable the government to stop leakages as well as exclude the better-off from the PDS, and the government can then invest the savings into infrastructure (that is, transfer it to the private sector through the PPP route); simultaneously, prices can be “liberated”.⁷

This is typical 'free market jargon'—that worships the free market, and demands that market must be allowed to determine prices. But preventing the market from determining prices was precisely one of the reasons why the PDS had been introduced in the country in the first place: speculators would often cause foodgrain prices to zoom, creating havoc for the poor, which ultimately forced the government to introduce the PDS. The PDS not only guaranteed foodgrains to the people at fixed and subsidised prices, it also acted as a check on speculation in foodgrain prices. For crops for which there is no procurement, and whose prices are determined by the ‘free market’, there often takes place a sharp fluctuation in prices,

like what happened with tur (arhar) dal in 2015.

Once the PDS is dismantled, speculators will again be able to rule the roost. If and when wheat and rice prices zoom, the government would then have to increase its cash transfers to the poor. But it is doubtful if the government would do that, as it is seeking to reduce its food subsidy bill. It is going to spell absolute disaster for the millions of impoverished people in the country.

Other Nutrition Schemes

The previous governments had put in place several “nutrition” schemes oriented towards pregnant women and children. While the funding for them was inadequate, at least they attempted to address the problem. Most of them are included under the umbrella of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and include Anganwadi services and the Maternity Benefit Programme (MBP), apart from some other smaller schemes. Another important scheme that is also nutrition-oriented, but comes under the Human Resource Development Ministry, is the Mid-Day Meal Scheme for school children.

Let us take a look at the allocations for the most important of these schemes under five years of Modi rule:

Table 2: BJP Budget Allocations for Nutrition-Oriented Schemes, 2014 to 2019 (Rs crore)

<i>Schemes</i>	<i>2014–15 BE (1)</i>	<i>2018–19 BE</i>	<i>2018–19 RE (2)</i>	<i>2019–20</i>	<i>Reduction, (2) over (1), CAGR</i>
Core ICDS/ Anganwadi Services	18,391	16,335	17,890	19,834	34%
Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana/MBP	400	2,400	1,200	2,500	
Mid-Day Meal (MDM)	13,215	10,500	9,949	11,000	49%

i) Anganwadi services

The most important of these nutrition schemes is Anganwadi services. It is a programme aimed at providing health, education and supplementary nutrition to mothers and children below 6 years of age. Though there is an increase in the budget of this year over last year’s revised estimate by 10.9%, this pales into insignificance when we look at the budget cuts made in the previous years, because of which the expenditure in 2018–19 RE is less than the allocation for 2014–15 even in nominal terms; in real terms, it signifies a cut of a whopping 34%.

This huge reduction has been made, despite a damning Niti Ayog Report of 2015 showing that around 41% of the Anganwadis have inadequate space, 71% are not visited by doctors, 31% have no nutritional supplementation for malnourished children and 52% have bad hygienic conditions.⁸ With the government reducing the allocation, the conditions are only going to get worse. It is indicative of our ruling regime’s complete insensitivity towards the 5 crore children in the country who are malnourished and the more than two crore pregnant women and lactating mothers. It also means that the Anganwadi workers who are being paid a pittance will continue to work at their very low wages.

ii) Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana

This maternity benefit programme, earlier known as the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, was first introduced as a pilot scheme in 53 districts across the country in 2010. It then gave a modest allowance of Rs 4,000

to pregnant and lactating mothers. Subsequently, the NFSA passed just before the 2014 elections mandated the extension of this programme to all over the country, and an increase in the allowance to Rs 6,000.

However, after winning the elections, the BJP delayed the implementation of this provision for 3 years, despite the huge maternal health crisis gripping the country: India’s maternal mortality rate is the highest in the world; according to the World Health Statistics (2016), nearly 5 women die every hour in India due to pregnancy and delivery related complications.

Finally, after much public pressure, Prime Minister Modi finally announced the implementation of these entitlements to all over the country in his address to the nation on December 31, 2016. But as is his wont, he repackaged the programme and proudly presented it as a new scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana. FM Jaitley followed it up with a similar announcement in his 2017 budget speech. But like the other big-bang BJP announcements, Modi-Jaitley are not serious about implementing it. Jaitley has never allocated enough funds for a genuine implementation of this scheme. It is estimated that it would require an allocation by the Centre of Rs 9,700 crore per year (assuming Centre–State cost sharing

to be 60:40);⁹ but Jaitley in all his budgets so far has allocated less than one-third of that, and spent less than one-fourth! In 2017, he allocated Rs 2,700 crore, spent only Rs 2,048 crore (2017–18 A); and in 2018–19, allocated Rs 2,400 crore but spent only Rs 1,200 (RE)—implying that an overwhelming number of pregnant women are being denied their maternity entitlements under one excuse or the other.

iii) Mid-Day Meal Scheme

This is another very important scheme to combat the huge malnutrition levels among children in the country; another equally important purpose is to improve school enrolment and child attendance in schools. But the government is not willing to allocate a decent amount for providing one nutritious meal a day to its children, despite the fact that more than one-third of the country’s children under five—about 47 million souls—suffer from stunting. In its very first year, the Modi Government reduced the money spent on this scheme from an already low allocation of Rs 13,215 crore to Rs 10,523 crore, and in the 2018–19 RE, the money spent on this scheme is less than that even in nominal terms (Rs 9,949 crore); in real terms, this implies a reduction by nearly half!

Table 3: National Social Assistance Programme (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
National Social Assistance Programme	10,635	8,900	9,200
<i>Of which:</i> Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension Scheme	6,008	5,972	6,259

2. PENSION SCHEME FOR INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS

Presently, the main programme for providing social security to the poor (including the disabled and widows) and especially those working in the unorganised sector is the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), allocation for which is budgeted under the Department for Rural Development. During its five years in power, the Modi Government's allocation for this programme was a lowly Rs 9,000–10,000 crore. The total number of poor people in the country, even according to the government's convoluted statistics, is around 36 crore. That works out to a social assistance of Rs 250 per person per year—a princely sum indeed! Not only that, the allocation for this programme actually declined during five years of Modi rule (2014–15 BE to 2018–19 RE) by a whopping 43% in real terms (see Table 3).

The most important scheme under this program is the Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension Scheme, under which the Central Government provides a ridiculously low pension of Rs 200 per month to old people above the age of 60. This pension amount of Rs 200 has remained unchanged since 2007—applying a deflation rate of 8% per annum means that its real value has fallen to less than Rs 90 today! Even this low amount is given to only those citizens below the poverty line; as is well known, a very large number of the poor do not have BPL cards, and so are deprived of this tiny amount too! This explains why the total budgeted expenditure for this scheme in the 2018–19 budget was only Rs 6,564 crore; the government managed to save on even this low

amount, and so the 2018–19 RE shows a disbursement of only Rs 5,972 crore (Table 3)!

And so, activists and working people and unions have been agitating for a decent old age pension for the poor and the informal sector workers for years. Apparently ceding their demand, the finance minister in his Budget 2019 speech announced a new pension scheme for informal sector workers that he pompously labelled as the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhaan (PMSYM), under which the estimated 42 crore informal sector workers in the country would be given a monthly pension of Rs 3,000. The announcement created a big splash in the media (as desired!).

A closer look reveals that the new scheme is a cruel joke on the informal sector workers. It is even a bigger hoax than the Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme. Nevertheless, the Modi *Bhakt* media went to town touting it as the largest pension scheme in the world!

Under the PMSYM scheme, informal sector workers are not going to automatically get a pension of Rs 3,000 per month upon attaining the age of 60. They will get this pension only after they have paid a monthly premium for several years, the amount of which will depend upon the duration for which they pay this premium. For instance, a worker who starts paying at the age of 29 would have to pay Rs 100 per month for 31 years and a worker who starts paying at the age of 18 would have to pay Rs 55 for 42 years. The government would make a matching contribution. Only then would the worker, on reaching the age of 60 years, get a pension of Rs 3,000 per month.¹⁰

The PMSYM scheme actually

only reveals how cut off are PM Modi and his cabinet ministers from the real life conditions of our country's informal sector workers (even though PM Modi may claim to be a *chaiwallah* earlier). The wages of the unorganised workers are so low, their jobs are so uncertain, their life conditions are so precarious, that asking them to first pay a defined, even though small, part of their hard earned income every month and that too for 20/30/40 years shows extreme insensitivity to their plight.

There is another reason also for the PMSYM being a farce. Expecting unorganised sector workers to deposit any part, even a small part, of their hard earned income in a scheme from which benefits will flow after 20 to 30 years is completely unrealistic. Governments have in the past broken so many promises, denied so many promised benefits, to ordinary people on vague excuses that expecting workers to believe the government promise that it would pay them a pension if they deposit some amount for 20/30/40 years is silly, to say the least.

And that too, for a pension amount which is a pittance! For a worker aged 30 today, he/she will be getting a pension of Rs 3,000 after 30 years. Even if we take 5% inflation, the real value of this would be a mere Rs 700 after 30 years!

But the biggest problem with this pension scheme is that by the time they reach the age of 60 years, when the workers will start receiving their pension, a majority of the informal sector workers would not be alive to avail of its benefit! While an age of 60 years is good for giving post-retirement benefits to the middle classes, it is completely unrealistic for the hard working informal sector workers. And life expectancy for

informal workers doing the hardest jobs, like construction workers and quarry workers, would probably be less than 55 years.¹¹ This only goes to show how divorced are Modi–Jaitley–Goyal from the real conditions of the working poor in India.

Clearly, the PMSYM is only another election *jumla*; worse, it is a complete fraud.

Can't our country afford to pay our informal sector workers, whose life conditions are so bad that they rank at the bottom of the ladder not just in India but at the global level, a decent pension in their old age, entirely on a non-contributory basis, so that they can spend their twilight years in dignity?

Indeed, the government, if it so desires, can easily do so. If it decides to provide all the old people in the country a (non-contributory) monthly pension of Rs 3,000 per month—and we are here talking of a universal pension scheme, not just for those living below the farcical official poverty line—it would cost the government Rs 4.3 lakh crore (there are an estimated 12 crore people in the country above the age of 60, so 12 crore x 3000 x 12 = 432,000 crore). From the estimates made in our previous articles published in *Janata* about the potential for increasing government revenues, the government can easily afford to pay this if it so desires.

3. ALLOCATIONS FOR WOMEN

These allocations are outlined in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS). It compiles information submitted by the various

ministries and departments on how much of their budgetary resources are targeted for benefiting women.

In a country where a crime against a woman is committed every 96 seconds, an insensitive Modi Government has reduced the gender budget in real terms as compared to last year. In fact, over the five budgets presented by Jaitley so far, the allocation for 2018–19 is more than the estimated allocation for 2014–15 by only 4.93% (CAGR), implying a cut in real terms. This reduction is also reflected in the gender budget allocation as a percentage of total budget outlay and also as a percentage of GDP (see Table 5).

A closer look at the GBS makes it clear that a large part of the allocations shown under it have actually nothing to do with the exclusive welfare of women. Let us discuss this with reference to 2018–19 RE.

The GBS is in two parts. Part A details schemes in which 100% provision is for women; total budget for this is Rs 26,544 crore. But of this, Rs 19,900 crore or 75% of the total budget under Part A is accounted for by only one scheme, Pradhan Mantri Avas Yojana. Even if women are given joint ownership of houses built under this scheme,

how is this a scheme that is meant to benefit women exclusively?

Part B of the GBS includes spending for those schemes where allocation for women constitutes at least 30% of the provision. All important ministries claim that 30–40% of their allocations are for women, and these are routinely included in Part B of the Gender Budget. Thus, for instance, the Department of Health and Family Welfare has claimed an allocation of Rs 23,421 crore for the Gender Budget, which is 43% of its total allocation of 54,303 crore; the Department of School Education and Literacy claims gender oriented allocation to be Rs 14,574 crore out of its total allocation of Rs 50,114 crore, or 29%; and so on. No attempt is made to ensure that this much allocation is targeted to benefit women, neither do these ministries attempt to make an estimate of how many women have benefited from these women-oriented allocations. Part B (Rs 92,583 crore) constitutes 79% of the total Gender Budget.

This basically means that most of the Gender Budget, probably more than three-fourths, has really nothing to do with benefiting women exclusively. Yet another Modi–Jaitley ‘jumla’.

Table 5: Budget Allocations for Women, 2014 to 2019 (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE (1)	2018–19 RE (2)	2019–20	Increase: (2) over (1), CAGR
Gender Budget	98,030	1,24,671	1,31,700	4.93%
Ministry of Women and Child Dev.	21,194	24,759	29,165	3.16%
Gender Budget as % of Budget Outlay	5.46%	5.07%	4.73%	
Gender Budget as % of GDP	0.79%	0.66%	0.63%	

The Genuinely Women Oriented Schemes

Let us now take a look at some of the schemes under Part A which are genuinely and exclusively meant to benefit women.

The scheme that has got a large allocation and has received the most publicity in recent times is the Ujjwala scheme to provide free cooking gas connections to poor women (2018–19 RE shows an expenditure of Rs 3,200 crore on this). The government claims that more than 7 crore free connections have been provided to poor women under this scheme by International Women's Day, March 8, this year (2019).

This scheme is also turning out to be another 'jumla'. Under this scheme, while poor women don't have to make any initial payment at the time of taking the gas connection, the gas stove and first cylinder given to them are not given free, but as a loan, to be recovered from them from the subsidy they receive at the time of each refill. Which means

they have to pay the market rate for all subsequent cylinders, till the loan (around Rs 1,500) is recovered. But most poor can't afford the price of the subsidised refill too, forget paying its market price. Therefore, according to newsreports, a very low number of Ujjwala beneficiaries are coming back for refills. Which is why data show that while the number of LPG connections across India increased by 16.26% in 2016–17, the use of gas cylinders increased by only 9.83%—lower than the rate recorded in 2014–15, when the scheme did not exist.¹²

Most other genuinely and exclusively women-oriented schemes in Part A come under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The total allocation for them was a miniscule Rs 4,271 crore. Yet, the 2018–19 RE show that the government managed to save on this too, spending only 60% of the budget allocation (Rs 2,574 crore).

To give an example: the government announced in 2017–18 that it was extending the 'Scheme for Adolescent Girls', also called

SABLA, from 205 districts in 2016–17 to cover the entire country over the next two years (by 2018–19). But at the same time, it has reduced the allocation for this scheme from Rs 450 crore in 2017–18 A to Rs 250 crore in 2018–19 RE.

Most schemes show such tiny expenditures on them that it is obvious that the government is not serious about implementing them, and they have been announced for propaganda purposes only. Thus, according to the 2018–19 RE, only Rs 29 crore has been spent on 'Women's helpline'; Rs 52 crore on working women's hostels; Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, that is supposed to provide micro-loans to women for livelihoods, micro-enterprises, etc. has been given a princely Rs 0.01 crore (or, Rs 1 lakh); the Central Social Welfare Board, that is supposed to run several important programmes for the welfare and development of women and children, especially in rural areas, has been given a measly Rs 71.5 crore; while the National Commission for Women, a statutory

Table 6: Funds Sanctioned and Spent Under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (Rs crore)

		<i>Budget Allocation</i>	<i>Amount Spent (7)</i>	<i>Of which: Funds released for media activities (8)</i>	<i>(8) as % of (7)</i>
1	2014–15	90	34.8 (actual)	18.9	54.3%
2	2015–16	97	59 (actual)	24.5	41.5%
3	2016–17 ^a	100	32.7 (actual)	29	88.7%
4	2017–18	200	169 (actual)	135.7	80.3%
5	Total (1+2+3+4)	487	295.5	208.1	70.4%
6	2018–19	280	280 (RE)	155.7*	55.6%
	Total (5 + 6)	767	575.5	363.8	63.2%

* Upto Dec 31, 2018

^a Figure taken from reply given by Minister of State for Women and Child Development Virendra Kumar in Lok Sabha on January 4, 2019. This does not match the actual expenditure for this year given in 2018–19 budget documents.

body that investigates complaints related to deprivation of women's rights, has been allocated Rs 24 crore.

The Modi–Jaitley Government has even run down the Nirbhaya Fund. Following the brutal gang rape of a young girl in Delhi in December 2012 that shook the conscience of the nation, the then Finance Minister P. Chidambaram had announced this fund in his 2013 Union Budget to support initiatives by the government and NGOs that support the safety of women in India, with a corpus of Rs 1,000 crore. Subsequently, Jaitley too in his budgets allocated funds for this non-lapsable corpus fund. According to a recent newsreport, government data say that the total amount that had accumulated in this fund in 2018–19 was Rs 3,600 crore, of which the BJP Government had released only Rs 1513 crore, or 42%, till December 2018.¹³

Finally, let us take a look at the Modi Government's most hyped scheme for the girl child, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. The declared aim of the scheme is to end discrimination against the girl child and educate her. The total amounts allocated and spent under the scheme under the five Jaitley budgets are given in Table 6.

The 2018–19 BE shows an allocation of Rs 280 crore this scheme. As of December 31, 2018, the government had spent Rs 226 crore of the allocated amount, according to Minister of State for Women and Child Development Virendra Kumar in a written reply given in the Lok Sabha on January 1, 2019. But he admitted that of this amount, Rs 155.7 crore, or 69%, had been spent on advertisements, and only Rs 70.6 crore (31%) had been disbursed to the districts and the

States! The same reply also showed that during the first four years of the scheme, of the total amount allocated for this scheme in the budget allocations (Rs 487 crore), the government spent only 60% of it (Rs 295.5 crore). Even of this low amount spent, more than 70% was on advertisements.¹⁴

Do we need any more proof that the BJP-RSS does not really believe in gender equality?

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Modi's Love for Ganga: Another 'Jumla'

Neeraj Jain

What completely exposes the Modi Government and its so-called religiosity is the government's attitude towards cleaning of Ganga, India's longest river along whose basin more than 40 crore people live, the largest such number in the world. Yet, it is one of the most polluted rivers in the world. The river is also considered to be sacred by the Hindus.

Five years ago, at the time of the Lok Sabha elections in 2014, Narendra Modi announced that he was going to contest the Parliamentary elections from Varanasi as he had got a call from Maa Ganga. Soon after winning the elections and coming to power, Modi announced plans to clean up the Ganga, declaring that “Mother Ganga needs someone to take her out of this dirt and she's chosen me to do the work.” The Ministry of Water Resources was given the task of cleaning up the Ganga, and its name was changed to include “Ganga Rejuvenation”. Uma Bharti, who was given charge of this ministry, announced in Parliament that the river would be cleaned and rejuvenated by July 2018.¹

In mid-2015, the Modi Government, as is its wont,

bombastically launched a new plan, the Namami Gange, to clean up the Ganga, with a budget outlay of Rs 20,000 crore for the next five years.² As a part of this, a five tier structure at the national, state and district level was created to take measures for prevention, control and abatement of environmental pollution in river Ganga and to ensure continuous adequate flow of water so as to rejuvenate the river. At the apex of this structure was the National Ganga Council (NGC), headed by the Prime Minister himself. This council replaced the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), the previous apex body that had been created during the UPA regime in 2009 for cleaning up the Ganga. NGC also had on board the chief ministers of the five Ganga basin states—Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal—besides several Union ministers.

Apart from this, an Empowered Task Force, headed by the Union Water Resources Minister, was created with the chief secretaries of the five Ganga Basin states as members. The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCNG) was created as the implementing arm of the Namami Gange project.³

A lot of hot air

All this architecture looks great on paper. But in reality, the Namami Gange programme too has remained another hot air balloon released by the master braggart Narendra Modi. The seriousness of the Modi Government, and of Prime Minister Modi himself who heads the NGC, regarding cleaning up the Ganga can be gauged from the fact that the NGC has not met even once since it was set up in October 2016 (it is supposed to meet at least once a year)! The Empowered Task Force on River Ganga too was set up at the same time as the NGC. According to regulations, it is supposed to meet every three months, that is, four times a year. RTI queries reveal that ever since it was created in October 2016, it has met only twice (in February and August 2017).⁴

So far as the NMCG is concerned, which is the implementing arm of the Namami Gange programme, its functioning was criticised by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in an audit report released in December 2017.⁵ It redflagged the delay in river cleaning and construction of infrastructure for sewage treatment.

Review of Namami Gange

Let us take a closer look at the most important steps that need to be taken to clean up and rejuvenate the Ganga, and what has been achieved by the NMCG so far.

i) Sewage Treatment

This is probably the simplest of the challenges—reducing the untreated waste that flows into the river by building sewage treatment plants (STPs) and rehabilitating the older plants to improve their

capacity. According to a report of the Parliamentary Estimates Committee presented to the Lok Sabha on May 11, 2016, on the mainstream of the Ganga, 7,301 million litres per day (MLD) sewage is created in five states (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal), but facilities existed to treat only 2,126 MLD sewage. And if we take the entire Ganga basin (that is, Ganga and its tributaries) into consideration, that comprises of 11 states, a total of 12,051 MLD sewage is created, but only 5,717 MLD is treated.⁶

That means that more than 50% of the sewage flowing into the Ganga and its tributaries is untreated. But the Modi Government, despite all the propaganda about cleaning up Maa Gange, has not shown any urgency in setting up STPs to clean this untreated sewage. The government informed the Lok Sabha in response to a question asked that as of November 30, 2018, projects for the creation of 3,083 MLD new STP capacity and rehabilitation of 886 MLD STP capacity had been sanctioned, of which work on creating 560 MLD STP capacity had been completed.⁷ Considering that STPs having a total capacity of treating 6,354 MLD sewage water are required to be built to clean all the untreated sewage presently flowing into the Ganga basin, this means that so far, under Namami Gange, only 9% work has been completed three-and-a-half years after the project was launched. The pace of the work is so slow that it is going to take several years for the NMCG to reach its target of sewage treatment, but by then, the volume of sewage generated would have gone up by several times.

ii) Faecal Sludge Management

The other important pollutant flowing into the Ganga is faecal sludge. Faecal sludge is a bigger pollutant than sewerage. While the BOD (Biochemical Oxygen Demand) of sewage is 150–300 mg/l, that of faecal sludge would be 15,000–30,000 mg/l.

To check this, the Modi Government took the first step of making the villages and towns in the Ganga basin open defecation free (ODF) by constructing toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission. But after that, it apparently lost interest, and did nothing as regards the next important step of faecal sludge management. Most of the villages and towns in the basin of the Ganga don't have sewage systems. With the result that while now people don't shit in the open, all that has happened is that the shit accumulates in the toilet tanks in the households. Once taken out of the tanks, this untreated faecal waste is just dumped around, and ends up flowing into the river, defeating the very mission of making the Ganga river basin ODF. According to one estimate, in cities like Allahabad, Varanasi and Kanpur, hardly 25 per cent of faecal sludge generated is collected for safe disposal. Even in PM Modi's own constituency Varanasi, 246 kilolitres of faecal sludge is generated every day, but only 30 kilolitres is collected for safe disposal.⁸

If the Modi Government had the slightest sincerity about cleaning up Ganga, this was the least it could have done—build the necessary infrastructure to collect and treat this faecal sludge, in at least the most important cities in the Ganga basin. But it is more interested in spending money on advertisements rather than

taking steps on the ground.

iii) Restoring the Flow of the River

This is the most important challenge.

The water flowing in river Ganga has several unique properties because of the path it treads naturally: it has medicinal properties—due to medicinal plants on the path of Ganga—that can treat skin infections; it is very rich in minerals; and it has bacteriophages which kill bacteria. But these properties depend on the river being allowed to flow; if the flow of the river dwindles (due to man-made reasons), then the water loses these properties.

To an extent, the above mentioned problems of cleaning up the Ganga can be reduced if the natural flow of the water is maintained; Ganga's ability to self-clean will then automatically reduce its pollution level (the pollution level today is too high for the river to completely purify itself).

Unfortunately, today, except during monsoons, the Ganga fails this basic test. The water levels in the river have fallen drastically. According to one study by geologists Abhijit Mukherjee and Souendra Nath Bhanja of IIT Kharagpur, the base flow of Ganga River has declined by as much as 56% from the 1970s to 2016. In several stretches of the river, the water levels are so shallow, especially during the summer season, that people can walk across the river. One reason for this is massive extraction of water from the river for irrigation purposes (today, the Ganga canal system in the Doab region between the Ganga and Yamuna rivers in the states of UP and Uttarakhand irrigates nearly 9,000 sq km of agricultural land). The second reason is excessive groundwater

extraction. During the lean season, the underground aquifers partially recharge the river. However, the introduction of bore wells—with pumps run by electricity—in the Gangetic plains in the 1970s has led to overexploitation of both shallow and deep aquifers. Therefore, instead of the aquifers recharging the river, the land is soaking water from the river. This has affected the base flow in the rivers of the Ganga basin.⁹

This means the whole problem of rejuvenating the Ganga is linked up to questioning the entire model of agricultural development being promoted in the country. The present agricultural model is what can be called chemical intensive, external input oriented industrial agriculture, which also guzzles water. Instead of that, we need to shift to alternate technologies that promote sustainable, environment friendly agriculture, which also conserve and minimise use of water. But the BJP is obviously not interested in this, as it is seeking to promote corporate farming, which is even more chemical intensive and uses even more water. We have discussed this in our previous article on Modi's Budgets and Agriculture.

The third reason for the falling water levels in the Ganga is the reckless construction of dams on the Ganga and its tributaries. By the last count, there were some 795 dams and 181 barrages/weirs that were obstructing and diverting water from almost every tributary in the entire Ganga basin!¹⁰ Worse, dams are being built even in the upper reaches of the Ganga. According to a report published by Wildlife Institute of India in May 2018, 16 existing and 14 ongoing hydroelectric projects on the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda river basins (these two meet at

Devprayag, after which the river is called Ganga) have turned the upper stretch of the Ganga into an "ecological desert".¹¹ Just the Tehri Dam built on the Bhagirathi River in Tehri in Uttarakhand state has reduced the lean season flow at Haridwar from 6,500 cusec to around 1,000 cusec.¹²

A river, to be called a river, must flow. For Ganga to continue to be the lifeline it has been for crores of Indians since ancient times, for Ganga water to retain its almost magical properties, the river must be allowed to flow. For that, environmentalists say that no more than 30% of the flow in the river should be allowed to be diverted for agricultural, domestic or industrial purposes.¹³ For any meaningful effort to clean up and rejuvenate the Ganga, among all the steps that need to be taken, removing the impediments to the uninterrupted flow of the river is the most important.

For this, apart from taking steps to regulate extraction of groundwater and reduce diversion of river water for irrigation, most importantly, we will need to impose a complete ban on construction of more dams on the Ganga. Modern environmental science is now quite emphatic that for generating hydroelectricity, building large dams is not a sustainable technology, and alternate sustainable methods exist.

Saints on Fast for Aviral and Nirmal Ganga

These were precisely the demands of the fast-unto-death undertaken by Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand last year. Before he became a saint, he was known as Professor Guru Das Agrawal, and had taught at Indian Institute of Technology,

Kanpur, and had also served as the founding member-Secretary of the Central Pollution Control Board. Swami Sanand began his fast on June 22, 2018, demanding that Ganga be allowed to flow *Aviral* (uninhibited) and *Nirmal* (unpolluted). For this, he wanted the government to enact a law for conservation of Ganga, scrap all ongoing and proposed hydroelectric power projects on it, ban mining and deforestation activities in its vicinity, and form a council consisting of people sensitive to Ganga to oversee its interests (to be nominated by the Prime Minister). Before he began his fast, Swami Sanand twice wrote to the Prime Minister, and then during his fast, he again twice wrote to him. But our much vocal Prime Minister, who speaks out his mind to the country regularly in public broadcasts known as *Mann ki Baat*, chose not to respond. Swami Sanand died on the 112th day of his fast. Modi then broke his 'maun' and tweeted a condolence.

Modi's Love for Ganga another 'Jumla'

The reason why the BJP/RSS and Modi chose to completely ignore the demands raised by Professor Agrawal turned Swami Sanand is that the issues raised by him go against Modi's and the BJP's ideological outlook, in which 'development' means 'construction', and that is more important for the BJP than the health of Ganga. The BJP is keen to undertake more and more construction projects in the Himalayas, including building all weather roads, even if it involves cutting down large number of trees thereby destabilising the hills, and speeding up construction of hydroelectric projects irrespective

of their consequences for the *aviral* and *nirmal* flow of Ganga.

Clearly, PM Modi's concern for *Maa Gange* is only another of his big lies.

And so, four years after the launch of Namami Gange, river Ganga is today more polluted than it was earlier. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), an organisation under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, monitors the quality of Ganga water from Gangotri, where the river originates, to West Bengal, at 80 sites. The CPCB's findings are that on all the scientific parameters on the basis of which the quality of Ganga water is determined—the Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) level, the Dissolved Oxygen level, total coliform bacteria level and pH level—the Ganga is more polluted now than it was in 2013.¹⁴

Swami Sanand (Prof G.D. Agrawal) had chosen Matri Sadan in Haridwar as the site for his fast. The head of Matri Sadan, Swami Shivanand, has announced that he and his disciples are going to continue the unfinished task undertaken by Prof. Agrawal, and that one saint after another will sit on fast until the demand of Professor G.D. Agrawal to let Ganga flow uninterrupted and clean is met by the government. After Prof. Agrawal's death, Brahmachari Atmabodhanand, a 26-year-old ascetic from Kerala, sat down on fast. Finally, after he had fasted for a heroic 194 days, the government used a trick to get him to break his fast. The Director-General of the NMCG wrote to Swami Shivanand, head of Matri Sadan, that during the elections, the government cannot take policy decisions, and that the Uttarakhand government's policy

on hydropower projects would be reviewed after the elections. So, on May 5, the saints of Matri Sadan decided to suspend their struggle till after the elections, and Swami Atmabodhanand broke his fast on May 5. With such powerful vested interests involved, and a very pro-corporate government in power, it is going to be a tough struggle to force it to accede to the demands for which Prof. Agrawal sacrificed his life.

Why doesn't the RSS mobilise its cadre, which number in lakhs, to reach out to the crores of people living in the Ganga basin, and educate and organise them and build up a powerful social movement that will force the government to take steps to clean up and rejuvenate the Ganga—a river that is revered by the Hindus as sacred. Such a social movement would genuinely benefit crores of people. Instead, it is mobilising people across the country for building a Ram Temple and raking up issues like Love Jihad and holy cow—issues which do not benefit anyone really, but which have led to attacks and even killings of Muslims across the country by violent mobs.

The struggle of these heroic saints of Matri Sadan glaringly brings out the difference between their true Hinduism, and the Hindutva of the RSS and Modi. True Hinduism motivates people to fight for a genuine cause (this is true with all religions actually; as Swami Vivekananda has said, true religion motivates people to devote their life for the good of all). The genuine saints are even willing to sacrifice their lives for it. On the other hand, the Hindutva of Modi and the RSS is only to exploit people's religious sentiments for narrow sectarian ends, to polarise

the people and divide them for votes. If it leads to killings of others (like in riots, lynchings, assassination of intellectuals), so be it—collateral damage.

The Commune is the Supreme Expression of Participatory Democracy

Cira Pascual Marquina

interviews Anacaona Marin of El Panal Commune

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[The Alexis Vive Patriotic Force, which has deep roots in 23 de Enero barrio (an area in a town that is inhabited by poor people) in Caracas (capital of Venezuela), began planning a commune years before Chavez even proposed the communal path toward socialism. Yet, when Chavez announced the plan to join communal councils into a higher form of organisation, Alexis Vive wholeheartedly embraced the initiative and has since then built a highly successful commune called El Panal Commune [1] involving some 13,000 people. We spoke with a key cadre of El Panal about this project that is both economic and political to find out how it is coping with the intense crisis created by US aggressions.]

Cira Pascual Marquina: *The commune is usually thought of a space of construction—for the political and economic reorganisation of society—but it is also a space of resistance. Let’s talk about the commune today, in a period where Venezuela is under attack by imperialism.*

Anacaona Marin: There is a confrontation of models, a clash of two paradigms not only in Venezuela and in Latin America, but also worldwide. One of the questions in the debate is: who is the historical subject? For us, this question means: who is it that takes the initiative, who lights up the field, who pushes changes ahead. And when we reflect on this issue, which means thinking about our own practice, we guide

our interpretation by the proposal that Comandante Chavez advanced.

Chavez developed a hypothesis after a period of intense thought and experiment, after a rigorous analysis of the Venezuelan and continental realities, and after reflecting on the revolutionary potential of the people (based also on a commitment to justice for the poor that was there from the start). His hypothesis was: the commune is the historical subject, the commune and its people is where the revolution really begins. So we made this proposal ours, we committed ourselves to it.

When Chavez first raised the banner of socialism in 2006, when he said that the Bolivarian Revolution must be socialist, when he said that a vote for him is a vote for socialism, he committed himself and the people to a collective project of rupture with the past. And that is where we find the seed of the commune. Self-government and economic emancipation go hand-in-hand with socialism, with a people in power.

We were aware that the proposal and our embracing it was going to be attacked from the very beginning, even when it was only being proposed. At that time itself, it became clear to us that there was going to be a new level of confrontation. We knew that the path towards socialism was going to be demonised, that opposition would pop up everywhere, inside and outside. And that is precisely what happened. The communes hadn’t even been born yet, and we

were already in struggle! And if we go deeper, the truth is that we have been resisting for more than five hundred years.

Today, we are not only resisting imperialism. We are also resisting old forms of production and their diverse forms of domination: from the organisation of education and its effects, to the organisation of the formal political sphere and the economy.

Why is there conflict? Because we are making a counter-hegemonic proposal to a system that is powerful, a system that seems part and parcel of what the human being is. In the face of this system, the communal being stands tall and says: Hey, this doesn't have to be so, this is not the only option. The communal being resolutely affirms that capitalism is not a natural occurrence, it is an imposition.

The communes are counter-hegemonic spaces, they have a potential to be hegemonic themselves. From our commune, we aim to show that another organisation of society is possible, that power must be reorganised, that power should be in the hands of the people. That means combining new economic relations with an exercise of power in the commune's territory.

CPM: *Here we are in the midst of El Panal Commune, which has a range of productive projects: from a bakery and a textile factory to cultivated land and an industrial packaging plant. How is all this organised?*

AM: El Panal Commune has some specific characteristics. We, as Alexis Vive, began thinking about building a commune in 2006, and soon after, we began working on it. However, the Law of Communes wasn't promulgated until 2009. The

law states that communal councils would be the embryo that would foster the formation of a commune. But by then, here in Alexis Vive, we had already begun evolving our own path of building a commune.

In our case, the Alexis Vive Patriotic Force generated a collective practice and a collective debate that pointed the path towards building the commune, helped along with Chavez's ideas. The community here, in the central part of 23 de Enero barrio in Caracas, liked and agreed with the idea, and readily agreed to implement it. Since then, we have come a long way.

Here, in the territory of our commune, the "Panalitos por la Patria" ("Beehives for the Homeland")—which are small discussion and work groups—are the DNA of the communal body. The Panalitos are formed by people from the community with a high degree of commitment to the commune. They are the engines of the communal initiative.

Additionally, we have "brigades", which is a term that the Alexis Vive Patriotic Force chose after much debate. The debate was based around our study of the Chilying Commune in China [2], which had various structures of participation for the people: councils, brigades and producers. The division there was based on a commitment to work and struggle. The brigades were made up of a militant group of communards with a lifelong commitment to the struggle. In our commune, these brigades are made up of professional cadres, and they take the responsibility for the most important issues of production and distribution in the community. They are also very politically advanced units.

Finally, we have the associated work collectives, which are the communal groups directly involved with producing goods and services. Since the commune is not an appendix of the state or the government, it must be autonomous and it must generate the resources it requires to address the community's needs. The associated work collectives are spaces for direct production, and the surplus from their production goes back to the commune and thus to the community.

This is how we organise the grassroots planning and administration of resources in our commune. Some of our resources go to sustaining a people's canteen, some to communications, some to the community's medical expenses, and some to transportation and infrastructure. We also have resources allotted for contingencies. All of these resources come from the associated work collectives. After all, the commune is not just a cultural, social and political organisation, it is also an economic organisation.

There is another "higher" element to the commune's organisation: the patriotic assembly, the space where people of the commune gather to decide collectively what must be done and how, through participatory democracy.

CPM: *Let's come back to the situation today: the imperialist aggression. In the past couple of months, we have witnessed a new form of war with the attacks on the electric grid and the electrical blackout. Tell us about how you have organised resistance in the commune in this context.*

AM: We are the daughters and sons of Chavez. We listened to his words and we learned. As a result of that, we understood that when you

stand up against capital and against imperialism, there is only one option: be ready to fight. If we are going to tell imperialism that we are no longer its backyard—that we have chosen the path to full independence and on top of that we are moving towards socialism—then we must understand that we are going to be in a war with a military superpower.

A new phase of aggression against our country has begun. They try to restrict our access to food and they have implemented a financial blockade and, more recently, an oil embargo. They also attack us culturally. They try to instill fear in us. Most recently, they attacked our electrical system, which is fundamental for modern life.

We were aware that this was coming, so we prepared for a war economy, through organisation and work. We also prepared through research and by paying attention to popular creativity. A contingency plan was in place. So when this new phase of the aggression began, we were ready for it with the necessary resources.

Our planning allowed us to build—in the midst of the blackout—a diesel-powered electrical grid for our collective spaces. That alternative power supply considerably reduced the hardships we had to face, and also made for a less hostile environment during the blackout. You see, the commune acts as a kind of state or government in everyday life, and it does so also when faced with a contingency or an aggression.

CPM: Many people do not know about the spontaneous forms of solidarity that emerged during the blackout. I witnessed beautiful gestures during those days, especially among my neighbours,

both Chavistas and the opposition. What happened here in 23 de Enero?

AM: It was an all-out assault on our lives! But when faced with terrible, catastrophic situations, popular kindness, solidarity and sisterhood blooms! This is not mere socialist rhetoric; ordinary people are intrinsically brave and noble. We don't believe that the human being is selfish by nature. Human beings are born and grow up in society; the human being is part of a whole, of a collective. The genesis of humanity is in the commons, in working together towards shared ends, and those collective instincts flourish when people face a war-like situation.

I can give you an example from our experience. We organise weekly fairs where fruits and vegetables are sold at very low prices through the "Pueblo a Pueblo" initiative (direct coordination with farmers). During the blackout, we sold on credit (since the electronic payment infrastructure was not working). Once the blackout was over, the people came and paid back their debts, every single one of them. One can see here that the response from the people was not selfish. People didn't take advantage of the situation, even though they could have. Instead, those days were characterised by intense collective consciousness.

CPM: In describing popular power I often refer to the trilogy of self-government, self-determination and self-defense. If the commune sometimes functions as a state, as you said, that means communes generate a situation of dual power. This could lead to tensions between the existing state and the commune.

AM: When Chavez promoted the idea of the commune, what he did was very daring. In fact,

much of his idea was advanced via the Enabling Act [the National Assembly had given Chavez the power to legislate by presidential decree] since his proposal was sure to rub the establishment the wrong way. By doing so, Chavez broke with the logic of the state.

Alvaro Garcia Linera talks about "creative tensions" that allow for new things to happen. When you move away from constituted power, that creates a space for the new to bloom, that allows flowers to spring forth from the creative tensions. We welcome contradictions. If we didn't have them, it would mean that we do not have an alternate project, it would mean that we are part and parcel with our society's hegemonic logic, which is capitalist.

On the question of dual power: we don't think of it in terms of a parallel state. Instead, we consider the communes to be the crystallisation of a proposal initiated by President Chavez. He understood that the commune, through self-government and autonomous popular economic activity, would bring about the new state, a communal state. But of course, it is still a process under construction.

As I was saying earlier, we encounter contradictions everywhere. Although some state institutions may be hostile to our commune, our commune has, in general, benefited from the goodwill of people within the state, people who support our commune, who want our project to advance. We have received economic and technical support from the state, and that has helped us build popular power.

We know that tensions and contradictions will remain, and we welcome them since we do not seek a static situation. Rather, we seek

change, and change only happens when there are contradictions.

CPM: *Is it fair to say, however, that the commune is not in the forefront of the government's political discourse now?*

AM: Absolutely. Look, when Chavez became a public figure, many from the left didn't understand that they had to change course, that the only way forward was with Chavez. Likewise, many within Nicolas Maduro's government maintain the old conception of the state and don't understand that the commune is the goal.

However, that is what the Bolivarian Revolution is: a combination of very diverse currents. Within the Revolution, there is an intense debate about the commune, sometimes hidden, sometimes open. Our role is to show that the commune is indeed the historical subject. We show this through our example, and, in doing so, we hope to make a rupture with the old ways and become hegemonic.

Our contribution to this important debate is through our practice, through our work. Our constructive criticism can be found in the concrete example that we are creating. Building a commune brings forth a new culture, a new form of doing politics, and new economic relations. Against the logic of representative democracy, we propose participatory and protagonistic democracy, and the commune is the supreme expression of the latter.

CPM: *The media discourse tends to criminalise poor barrio dwellers. It has been going on for a long time. Recently, there has been a great deal of focus on "colectivos" [a common form of grassroots organisation in urban Latin America*

and Venezuela in particular] to make them seem as if they were merely gangs or paramilitary organisations. Has that affected your projects in the 23 de Enero barrio?

AM: Indeed, there is nothing new about all that. Earlier, during the 1960s to the 1990s, the communists and the radical urban left were considered to be the source of all evil. Later the Bolivarian Circles were criminalised. Frankly, every expression of popular organisation that isn't submissive has always been criminalised in history. That's because popular organisation is, indeed, a problem for the system. The mass media has always demonised the people when they organise, so it shouldn't surprise us.

Now, in this new phase of the imperialist aggression, we can see that popular action is once again being criminalised. They are in a process of rebranding "colectivos"

Letter to Editor

Response to "Why Janata Party Parted with Jan Sangh over RSS" by Madhu Limaye

Aniruddha Limaye

(In my musings below, I have referred to Madhu Limaye as Bhai, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Doctorkaka and George Fernandes as Georgekaka, which is what I called them.)

In my opinion sharing this article now is quite opportune. However, I'm not sure how many people who have been misled into believing the 'myth' of the greatness of RSS, its societal contribution and its so-called sacrifice, selflessness and patriotism, will recognise and accept the truth. The fascist and divisive

as terrorist organisations, as the maximum expression of evil. The poor Chavistas defending themselves in the streets, the slum dwellers defending their territories, are defending themselves! That needs to be stopped! And for that, the best way is declare them as criminals, as terrorists. Why do they do this? To instill fear in the people, to prevent poor people from organising.

Notes

- [1] Panal means beehive or honeycomb in Spanish.
- [2] The Chiling Commune was a pioneer commune in Honan province in China. It was subject of a classic study by Li Chu, titled *Inside a People's Commune*, that Chavez encouraged people to read.

(Cira Pascual Marquina writes for Venezuelanalysis.com.)

nature of RSS and its offspring are no longer visible and perceptible to those who have been brainwashed by the incessant propaganda. Worse, some have become admirers of it.

First of all I want to comment on the post-independence disservice that Smt. Indira Gandhi has done to the Indian National Congress and India by promoting dynastic politics and virtually destroying all inner party democratic processes and institutions, promoting endless sycophancy and humiliating, sidelining, destroying capable

leaders, who were her peers and juniors. All these destructive practices (destructive of the Indian political ethos) have not only undermined the Congress, but have had a much wider negative impact. These pernicious practices have been readily adopted by virtually every other political party and political leaders at all levels. Consequently, merit, calibre, character, dedicated hard work, sacrifice, contribution, etc., have been made irrelevant and without any value or significance in Indian politics.

The Congress leaders as well as its rank and file members/workers have, over these decades, displayed spinelessness and endless hero worship, such that only a Nehru–Gandhi family member is projected and accepted as the supreme party leader in the Congress. The party, which during its pre-independence days and immediate post-independence existence had such a large number of very capable and some truly great leaders, now can hardly boast of any.

Having said this, I would also like to state what I see as another truth, a bitter pill that is likely to upset many, who cannot stomach any criticism of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's policies. I think that unless a person, a team, an organisation or even a movement acknowledges, assesses and learns from their failures and mistakes as much as from their successes and achievements, there is no progress or change possible.

I'm referring to the disastrous and irreversible blunder, made out of impatience, pique, anger and frustration—rather than his usual insightful brilliance—by none other than Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia (Doctorkaka). And that was introducing the "lethal virus of non-

Congressism in the body politic of India", after the disastrous and humiliating defeat of India in the India–China border war.

When Doctorkaka sought to introduce this fatal policy, Bhai (Madhu Limaye) did not attend the National Committee Meeting of the Socialist Party held in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He resigned from his membership of the National Committee and sent a detailed letter of resignation to Doctorkaka protesting against this policy .

Immediately after this inconclusive meeting (if I remember right it was inconclusive as without Bhai's full support Doctorkaka did not want to push this policy), Doctorkaka came to Mumbai and stayed at our little house as he did always do. For 3–4 days, he argued and pleaded with Bhai trying to convince him and get him to agree to endorse and wholeheartedly support his new strategy of non-Congressism. He also wanted Bhai to withdraw his resignation from the National Committee.

I distinctly remember this trip of Doctorkaka because I also participated in that discussion and asked Doctorkaka a question to this effect. These may not have been my exact words then, but what I asked would have been pretty close to these words. Despite my young age (I was not even 9 years old), I could ask this question because such questions were being discussed in our house for nearly a month before Doctorkaka came from Calcutta: *"How would we be able to implement our Socialist policies and ideology if we were going to join hands with every party, from Communists on one side to Jan Sangh on the other to defeat the Congress?"*

Bhai, of course, had other

concerns as well, which I mention below. To his greatness, Doctorkaka was never dismissive or disrespectful towards any person on account of that person's age or stature. He didn't ask me to shut up. He patiently told me to listen to their discussion in which he would answer this question.

Bhai had several other concerns. The first was that this strategy or policy would make the Socialist Party as well as other parties totally opportunistic. This strategy would dilute the character, fortitude and patience of leaders and activists in all parties, particularly in the Socialist Party, as this policy would be seen as a shortcut to power.

And this policy would shift everybody's attention and focus on to only electoral mathematics and to electoral and summit politics, rendering Doctorkaka's own formulation or prescription (as well as Mahatma Gandhi's similar approach) of *jail* (agitation), *phaavdaa* (constructive work of building institutions, infrastructure, people, etc.) and vote (elections) to a single formula and focus—Vote!

There were other points as well. Doctorkaka really had no convincing answers. It was the first time I had witnessed this. He had just two points.

One was that after the disastrous defeat at the hands of China, continuance of the Congress in power would hurt India immeasurably. And the only quick way to oust the Congress from power, which was now the overarching priority in Doctorkaka's mind, was Non-Congressism—combining the opposition strength and votes to defeat the Congress. Doctorkaka's other argument was that this policy or strategy would be only a "short-term expedient".

Bhai readily accepted that the Congress rule was progressively hurting India and its people, but he rightly thought that Doctorkaka's "remedy was worse than the disease". Bhai was prepared to build, agitate, work and wait. The second objection that Bhai had was that the terrible consequences of this so-called short-term strategy would be irreversible. Almost all parties would never be able to return to principled, ideological politics. The lure of power would be irresistible.

Finally, unable to convince Bhai on the basis of logic, Doctorkaka resorted to emotional blackmail. He used Bhai's great regard, admiration and affection for him as well as Bhai's sense of gratitude for Doctorkaka's unwavering support to him during the split within PSP in 1955 to get Bhai to agree to give this strategy or policy a try, at least for a short period.

Finally, Bhai succumbed and agreed. This policy led to some immediate successes. If I remember right, Acharya J.B. Kripalani and Doctorkaka himself won by-elections to the Lok Sabha. More resounding success of this policy was seen in the 1967 general elections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, although the Congress could retain its majority in the Lok Sabha.

But my question and Bhai's concerns/fears have turned out to be prophetic. Doctorkaka, in his remaining days, was severely agonised, nay traumatised, by the early evidence of rank opportunism that was unleashed in 1967. I have witnessed this in the summer vacation of 1967, when I was a regular visitor at Doctorkaka's Delhi residence, which was then 7 Gurudwara Rakabganj Road (now I think it is No. 24).

Unfortunately, on October 12, 1967, Doctorkaka passed away. He neither had the time nor the opportunity to reverse non-Congressism and the huge wreck it has left behind. Subsequently, Bhai too could not present an acceptable alternative to non-Congressism to anyone since all had tasted some success of the formula.

My apprehension and all of Bhai's concerns have come to haunt India. I don't know for how long India will continue to suffer the ill effects of non-Congressism. Even now non-BJPism hasn't fully succeeded—that is not to praise the Congress!!

To my mind, the other immense damage that the strategy or policy of non-Congressism unwittingly did was to give Jan Sangh / Sangh Parivar legitimacy, votes and seats in 1967 (as a part of the SVD alliance), and thereafter in 1977, as a part of the combined fight that led to Indira Gandhi's / Congress's ouster from the centre and the formation of the Janata Party Government. The Sangh Parivar used its few years in power to influence and pack the bureaucracy, media and what not, with its supporters and adherents to the extent possible.

In the first three general elections (that is up to 1962), the vote share and the number of seats that Jan Sangh got compared either with Socialists or Communists was a fraction. Under the banner of non-Congressism, in 1967 they emerged as a force. They suffered, like most others, in 1984. But after Mandal and Ram Mandir/Ratha Yatra, they have continued to gain strength using their corrosive and divisive rhetoric.

No doubt, in the last 3–4 decades, the leftist ideology has lost ground the world over. But, in my opinion,

in India it has suffered greatly and ceded the centre-stage to the rightist BJP / Sangh Parivar more severely as the result of non-Congressism.

Doctorkaka's non-Congressism let out this dangerous genie from the bottle, which will be almost impossible to contain. To use the old proverb or the words of Goethe's Faust, "No one can win by having a truck with the evil, with the Devil." Of all people, Doctorkaka, who had witnessed for some years the rise of Hitler and Nazism while he was in Germany, should have, more than anyone else, known better!

To this day, it is my 'undying regret' that Bhai agreed to support this policy. Maybe he could have changed Doctorkaka's mind. Maybe Doctorkaka and Bhai would have broken off permanently. Maybe Bhai would not have got the opportunity to become one of India's most effective parliamentarians. Maybe he would have gone into political wilderness. Temperamentally, Bhai was not a mass leader with charisma. He was not a rabble-rousing speaker or orator. He did not possess immense personal ambition either. He knew he couldn't have, on his own, built a new political party or organisation.

Once Bhai agreed to support the strategy of non-Congressism, he never turned back from pursuing this policy right up to the formation of the Janata Party. Many leaders, even during the Emergency, were not ready to go as far as forming a federal party, let alone forming a single party. Many even wanted to boycott the 1977 elections, fearing that Indira Gandhi would rig and win the elections to provide her the legitimacy she sought and craved for. I think the 'myth and mystery of the invisible Russian ink' haunted many leaders from 1971.

I would like to pay my respects and homage to Bhai, Doctorkaka and to Georgekaka who were / are definitely among my heroes. But I don't believe nor have I any compelling need that any of my heroes must be perfect in all respects, forever and more. All of them are human beings and bound to suffer from human follies, just as I do. And therefore, I don't need to defend them needlessly or feel offended if fact based, valid criticism is leveled against any of them.

Georgekaka in his latter phase, particularly since he became the convener of NDA, has been a "great disappointment and immense heart ache" to me. I will not go into any further details, excepting that most of what he did in those years was quite the opposite to what he stood for, without any real justification in my eyes, other than pursuing his personal ambition and to somehow remain significant. And it all ended in humiliation.

I am afraid Georgekaka is not the first or the last one to regress. In my opinion, from Savarkar to Sir Syed Ahmed, Jinnah and Iqbal, all turned against what they avowedly stood for earlier. Who can forget Saare Jahaan se *Acchhaa Hindostan Hamaaraa* by Iqbal? Not me.

Having said that, Georgekaka will remain a hero in my eyes for his immense courage, his energy and ability to organise and galvanise people, his simplicity, his undaunting spirit and struggles, his contribution in getting the Konkan Railway built, and so on. As a child I shared a very close relationship with Georgekaka and have spent weekend holidays with him all by myself. I shared a similar, very close, relationship with Doctorkaka. We've listened to music, played games, even played

'cricket' that I liked and Doctorkaka loathed! But that doesn't stop me from *critiquing* his monumental error in inaugurating non-Congressism.

While non-Congressism is not the only factor in giving the right-wing Jan Sangh / BJP initial legitimacy and helping them in crafting their first electoral breakthrough, it certainly has been a 'very important factor', just as it has been a very important factor in burying ideological and principled politics in India.

Of course, other factors have played their part. But anyone who

thinks that non-Congressism has not been a very critical factor and an initial prime mover in these disastrous developments is, in my opinion, denying it out of immense respect and admiration for Doctorkaka.

I also want to end these musings by reminding all of us that the greatest of human beings and leaders also suffer from human failings, and therefore, it is best to assess and admire everyone critically and on merit and not become blind hero worshippers and followers. We Indians are most prone to doing just that.

Meher Engineer: A Requiem for a Man of Reckonable Height

Prof Sibaji Raha, Ashoke Mukherjee

Meheryar Hosang Engineer was born on December 20, 1940 in Guntur, the younger of two brothers in a Parsi family. His family moved to Kolkata (then Calcutta) when Meher was a few years (4 or 5) old. After the sudden accidental death of his father, Meher and his elder brother were brought up by their mother alone. Meher had all his education in Calcutta. He studied for his B.Sc. (Hons.) degree in Physics at St. Xavier's College, his B.Tech. and M. Tech. degrees at the Institute of Radiophysics and Electronics, University of Calcutta, and did his Ph.D. from the same institute, under the supervision of Prof. B.R. Nag. He obtained his Ph.D. in 1967.

Meher moved to Pennsylvania State University in 1966, first as a Research Associate in Material Science and then as an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Electrical Engineering and Physics.

He moved to the City College of the City University of New York as an Assistant Professor of Physics in 1970. After spending two years there, he returned to India, and joined TIFR as a Visiting Scientist. After two years there, he joined the ONGC where he worked in various capacities for a number of years. In the interim, he was also associated for some time with Harwell Laboratories in the UK. Finally, he moved to Bose Institute, Kolkata as a Professor of Physics in 1987 from where he retired in 2000.

After superannuation, he was re-employed at Bose Institute for two years, ultimately ending his stint in December 2002. He served as Acting Director of Bose Institute during 2000–2001.

He had been married to Sue Engineer, with whom he had two children, Mark and Renu. After Meher and Sue got divorced, she and the two children lived in England and

Meher saw them rather infrequently, although keeping in regular contact.

In addition to being a brilliant physicist, with a vast range of interests, Meher was a highly accomplished violinist, although in later life he was reluctant to reveal the fact. After his mother's death, he lived alone in the flat where he has spent all his life in Kolkata.

Meher was a very decent and sociable man. Although alone from the family side, he was always amidst people. He was very aware

of social issues all his life. Soon after his retirement from academics, he devoted himself whole-heartedly to social and political causes. His involvement in the Nandigram movement, Singur movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, education movement, human rights activities, science popularisation movement and many other progressive activities is well known. In May 2012, on the occasion of the celestial event Transit of Venus, he participated in an observation camp organised by

CESTUSS and BBYS at Behala, Kolkata through the entire hot summer day. Prof. Meher Engineer served as chairperson of All India Forum for Right To Education (AIFRTE) from 2010 till his demise. His principled behavior and uncompromising policy perspective helped all the organisations he was in touch with enormously. In his silent departure, we have lost a great human being of our time. Let his memories survive through years!

India Packs Up on Iran Under US Pressure

M. K. Bhadrakumar

The sudden visit to New Delhi by the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif for a meeting on May 14 with the outgoing External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in the dying days of the Modi government underscores dramatically how much Tehran has been traumatised by the Indian decision under American pressure to summarily stop all imports of Iranian oil w.e.f May 2.

If one were to encapsulate the anguish and bewilderment in the Iranian mind, an analogy would be the plaintive entreaty by Julius Caesar in William Shakespeare's play of that name—'Et tu, Brute' (Even you, Brute)—when on the Ides of March in 44 BC the great Roman statesman spotted amongst the conspirators in the Senate building the pale visage of his old dear friend Marcus Junius Brutus, who were stabbing him in a pre-conceived assassination plot.

To be sure, the unexpected betrayal by the old and dear Indian friend has shocked Tehran.

According to reports, Swaraj offered her best explanation by taking a detour and reportedly holding out a non-committal assurance that Delhi will review the situation after a new government is formed "keeping in mind our commercial considerations, energy security and economic interests."

Now, this is a big shift from the Indian stance that it will only abide by UN sanctions. But then, it is not within Swaraj's competence to commit anything. The Boss has to decide, and he's busy campaigning. In the final analysis, if PM Modi keeps his job, it will be a tricky decision. For, Modi enjoys wonderful friendship with three players of the infamous "B Team"—Benjamin Netanyahu, bin Salman (Saudi Crown Prince), bin Zayed (UAE Crown Prince)—and is wary of the fourth player, Bolton (Trump's national security advisor). And the B team sponsors the Iran project, which is about 'regime change' in Tehran.

The most galling thing about

the Indian betrayal is that amongst the three top importers of Iranian oil—China included—it's only India that summarily packed up under American pressure. For the Modi government which claims to be 'muscular', such cowardly behaviour is a matter of shame. Simply put, the strategic understanding forged during the historic meeting between Modi and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in Ufa, Russia, on the sidelines of the SCO summit in May 2019 turns out to be a damp squib. Tehran is bound to reflect over the quality of the hand of friendship that Modi extended.

To jog memory, India is party to a trilateral MOU with Iran and Afghanistan with plans to commit at least \$21 billion to developing the Chabahar–Hajigak corridor, including \$85 million for Chabahar port development by India. This includes \$150 million line of credit by India to Iran, \$8 billion India–Iran MoU for Indian industrial investment in Chabahar Special Economic Zone, \$11 billion for the

Hajigak iron and steel mining project awarded to seven Indian companies in central Afghanistan, and \$2 billion commitment to Afghanistan for developing supporting infrastructure including the construction of the Chabahar–Hajigaj railway line.

The Chabahar–Hajigaj railway line holds the potential to expand trade manifold via connectivity to the 7,200-km-long multi-mode North-South Transport Corridor India is working on to connect to Europe and Turkey—and all across Russia by linking with the R297 Amur highway and the Trans-Siberian Highway. Over and above, a planned Herat to Mazar-i-Sharif railway will provide access for the Central Asia states via Chabahar Port to link with the Indian market. The Chabahar Port also provides the only means for India developing direct access to its erstwhile air base in Farkhor in Tajikistan. Expert opinion is that Chabahar route will result in 60% reduction in shipment costs and 50% reduction in shipment time from India to Central Asia.

The Indian media quoted government sources to the effect that the compliance with the US sanctions against Iran is the price that Washington demanded from India as quid pro quo for its support in the UN Security Council on the designation of Masood Azhar as global terrorist. The veracity of this interpretation can never be established, because the Americans will never claim ownership of any derailment of the India–Iran relationship.

Yet, it is an unfair linkage since Azhar designation has been far from a solo US enterprise. It was a collective effort where Britain and China probably played key roles alongside some very

effective behind-the-scene bilateral negotiations between Delhi and Beijing aimed at carrying Pakistan along. The Americans are always quick to claim credit when something good happens—and there is always the Indian chorus that is only too keen to echo such tall claims.

Indeed, the “big picture” is not at all reassuring. For, Washington has now added two further templates to its “linkage diplomacy” vis-a-vis India. First, Washington has ratcheted up the pressure on India to remove “overly restrictive market access barriers” against American products—to quote from a speech in Delhi by visiting US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross in New Delhi last week. Ross repeated President Donald Trump’s accusation that India is a “tariff king”, and threatened India with “consequences” if it responded to US tariffs with counter-tariffs. Ross audaciously proposed that India could balance the trade figures by buying more American weaponry.

So, what do we have here? Delhi falls in line with the US diktat on Iran sanctions, which of course will hit the Indian economy very badly, while the US is also at the same time aggressively demanding that India should open up its market for American exports. Why can’t the Modi government prioritise India’s economic concerns?

Second, the Trump administration is cracking the whip on India to give up the S-400 missile defence system and conform to the US sanctions against Russia’s arms industry. A report in *Hindustan Times* says that the US expects India to instead buy from it the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and Patriot Advance Capability (PAC-3) missile defence systems as an alternative to

S-400. But these American systems are far more expensive and may still not be on par with the advanced S-400 system in capability.

Evidently, like in the case with Iran, the US attempt is to complicate India–Russia relations by forcing Modi to resile from a commitment he gave to President Vladimir Putin on the S-400 deal.

Meanwhile, another report has appeared that under American pressure, India joined a US-led naval exercise in the South China Sea with America’s Asian allies Japan and the Philippines. Whereas the US, Japan and the Philippines are longstanding allies bound together under military pacts, India is not part of any alliance system. Yet, India took part in the exercise in the disputed South China Sea within a ‘Quad Lite’ format. The US secretary of state Mike Pompeo has a cute expression for it—“banding together”.

The running theme in all this is that India’s strategic ties with Iran, Russia and China are coming under challenge from Washington. But the big question is how come Washington regards the “muscular” Modi government with a 56” chest to be made of such cowardly stuff? Are the ruling elites so thoroughly compromised with the Americans? There are no easy answers.

(The writer is a former diplomat.)

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One Million Species Face Extinction: UN Report

Countercurrents Team

Nearly one million species risk becoming extinct within decades while current efforts to conserve the earth's resources will likely fail if radical action is not taken, says a major UN report on the impact of humans on nature.

Speaking in Paris at the launch of the 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services—the first such report since 2005—UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said that its findings put the world “on notice”.

“Following the adoption of this historic report, no one will be able to claim that they did not know,” the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation said. “We can no longer continue to destroy the diversity of life. This is our responsibility towards future generations.”

Highlighting the universal importance of biodiversity—the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems—Ms. Azoulay said that protecting it “is as vital as fighting climate change”.

Presented to more than 130 government delegations for their approval at UNESCO headquarters, the report features the work of 400 experts from at least 50 countries, coordinated by the Bonn-based Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

The Global Assessment made after a three-year review of some 15,000 scientific papers showed the profound impact of the rise of a globalised industrial society on biodiversity in our planet over the past half-century.

One in four species at risk of extinction

On at-risk fauna and flora, the study asserts that human activities “threaten more species now than ever before”. It suggests that around one million species “already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss.”

559 domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture extinct

It notes that despite many local efforts, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, by 2016, 559 of the 6,190 domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture were extinct—around nine per cent of the total—and at least 1,000 more are threatened.

Crop security threatened

In addition, many crop wild relatives that are needed for long-term food security “lack effective protection”, the report insists while the status of wild relatives of domesticated mammals and birds “is worsening”.

At the same time, reductions in the diversity of cultivated crops, crop wild relatives and domesticated breeds mean that farming will likely be less resilient against future climate change, pests and pathogens.

“While more food, energy and materials than ever before are now being supplied to people in most places, this is increasingly at the expense of nature's ability to provide such contributions in the future,” the report states, before adding that “the

biosphere, upon which humanity as a whole depends, is declining faster than at any time in human history”.

Marine pollution has increased tenfold since 1980

On the issue of pollution, although global trends are mixed, air, water and soil pollution have continued to increase in some areas, the report insists. “Marine plastic pollution in particular has increased tenfold since 1980, affecting at least 267 species”, it says, including 86 per cent of marine turtles, 44 per cent of seabirds and 43 per cent of marine mammals.

Business as usual has to end

The relentless pursuit of economic growth, twinned with climate crisis, has brought forth this crisis. Only a wide-ranging transformation of the global economic and financial system could pull ecosystems that are vital to the future of human communities worldwide back from the brink of collapse, concluded the report.

The report has been endorsed by 130 countries, including the United States, Russia and China.

“We have been running from one frontier to another frontier trying to find cheap nature (to exploit) in every corner of the planet,” Eduardo Brondizio, a professor of anthropology at Indiana University in the United States who co-chaired the Global Assessment, told Reuters. The scientist said: “The key message: business, as usual, has to end.”

“The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed,”

said Professor Josef Settele, co-chair of the study. “This loss is a direct result of human activity and constitutes a direct threat to human well-being in all regions of the world”, he added.

The study is a cornerstone of an emerging body of research that suggests the world may need to embrace a new “post-growth” form of economics if it is to avert the existential risks posed by the mutually-reinforcing consequences of pollution, habitat destruction and carbon emissions. The report identifies industrial farming and fishing as major drivers of extinction. Climate crisis is aggravating the situation.

Robert Watson, a British environmental scientist, said one could go back only if societies were prepared to confront “vested interests” committed to preserving the status quo. “The report also tells us that it is not too late to make a difference, but only if we start now at every level from local to global,” he said in a statement.

“We know that the way people eat today is often unhealthy for them and for the planet,” said Dr. Kate Brauman, one of the report’s authors. “We can become healthier as individuals by eating more diverse diets, with more vegetables, and we can also make the planet healthier by growing that food in more sustainable ways.”

According to the report, the loss of the natural world would also affect human lives. From the disappearance of insects vital for pollinating food crops, to the destruction of coral reefs, which support fish populations that sustain coastal communities, or the loss of medicinal plants, all would inevitably risk human lives. The threatened list includes

more than 40 percent of amphibian species, almost 33 percent of reef-forming corals, and more than a third of all marine mammals. The picture was less clear for insect species, but a tentative estimate suggests 10 percent are at risk of extinction.

Another report by the United Nations Food Organisation (FAO) also issued a similar warning in February 2019. It said that bees, soil, trees—even tiny organisms we can’t even see—all play a vital role in producing the world’s food. Yet, this biodiversity, which supports our food and agriculture systems, is under stress. The report found 33 percent of fish stocks endangered due to overfishing and bee colony losses on the rise—all factors that endanger the world’s food security.

Sixth mass extinction already underway

The IPBES report warns of “an imminent rapid acceleration in the global rate of species extinction.” The pace of loss “is already tens to hundreds of times higher than it has been, on average, over the last 10 million years,” it notes. Many experts think a “mass extinction event”—only the sixth in the last half-billion years—is already under way.

The most recent is the end of the Cretaceous period some 66 million years ago, when a 10-kilometer-wide asteroid strike wiped out most lifeforms.

Scientists estimate that Earth is today home to some eight million distinct species, a majority of them insects. A quarter of catalogued animal and plant species are already being crowded, eaten or poisoned out of existence. The drop in sheer numbers is even more dramatic, with wild mammal biomass—their

collective weight—down by 82 percent. Humans and livestock account for more than 95 percent of mammal biomass.

“If we’re going to have a sustainable planet that provides services to communities around the world, we need to change this trajectory in the next ten years, just as we need to do that with climate,” noted WWF chief scientist Rebecca Shaw, formerly a member of the UN scientific bodies for both climate and biodiversity.

The direct causes of species loss, in order of importance, are shrinking habitat and land-use change, hunting for food or illicit trade in body parts, climate change, pollution, and alien species such as rats, mosquitoes and snakes that hitch rides on ships or planes, the report finds.

Biodiversity loss and global warming are closely linked, according to the 44-page Summary for Policy Makers, which distills the 1,800-page UN assessment of scientific literature on the state of nature. Shifts in the distribution of species, for example, will likely double if average temperature goes up a notch from 1.5 degrees Celsius to 2°C. So far, the global thermometer has risen 1°C compared with mid-19th century levels. The 2015 Paris Agreement enjoins nations to cap the rise to “well below” 2°C. But a landmark UN climate report in October said that would still be enough to boost the intensity and frequency of deadly heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms.

The report cautioned against climate change solutions that may inadvertently harm Nature. The use, for example, of biofuels combined with “carbon capture and storage”—the sequestration of CO₂ released when biofuels are burned—is widely

seen as key in the transition to green energy on a global scale. But the land needed to grow all those biofuel crops may wind up cutting into food production, the expansion of protected areas or reforestation efforts.

Note by Editor:

In 1964, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, a poet from Minjerribah (in the land known as Australia) wrote *We Are Going*. The poem talked of the extinction of the world of the aboriginal people, their lands gone, their customs eroded. (The ‘bora ring’ is a ceremonial space and the ‘corroboree’ is a dance ceremony). Was he prophesying about all of humanity?

We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.

We are nature and the past, all the old ways

Gone now and scattered.

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.

The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.

The bora ring is gone.

The corroboree is gone.

And we are going.

Madhu Dandavate

By

B. Vivekanandan

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Modi Govt has Crippled the Public Sector

B. Sivaraman

ONGC, the once-glittering and now struggling Maharatna, best exemplifies the fact that there is something sinister in the very approach of the outgoing Modi Government towards the public sector enterprises (PSUs). In May 2019, the cash reserves of ONGC, the richest PSU, had fallen in the last two years of Modi Government to a miserable Rs 167 crore.

As it needs at least Rs 1,00,000 crore, including Rs 5,000 crore in cash, to meet working capital requirements per annum including for paying salaries, ONGC executives are running to banks, and executives of public sector banks already saddled with NPAs are hesitant to infuse more loans in view of the precarious financial position of the ONGC.

The warning issued by the ONGC’s Employees Mazdoor Sabha General Secretary A.R. Tadvi in October 2018 has proved to be prophetic. In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister Modi on 4 September 2018, Tadvi alleged that “Decisions taken over the past four-and-a-half years have broken the economic backbone of the company.”

The employee’s union has given a notice period of three months to give ONGC a free hand to take its own decisions. The workers warned Modi of direct action if his government’s policies leading to a disaster were not reversed. But the disaster has now occurred.

The ONGC was arm-twisted by the government to bail out the Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation (GSPC) with its reserves when it

was forced to buy a barren gas block from GSPC for Rs 8,000 crore. Then it was forced to buy a sick Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL) for Rs 36,915 crore in an off-market deal.

Over and above this twin burden, ONGC was ordered to pay a dividend of Rs 7,764 to the government in 2016–17 and Rs 8,470 crore in 2017–18. Additionally, it was pushed to do a share buyback of Rs 4,022 crore, through which the government transferred a part of its holdings to the company to raise money in the name of disinvestment.

This comes over and above a masochistic hara-kiri of forcing ONGC to invest money in oil exploration, develop new fields and then sell the successful blocks to Indian and foreign private corporates at the diktats of the World Bank in 1991.

Answering a question in the Lok Sabha, the Union Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said that ONGC and Oil India Ltd (OIL) spent over Rs 13,000 crore on 115 oil and gas discoveries. He said that these discoveries were taken away from them by the government for auctioning to private companies! Robbing PSU Peters to Pay Cairn–Vedanta–Ambani Pauls!

But then, ONGC is no isolated case. Modi Government resorted to four routes to drain PSUs of cash—new PSU IPOs, disinvestment through an exchange-traded fund (mutual fund), forcing the PSUs to go in for share buyback and forcing them to pay a higher dividend to the government.

During its first four and a half years in office, Modi Government sold away PSU stocks to the tune of more than Rs 2,10,000 crore, 58% of all disinvestment since 1991. Finance Minister Jaitley announced that Rs 85,000 crore was raised through disinvestment in 2018–19 and a target of Rs 1,00,000 crore has been set for 2019–20.

To meet its ambitious disinvestment targets, the Modi Government launched an exchange-traded fund (ETF), managed by Reliance Nippon, a subsidiary of Reliance Capital, which is one of the group companies of Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group, which itself is now facing loan defaults and bankruptcy.

By March 2019, the government garnered Rs 28,500 crore by selling its PSU shares through the CPSE ETF paying Reliance Nippon 7.1%, or Rs 2,023 crore, as commission. Blame it on Anil Ambani's Reliance Nippon's wisdom or not, the share prices of almost all CPSE ETF-traded stocks fell uniformly, hurting not only the government, but also hitting the workers below the belt in the process.

The EPFO was forced to invest workers' money in CPSE ETF and got pathetic returns of 1.89%, and hence it is grudging to pay even 8.5% interest to the workers on their EPF savings. The trade unions rightly protested the EPFO's decision well in advance. In all, the Modi Government has raised Rs 48,325 crore though all ETFs, including that of Anil Ambani.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Joint Secretary Venudhar Reddy Nukala revealed that in 2018–19, LIC and PSBs were asked to invest Rs 25,000 crore in ETFs

trading in PSU stocks. This was how Modi Government sucked the PSUs dry.

There were also new PSU IPOs launched in such a senseless manner that they flopped at the stock market where market price per share sunk far below the issue price, creating favourable conditions for private corporates to grab them for a song.

The forced share buybacks from 11 PSUs—Coal India, NTPC, NALCO, NMDC, NLC, BHEL, NHPC, NBCC, SJVN, KIOCL and even a cash-strapped HAL—fetched the Modi Government another Rs 1,03,000 crore.

The disinvestment disaster apart, in February 2019, the Modi Government finalised a list of 24 state-owned companies for outright strategic sale and they included Dredging Corporation of India, HLL Lifecare, Bharat Earth Movers Ltd, Units/JVs of ITDC, Bhadrawati, Salem and Durgapur units of SAIL,

Nagarnar Steel Plant of NMDC, Central Electronics and Ferro Scrap Nigam.

This fire sale apart, similar to the ONGC–HPCL model, the government saddled the cash-rich profit-making PSUs with sick ones instead of recapitalising them directly from the budget and reviving them. This apart, the government has finalised a plan to monetise the land and other assets of PSUs like Air India and BSNL and has appointed DIPAM as the executioner.

First strangulating to death the PSUs through various forms of attrition instead of making them viable, and then handing over the carcass to the private corporates for a song—this is the crux of India's disinvestment drama of the last five years. The executioner of this none other than Modi in his new avatar as a PSU-killer!

(Courtesy: National Herald)

Trump: Emulating Hitler

Atilio Borón

The events of recent days in Venezuela corroborate, for the umpteenth time but now with total brazenness, Washington's intention to seize that country by establishing a neocolonial protectorate there at any price. John Bolton's press conference on April 30 attests to what we have said. A serial liar, he acted and spoke with absolute contempt for the Charter of the United Nations, which clearly establishes the principle of the self-determination of nations and condemns any attempt to subjugate one nation to the will of another.

That cowardly operetta buffoon insists that "Maduro must go" and that Juan Guaidó, who according to Washington is the legitimate president of Venezuela, must assume his functions as soon as possible. According to this shady National Security Advisor to Donald Trump, Maduro's days are numbered and he barely holds on to power thanks to a constellation of international forces who are completely against democracy and the will of Venezuelan citizens.

In his statement, this despicable supremacist pointed out the three

actors that, according to him, sustain Maduro: the Cuban troops, some 22–25 thousand, who he claims are the ones that really control the Bolivarian Armed Forces, thus transforming the Cuban doctors into combat troops; the collectives, those “gangs of thugs” who are also the creation of Havana; and “other external forces” among whom Russia stands out.

“We need,” he said in his opening statement before questions, “a Venezuela governed by its people and not by outside forces, and that is what we are looking for.”

Bolton mentioned Cuba and Cubans eleven times in his speech, something absolutely extraordinary that reveals that the objective of this escalation of aggressions and interventionism transcends the homeland of Bolívar and Chávez and has multiple objectives, that include the rebel island and Nicaragua, explicitly fulminated as “the troika of tyrannies” in the Americas. The collectives supposedly created by the Cubans were mentioned five times at the press conference, and he also uttered additional utter nonsense: that General Padrino López and the General Staff of the FANB report to Havana and that it is from there that they receive their orders.

President Trump, Bolton said, “wants to see a peaceful transfer of power from Maduro to Guaidó” without further delay. Those who support Maduro, and particularly those who are not Venezuelans, should know that “all options are on the table”. The next day Mike Pompeo, another buffoon—who by his last name and even by his physical appearance looks like a member of Al Capone’s mob—who to the shame of the US serves as

its Secretary of State, advanced his attack on another “external factor,” Russia. He stated that President Vladimir Putin had been warned that his involvement with the Venezuelan “regime” was a cause for enormous concern in the United States.

This prompted a resounding response from Russia’s Foreign Ministry, which reminded him that “Washington’s interference in Venezuela’s affairs is a flagrant violation of international law.”

From the foregoing it can be inferred that we are approaching a decisive situation for the future of emancipatory struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean. Not only Venezuela, but also Cuba and Nicaragua are under the spotlight and are a US military objective. The complicity of the “democrats” of the region with this attempt to take over Venezuela is repugnant, as is the collusive and cowardly silence of the European governments, unworthy vassals of a deranged Caligula and their clique of criminal fanatics willing to do anything.

They lie shamelessly and knowingly, but lying and defaming is a crucial chapter in the manual of destabilising operations that the White House has compiled and applied on countless occasions. Remember that they had claimed that Cuba and the USSR had introduced sophisticated weaponry in the Dominican Republic during the short government of Juan Bosch. When the US army invaded the island in April 1965, 44,000 Marines found a Dominican army equipped with obsolete weapons, remnants of World War II, and a people that repelled them with machetes, stones and sticks.

They lied to create a climate of opinion favorable to the coup against

Joao Goulart in Brazil in 1964, against Salvador Allende in 1973, against Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement in Granada in 1983, when there was also talk of Cuban presence and sophisticated armaments carefully hidden in homes specially adapted for that purpose. They were never found.

They also lied when they reported the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which were never found. And before that, in 1945, when they said there was no trace of radioactivity in Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombing. The US government, the curse of all the free peoples of the world, lies by default.

And now they are lying treacherously about the situation in Venezuela and Cuba’s role in that country. They count on the complicity of the hegemonic media, which have become pestilent sewers where anything and everything is said that could destroy the reputation of an enemy of the empire. Day and night non-stop they excrete their lies with outrageous impunity and total contempt for what should be a Hippocratic oath of journalists (and also of academics and intellectuals) that there can be no other than “telling the truth and denouncing the lies,” as Noam Chomsky said succinctly.

But no. The voices of so many vestals of the republic and democracy that have harassed every progressive government in this part of the world remain ignominiously silent. In this way, they reveal their dishonourable condition of foul-mouthed charlatans paid by the empire. They reveal that they lack independence and professionalism and that their words are fatally contaminated with the dirty money

of the White House gangster who wants to culminate the larceny that has already begun in Venezuela by appropriating its international assets (gold in England, CITGO in the United States, etc.).

And the same goes for those responsible for international organisations. What does Antonio Gutiérrez, Secretary General of the UN, say in the face of the vulgarities uttered by Bolton? Not to mention Luis Almagro, the secretary general of the OAS, who competes head to head with Lenin (a) “Donald” Moreno in the fierce dispute to establish who is the most corrupt traitor in Our America. The list would be endless.

All have become accomplices, or should we say, the emperor’s lackeys—the “serious” journalists, the sophisticated intellectuals with refined manners who display false objectivity, the domesticated mainstream academics, the international bureaucrats and the rulers of this region and of Europe, say nothing of an operation that each day more closely resembles the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland by Hitler in 1938.

Necessary participants and concealers of crimes, because what has happened in Venezuela—with economic sanctions, dispossession of its wealth abroad and aggression against the daily life of Venezuelans, deprived of electricity, water, transportation and other basic goods—constitutes a crime against humanity.

Martí, in his dazzling clairvoyance, denounced the White House’s addiction to looting and pillage. The Americans, said the Apostle, “believe in necessity, in the barbaric right as the only right: this is ours, because we need it.”

We need Venezuela’s oil because it is an irreplaceable ingredient in our military apparatus and when there is not a drop of that resource in the world, then our enemies will be left without it, we will have it and we will be able to impose our world domination without counterweights. As we need it, it will be ours, for better or worse. This and no other is the exclusive reason why the noble and brave Venezuelan people are suffering the aggression of imperialism.

In his famous book *Hegemony or Survival*, Noam Chomsky set forth the thesis that Washington has an even more ambitious project of world domination than Hitler’s Third Reich. Many thought at the time that the great American linguist was delirious. However, later events have proved him right.

Against this plan led today by Trump and his collaborators, free peoples from all over the world are on the front line with Venezuela. Therefore, international solidarity with their struggle is an inescapable moral imperative for all women and all men of good will.

(The author is an Argentinian economist and journalist.)

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Motto to the Svendborg Poems

Bertolt Brecht (1939)

*In the dark times
Will there be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing
About the dark times.*

Remembering Bertolt Brecht

Anjan Basu

Bertolt Brecht the playwright appears to have overshadowed his other artistic identities nearly completely, though, in truth, Brecht wore more creative hats than most other artists of his time. He was a theatre-producer, essayist, critic, novelist, short-story writer, drama theorist and film-script writer. And, above all, he was a poet. Indeed, Brecht was a poet first and everything else after that – though it is easy to forget this, not least because he himself actively downplayed his poetic output. Years before his first play, *Baal*, was staged, the 19-year-old Brecht was writing such haunting lines as these:

*Half-way along the road from night to morning
Naked and strewn in a rock-strewn glen
A chilly sky across it like an awning
You'll find the heaven for disenchanted men . . .*

*Ever silence where great rocks are lying
The glow remains although the light has gone
Sullen souls, fed up with their own crying
Sit dreamless, dumb and very much alone.*

And yet, though his poetic oeuvre comprises nearly one thousand items, only about 170 had found a place in the three collections Brecht had made himself. He seldom let go of an opportunity of making light of the whole business of writing poetry. "My poetry is laid so heavily to my account," he somewhat dismissively said in response to a request in 1928 for a public reading of his poetry, "that for some time now the least rhyme has stuck in my craw".

In fact, a large majority of Brecht's poems were not published before his death, prompting the editors of the 1976 Methuen collection of his poetry to

remark that “more perhaps than any other major writer except Kafka, Brecht was content that the greater part of his achievement should remain unknown”.

But can the readers of his plays fail to see that Brecht’s language was that of a poet? Think of *The Threepenny Opera*, among Brecht’s most earthy—some may even say ribald—plays written, appropriately enough, in a rambunctious, racy idiom. The dainty Polly Peachum, daughter of Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum (who is very nearly the model of bourgeois respectability) stuns her parents by announcing her resolve to marry Mack the Knife, the London underworld’s uncrowned king. Polly has had many suitors—all of them well-heeled as well as well-groomed—and yet, she always said no.

*But then one day, and that day was blue
Came someone who didn’t ask at all
And he went and hung his hat on the nail in my little attic
And what happened then I can’t quite recall.*

*And as he had got no money
And was not a nice chap
And his Sunday shirts, even, were not like snow
And as he had no idea of treating a girl with due respect
I could not tell him: No. . . .*

*Oh, the moon was shining clear and bright
Oh, the boat kept drifting downstream all that night
That was how it simply had to go.*

This is top-drawer lyric poetry and the fact that Brecht manages to pull this off in the middle of a boisterous farce, where the principal characters are all equally hard-nosed men/women of the world, establishes the supreme self-assurance of his technique.

Many of Brecht’s early poems were composed as songs, at any rate as pieces to be read to the accompaniment of a musical instrument such as the guitar. Off and on he wrote what he called ‘Psalms’, evocative prose pieces that read like chants:

*Evenings by the river in the dark heart of the bushes I
see her face again sometimes, face of the woman I loved:
my woman, who is dead now.*

*It was many years ago and at times I no longer know
anything about her, once she was everything, but
everything passes.*

*And she was in me like a little juniper on the Mongolian
steppes, concave, with a pale yellow sky and great
sadness. . . .*

The 22-year-old Brecht puts on paper his last memories of his mother in a tender little haiku-like poem that could well be a song:

*And when she was finished they laid her in earth
Flowers growing, butterflies juggling over her . . .
She, so light, barely pressed the earth down
How much pain it took to make her as light as that!*

But he was equally capable of fashioning superbly lyrical poems which are not meant to be ‘performed’. One late night in the spring of 1922, when travelling back home in Augsburg from Berlin by train, Brecht jotted down some lines that were later to be chiselled into the magnificent ‘Of Poor B.B.’, which begins thus:

*I, Bertolt Brecht, came out of the black forests.
My mother moved me into the cities
As I lay inside her. And the coldness of the forests
Will be inside me till my dying day.*

A speeding train on a dark night must have seemed to the 24-year-old Brecht the perfect symbol of Weimar Germany—tentative, transient, even unreal.

*In the grey light before morning, the pine trees piss
And their vermin, the birds, raise their twitter and cheep.
At that hour in the city I drain my glass, then throw
The cigar butt away and worriedly go to sleep.*

The coldness of the forest as much as the hardness of life in the ‘asphalt city’ has entered the soul of the Weimar generation, “an easy generation (that lives) in houses held to be indestructible”. But the knowledge gnaws at its heart that

*Of those cities will remain what passes through them,
the wind!
The house makes glad the eater: he clears it out.
We know that we’re only tenants, provisional ones
And after us will come: nothing worth talking about.*

Memorably, this scepticism merges with the moral ambivalence of nowhere land:

*In the earthquakes to come, I very much hope
I shall keep my cigar alight, embittered or no.
I, Bertolt Brecht, carried off to the asphalt cities
From the black forests inside my mother long ago.*

Brecht was on the Nazis’ hate list right from the mid-1920s and works like *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* quite infuriated Hitler’s men. Right after Hitler’s rise to power, therefore, Brecht went into exile, moving restlessly over western and northern Europe, living in Denmark, Sweden and Finland before moving to the US in 1941 where he lived through the war years. He eventually returned to what by then had become East Germany and settled down in Berlin. The long years in exile produced poems of several different kinds, including such quatrains as:

*This, then, is all. It's not enough, I know.
At least I'm still alive, as you may see.
I'm like the man who took a brick to show
How beautiful his house used once to be.*

Or the tongue-in-cheek epigram written while in Los Angeles:

*Every day, to earn my daily bread
I go to the market where lies are bought
Hopefully
I take up my place among the sellers.*

In his poetry as much as in his plays, Brecht was in his element in irony, as witness this laconic account of a friendly *Encounter with the poet Auden*:

*Lunching me, a kindly act
In an alehouse, still intact
He sat looming like a cloud
Over the beer-sodden crowd.*

*And kept harping with persistence
On the bare fact of existence
I.e, a theory built around it
Recently in France propounded.*

Talking about irony and satire, though Brecht was an icon of the communist East German state and was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954 by the Soviet Union, he famously lampooned the authoritarian state in poems such as *The Solution*:

*After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers' Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinalle
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?*

And yet, even in his last few years when his dramatic output had thinned considerably and he kept returning to poetry, the dominant themes were not built around cynicism or hopelessness. He again wrote lyrical poetry, evocative, often wistful:

*And I was old, and I was young at moments
Was old at daybreak, young when darkness came
And was a child recalling disappointments
And an old man forgetting his own name.*

“Well after his death in 1956”, the editors of the excellent Methuen collection note, “Brecht the poet

remained like an unsuspected time-bomb ticking away beneath the engine-room of world literature”. It may well have been so, but it had not been possible even for Bertolt Brecht to hold back from the world’s view his most consummate achievement as poet, the incomparable *To Those Born Later*, written in exile in Denmark:

*Truly, I live in dark times!
The guileless word is folly. A smooth forehead
Suggests a hard heart. The man who laughs
Has simply not yet had
The terrible news.*

*What kind of times are these, when
To speak of trees is almost a crime
Because it implies silence about so many horrors?
That man there calmly crossing the street
Is already perhaps beyond the reach of his friends
Who are in need? . . .*

*I came to the cities in a time of disorder
When hunger reigned there.
I came among men in a time of revolt
And I revolted with them
So passed my time
Which on earth was granted me. . . .*

*You who will emerge from the flood
In which we have gone under
Remember
When you speak of our failings
The dark time too
Which you have escaped.*

*For we went, changing countries oftener than our shoes
Through the wars of the classes, despairing
When there was injustice only, and no resistance.*

*And yet we knew only too well
Even the hatred of meanness
Contorts our features.*

*Anger, even against injustice,
Makes our voice hoarse. Oh, we
Who wished to lay the foundation of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.*

*But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly.*

(Anjan Basu is a literary critic, translator and commentator living in Bangalore.)

Capitalism Has Failed – What Next?

John Bellamy Foster

Less than two decades into the twenty-first century, it is evident that capitalism has failed as a social system. The world is mired in economic stagnation, financialisation, and the most extreme inequality in human history, accompanied by mass unemployment and underemployment, precariousness, poverty, hunger, wasted output and lives, and what at this point can only be called a planetary ecological “death spiral.” The digital revolution, the greatest technological advance of our time, has rapidly mutated from a promise of free communication and liberated production into new means of surveillance, control, and displacement of the working population. The institutions of liberal democracy are at the point of collapse, while fascism, the rear guard of the capitalist system, is again on the march, along with patriarchy, racism, imperialism and war.

To say that capitalism is a failed system is not, of course, to suggest that its breakdown and disintegration is imminent. It does, however, mean that it has passed from being a historically necessary and creative system at its inception to being a historically unnecessary and destructive one in the present century. Today, more than ever, the world is faced with the epochal choice between “the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large and the common ruin of the contending classes.”

Indications of this failure of capitalism are everywhere. Stagnation of investment punctuated

by bubbles of financial expansion, which then inevitably burst, now characterises the so-called free market. Soaring inequality in income and wealth has its counterpart in the declining material circumstances of a majority of the population. Real wages for most workers in the United States have barely budged in forty years despite steadily rising productivity. Work intensity has increased, while work and safety protections on the job have been systematically jettisoned. Unemployment data has become more and more meaningless due to a new institutionalised underemployment in the form of contract labor in the gig economy. Unions have been reduced to mere shadows of their former glory as capitalism has asserted totalitarian control over workplaces.

The capture of the surplus value produced by overexploited populations in the poorest regions of the world, via the global labour arbitrage instituted by multinational corporations, is leading to an unprecedented amassing of financial wealth at the center of the world economy and relative poverty in the periphery. Around \$21 trillion of offshore funds are currently lodged in tax havens on islands mostly in the Caribbean, constituting “the fortified refuge of Big Finance.” Technologically driven monopolies resulting from the global communications revolution, together with the rise to dominance of Wall Street-based financial capital geared to speculative asset creation, have further contributed

to the riches of today’s “1 percent.” Forty-two billionaires now enjoy as much wealth as half the world’s population, while the three richest men in the United States—Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Warren Buffett—have more wealth than half the US population. In every region of the world, inequality has increased sharply in recent decades. The gap in per capita income and wealth between the richest and poorest nations, which has been the dominant trend for centuries, is rapidly widening once again. More than 60 percent of the world’s employed population, some two billion people, now work in the impoverished informal sector, forming a massive global proletariat. The global reserve army of labor is some 70 percent larger than the active labour army of formally employed workers.

Adequate health care, housing, education, and clean water and air are increasingly out of reach for large sections of the population, even in wealthy countries in North America and Europe, while transportation is becoming more difficult in the United States and many other countries due to irrationally high levels of dependency on the automobile and disinvestment in public transportation. Urban structures are more and more characterised by gentrification and segregation, with cities becoming the playthings of the well-to-do while marginalised populations are shunted aside. About half a million people, most of them children, are homeless on any given night in the United States. New York

City is experiencing a major rat infestation, attributed to warming temperatures, mirroring trends around the world.

In the United States and other high-income countries, life expectancy is in decline, with a remarkable resurgence of Victorian illnesses related to poverty and exploitation. In Britain, gout, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and even scurvy are now resurgent, along with tuberculosis. With inadequate enforcement of work health and safety regulations, black lung disease has returned with a vengeance in US coal country. Overuse of antibiotics, particularly by capitalist agribusiness, is leading to an antibiotic-resistance crisis, with the dangerous growth of superbugs generating increasing numbers of deaths, which by mid-century could surpass annual cancer deaths, prompting the World Health Organisation to declare a “global health emergency.”

More than two million people in the United States are behind bars, a higher rate of incarceration than any other country in the world, constituting a new Jim Crow. African Americans and Latinos make up 56 percent of those incarcerated, while constituting only about 32 percent of the US population. Nearly 50 percent of American adults, and a much higher percentage among African Americans and Native Americans, have an immediate family member who has spent or is currently spending time behind bars. Racial divides are now widening across the entire planet.

Violence against women and the expropriation of their unpaid labor, as well as the higher level of exploitation of their paid labor, are integral to the way in which power

is organised in capitalist society—and how it seeks to divide rather than unify the population. More than a third of women worldwide have experienced physical/sexual violence. Women’s bodies, in particular, are objectified, reified, and commodified as part of the normal workings of monopoly-capitalist marketing.

The mass media–propaganda system, part of the larger corporate matrix, is now merging into a social media-based propaganda system that is more porous and seemingly anarchic, but more universal and more than ever favouring money and power. Utilising modern marketing and surveillance techniques, which now dominate all digital interactions, vested interests are able to tailor their messages, largely unchecked, to individuals and their social networks, creating concerns about “fake news” on all sides. Numerous business entities promising technological manipulation of voters in countries across the world have now surfaced, auctioning off their services to the highest bidders. The elimination of net neutrality in the United States means further concentration, centralisation, and control over the entire Internet by monopolistic service providers.

Elections are increasingly prey to unregulated “dark money” emanating from the coffers of corporations and the billionaire class. Although presenting itself as the world’s leading democracy, the United States, as Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy stated in *Monopoly Capital* in 1966, “is democratic in form and plutocratic in content.” In the Trump administration, following a long-established tradition, 72 percent of those appointed to the cabinet have come from the higher

corporate echelons, while others have been drawn from the military.

War, engineered by the United States and other major powers at the apex of the system, has become perpetual in strategic oil regions such as the Middle East, and threatens to escalate into a global thermonuclear exchange. During the Obama administration, the United States was engaged in wars/bombings in seven different countries—Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. Torture and assassinations have been reinstated by Washington as acceptable instruments of war against those now innumerable individuals, group networks, and whole societies that are branded as terrorist. A new Cold War and nuclear arms race is in the making between the United States and Russia, while Washington is seeking to place road blocks to the continued rise of China. The Trump administration has created a new space force as a separate branch of the military in an attempt to ensure US dominance in the militarisation of space.

Increasingly severe economic sanctions are being imposed by the United States on countries like Venezuela and Nicaragua, despite their democratic elections—or because of them. Trade and currency wars are being actively promoted by core states, while racist barriers against immigration continue to be erected in Europe and the United States as some 60 million refugees and internally displaced peoples flee devastated environments. Migrant populations worldwide have risen to 250 million, with those residing in high-income countries constituting more than 14 percent of the populations of those countries, up from less than 10 percent in

2000. Meanwhile, ruling circles and wealthy countries seek to wall off islands of power and privilege from the mass of humanity, who are to be left to their fate.

More than three-quarters of a billion people, over 10 percent of the world population, are chronically malnourished. Food stress in the United States keeps climbing, leading to the rapid growth of cheap dollar stores selling poor quality and toxic food. Around forty million Americans, representing one out of eight households, including nearly thirteen million children, are food insecure. Subsistence farmers are being pushed off their lands by agribusiness, private capital, and sovereign wealth funds in a global depeasantisation process that constitutes the greatest movement of people in history. Urban overcrowding and poverty across much of the globe is so severe that one can now reasonably refer to a “planet of slums.” Meanwhile, the world housing market is estimated to be worth up to \$163 trillion (as compared to the value of gold mined over all recorded history, estimated at \$7.5 trillion).

The Anthropocene epoch, first ushered in by the Great Acceleration of the world economy immediately after the Second World War, has generated enormous rifts in planetary boundaries, extending from climate change to ocean acidification, to the sixth extinction, to disruption of the global nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, to the loss of freshwater, to the disappearance of forests, to widespread toxic-chemical and radioactive pollution. It is now estimated that 60 percent of the world’s wildlife vertebrate population (including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and fish)

have been wiped out since 1970, while the worldwide abundance of invertebrates has declined by 45 percent in recent decades.

If present climate-change trends continue, the “global carbon budget” associated with a 2°C increase in average global temperature will be broken in sixteen years (while a 1.5°C increase in global average temperature—staying beneath which is the key to long-term stabilisation of the climate—will be reached in a decade). Earth System scientists warn that the world is now perilously close to a Hothouse Earth, in which catastrophic climate change will be locked in and irreversible. The ecological, social, and economic costs to humanity of continuing to increase carbon emissions by 2.0 percent a year as in recent decades (rising in 2018 by 2.7 percent—3.4 percent in the United States), and failing to meet the minimal 3.0 percent annual reductions in emissions currently needed to avoid a catastrophic destabilisation of the earth’s energy balance, are simply incalculable.

Nevertheless, major energy corporations continue to lie about climate change, promoting and bankrolling climate denialism—while admitting the truth in their internal documents. These corporations are working to accelerate the extraction and production of fossil fuels, including the dirtiest, most greenhouse gas-generating varieties, reaping enormous profits in the process. Capitalist countries across the board are putting the accumulation of wealth for a few above combating climate destabilisation, threatening the very future of humanity.

Capitalism is best understood as a competitive class-based mode of

production and exchange geared to the accumulation of capital through the exploitation of workers’ labour power and the private appropriation of surplus value (value generated beyond the costs of the workers’ own reproduction). The mode of economic accounting intrinsic to capitalism designates as a value-generating good or service anything that passes through the market and therefore produces income. It follows that the greater part of the social and environmental costs of production outside the market are excluded in this form of valuation and are treated as mere negative “externalities,” unrelated to the capitalist economy itself—whether in terms of the shortening and degradation of human life or the destruction of the natural environment.

We have now reached a point in the twenty-first century in which the externalities of this irrational system, such as the costs of war, the depletion of natural resources, the waste of human lives, and the disruption of the planetary environment, now far exceed any future economic benefits that capitalism offers to society as a whole. The accumulation of capital and the amassing of wealth are increasingly occurring at the expense of an irrevocable rift in the social and environmental conditions governing human life on earth.

How did these disastrous conditions characterising capitalism worldwide develop? An understanding of the failure of capitalism, beginning in the twentieth century, requires a historical examination of the rise of neoliberalism, and how this has only served to increase the destructiveness of the system. Only then can we address the future of

humanity in the twenty-first century.

Neoliberalism and Capitalist Failure

Many of the symptoms of the failure of capitalism described above are well-known. Nevertheless, they are often attributed not to capitalism as a system, but simply to neoliberalism, viewed as a particular paradigm of capitalist development that can be replaced by another, better one. For many people on the left, the answer to neoliberalism or disaster capitalism is a return to welfare-state liberalism, market regulation, or some form of limited social democracy, and thus to a more rational capitalism. It is not the failure of capitalism itself that is perceived as the problem, but rather the failure of neoliberal capitalism.

In contrast, the socialist tradition understands neoliberalism as an inherent outgrowth of late capitalism, associated with the domination of monopoly-finance capital. A critical-historical analysis of neoliberalism is therefore crucial both to grounding our understanding of capitalism today and uncovering the reason why all alternatives to neoliberalism and its capitalist absolutism are closed within the system itself.

The term neoliberalism had its origin in the early 1920s, in the socialist critique of the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises's (1881–1973) *Nation, State, and Economy* (1919) and *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (1922), both of which were written as virulent anti-socialist tracts. In these works, Mises, then employed by the Vienna Chamber of Commerce, equated socialism with “destructionism,” insisted that monopoly was consistent with capitalist free competition,

defended unlimited inequality, and argued that consumers exercised “democracy” through their purchases, which were equivalent to ballots. He strongly condemned labour legislation, compulsory social insurance (or social security – provides protection against various economic risks, such as loss of income due to illness, retirement benefits, or unemployment), trade unions, unemployment insurance, nationalisation, taxation, and inflation as the enemies of his refurbished liberalism.

In 1921, renowned Austrian socialist philosopher and politician Max Adler coined the term neoliberalism to designate Mises's attempt to refurbish a fading liberal order through a new ideology of market fetishism. Subsequently, Mises' neoliberalism was criticised by several other socialists.

The 1930s, and later the post-Second World War years in the West are known as the age of Keynes. The Great Depression years saw powerful working class movements, forcing the ruling classes to implement measures such as the New Deal. And then, after the Second World War, capitalist economies grew rapidly for a quarter-century—spurred on by increased state spending (particularly on the military in the context of the Cold War), the rebuilding of the war-torn European and Japanese economies, the expansion of the sales effort, waves of automobilisation in both the United States and Europe, and two major regional wars in Asia. Simultaneously, the West was faced with the threat of the alternative model represented by the Soviet Union, and the advent of strong unions as a result of the developments of the 1930s and '40s. Consequently, the West moved

in the direction of Keynesianism, social democracy, and the welfare state. The net result was: from the 1930s to 1960s, following the Great Depression and the Second World War, neoliberal ideology waned in the context of the deepening crisis of capitalism.

Nevertheless, the tendency toward economic stagnation already exhibited in the 1930s remained as a structural flaw of the system, temporarily masked by the so-called Golden Age of rapid growth and increasing income for workers that immediately followed the Second World War. By the 1960s, the factors that led to the rapid growth of the economy in the 1950s began to wane, and the US economy began to slowdown once again, resulting in a structural crisis of the capitalist system in the mid-1970s. This marked the beginning of decades of economic stagnation and a long decline in the trend rate of growth in the advanced capitalist economies.

To maintain its profit accumulation, the capitalist class now sought to reverse decades of modest working-class gains, thereby deciding to take an anti-Keynesian stance, designating anything to the left of hardcore neoliberalism as socialist or totalitarian. There was a sharp turn toward austerity and economic restructuring, under the guise of monetarism and supply-side economics. Simultaneously, a concerted effort to destroy unions by combined political, economic, and juridical means was carried out.

Key to the reemergence of neoliberalism in the post-Second World period was the Mont Pèlerin Society, named after the Swiss spa where Mises, Hayek, Robbins, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Raymond Aron, and others met

in 1947, to promote neoliberal economic and political ideas. However, the members of the Mont Pèlerin Society did not refer to themselves as neoliberals, probably because they remembered the devastating socialist critiques of neoliberal ideology in the 1920s, and referred to themselves as classical liberals; they stated that neoliberalism was not a separate political ideology but only an extension of classical liberalism and attributable to inherent features of human nature. In this way, as Michel Foucault (French philosopher) argued, it was converted into a kind of biopolitics.

Till the 1960s, figures like Mises, Hayek, Friedman, and James Buchanan remained on the margins, though heavily bankrolled by private foundations. But with the return of economic stagnation in the 1970s, neoliberal intellectuals were actively recruited at the apex of monopoly capital in order to provide the ideological basis to launch the corporate campaign to restructure the capitalist economy, deliberately targeting labour, the state, and the underdeveloped economies of the global South. By now, along with the Mont Pèlerin Society, the Department of Economics at the University of Chicago too had become the bastion of neoliberal ideology, as several leading believers in this ideology were teaching there.

Central to neoliberal philosophy from the beginning was the defense of concentrated corporate capital and class dynasties, which were portrayed as representing free-market competition and entrepreneurship. The very virulence of neoliberal anti-socialism meant that it represented the drive to a complete market-privatisation of social life.

In Margaret Thatcher's London and Ronald Reagan's Washington, figures like Hayek and Friedman became the symbols of the neoliberal era. The new so-called Nobel Prize in Economics, or the Sveriges Riksbank (Bank of Sweden) Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, established by the Bank of Sweden in 1969, was controlled from its inception by ultraconservative neoliberal economists. Seven members of the Mont Pèlerin Society, including Hayek, Friedman, Stigler, and Buchanan received the prize between 1974 and 1992, while even mildly social-democratic economists were all but excluded.

Neoliberalism as an economic ideology was largely ineffectual in normal economic-policy terms, judged by its lack of success in promoting growth. But for big business, it was a huge success as the surplus capital in the hands of the corporate rich not only increased, but by virtue of financialisation, globalisation, and the revolution in digital technology, new forms of amassing wealth were created.

Financialisation—the relative shift of the economy from production to finance—opened up vast new avenues to speculation and wealth formation, relatively removed from capital investment in new productive capacity (that is, real capital accumulation). Globalisation meant not only new markets, but, more importantly—through the global labour arbitrage—the appropriation of huge economic surpluses from the overexploitation of low-wage labor in the periphery that ended up in the financial coffers of multinational corporations and wealthy individuals in the rich countries.

Meanwhile, digital technology

created the basis of a new globalised surveillance capitalism, buying and selling information on the population, primarily motivated by the sales effort, leading to the creation of enormous information-technology monopolies.

Vast increases in inequality and wealth were justified as returns for innovation. In the new era of expropriation, all was up for grabs: education, health systems, transportation, housing, land, cities, prisons, insurance, pensions, food, entertainment. All exchanges in society were to be fully commodified, corporatised, and financialised, with the funds flowing into financial centers and feeding speculation on capital gains, leveraged by debt. Human communication was itself to be turned into a commodity. All in the name of a free-market society.

For the powers that be, this strategy was enormously successful. The financialisation process managed to counter economic-stagnation tendencies to some extent, but at the cost of periodic financial crises layered over the normal business cycle. Nevertheless, the amassing of wealth at the top continued to accelerate, with financial crises themselves leading to even greater financial concentration and centralisation.

The state too became subject to the financialisation policy, shifting its overall role to protecting the value of money. In the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–09, the big banks and corporations were almost all bailed out; the population was not. While this crisis, the worst faced by the capitalist world since the Great Depression of 1929–37, should have raised questions about the efficacy of neoliberalism, what has actually happened is its exact opposite—the

neoliberal ideology has become so strongly entrenched that the Great Financial Crisis only gave it further impetus!

A characteristic of this new era of financialised accumulation is that it is so far removed from the realities of production and use value that it has led to “a social and ecological planetary emergency.” This is most evident in the rapid destruction of the natural environment. Fossil fuels are entered as financial assets on the books of corporations, even when they exist only in the form of reserves buried in the ground. Trillions of dollars of Wall Street assets are thus tied up in fossil capital. This has made it doubly difficult to shift away from the extraction and use of fossil fuels to more sustainable alternatives, such as solar and wind power. No one owns the sun’s rays or the wind. Hence, there is less of a vested interest in these forms of energy. In today’s capitalism, more than ever before, current and potential future profits dictate all, at the expense of people and the planet. The human population stands by, seemingly helpless, watching the destruction of the climate and the loss of innumerable species, all imposed by the ostensibly overwhelming force of market society.

Neoliberalism has always been directly opposed to strict *laissez faire* since it has invariably emphasised a strong, interventionist, and constructionist relation to the state, in the direct service of private capital and market authoritarianism. In the neoliberal view, the role of the state is not simply to protect property, as maintained by Smith, but extends to the active construction of the domination of the market over all aspects of life. This means refashioning the state and society on

the model of the corporation or the market.

The state must not “correct the destructive effects of the market,” where these fall “on society” outside the market, but rather take advantage of these destructive effects to impose further measures that extend the reach and penetration of the market. The goal is to shackle the state to the monopolistic–competitive ends of capital, so as to limit any changes that would negatively affect the value of money. Hence, both fiscal and monetary policy are increasingly put out of reach of the government itself—in those cases where changes going against the vested interests are contemplated. Central banks have been transformed into largely autonomous branches of the state, in fact controlled by the banks. Treasury departments are shackled by debt ceilings. Regulatory agencies are captured by monopoly–finance capital and act, for the most part, in the direct interest of corporations outside governmental control.

Such an attempt to construct a so-called self-regulating market society therefore requires constant state interventions on behalf of capital, undermining the very foundations of society and life itself. Neoliberalism thus extends the structural crisis of capitalism in its globalised monopoly–finance phase to all of society and makes it universal. The answer to every failing of capitalism is thus to turn the screw further—with each failure opening up new areas of profitability for a few. The result of this irrational logic is not merely economic and ecological disaster, but the gradual demise of the liberal–democratic state itself. Neoliberalism thus points inevitably to market authoritarianism and even neofascism. In this respect, Donald

Trump is no mere aberration.

As Mises openly declared in 1927 in another work, *Liberalism*: “It cannot be denied that Fascism and similar movements [on the right] aiming at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions, and that their intervention, has, for the moment, saved European civilisation. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history.” Hayek, along with other neoliberals such as Friedman and Buchanan, actively supported General Augusto Pinochet’s coup in Chile in 1973, overthrowing the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende and imposing an economic shock doctrine on the population. Hayek, during a trip to Chile in 1978, personally warned Pinochet against a resurrection of “unlimited democracy.” During a second visit in 1981, he stated that “a dictatorship . . . may be more liberal in its policies than a democratic assembly.”

Neoliberalism, in short, is not a mere paradigm that can be dispensed with, but represents the absolutist tendencies of the system in the age of monopoly finance. In this new phase of monopoly capitalism, its survival can only be ensured for a time by the singular application of its economic logic to all of sociological existence. Reduced, however, to a pure Midas principle, capitalism is ending up by destroying everything in existence with which it comes into contact. But if capitalism has now failed, the question becomes: What next?

What Next?

In his magisterial *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914–1991*, the renowned socialist historian Eric Hobsbawm, viewing

the approach of the twenty-first century, indicated that there were reasons to be concerned that the new century might be even more threatening to humanity than the “age of extremes” that had preceded it, a century that had been punctuated by world wars, imperial conflicts, and economic depressions—and in which humanity was confronted for the first time with the possibility of its own self-annihilation. Yet, looking forward, he concluded, the new century (and millennium) offered even greater dangers.

“We live in a world,” Hobsbawm observed in 1994,

uprooted and transformed by the titanic economic and the techno-scientific process of the development of capitalism . . . it cannot go on ad infinitum. The future cannot be a continuation of the past, and there are signs, both externally, and, as it were, internally, that we have reached a point of historic crisis. The forces generated by the techno-scientific economy are now great enough to destroy the environment, that is to say, the material foundations of human life. The structures of human societies themselves, including even some of the social foundations of the capitalist economy, are on the point of being destroyed by the erosion of what we have inherited from the human past. Our world risks both explosion and implosion. It must change. . . . If humanity is to have a recognisable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present. If we try to build the third millennium on that basis, we shall fail. And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness.

Hobsbawm left little doubt as to what the principal danger was at

present, namely “the theological faith in an economy in which resources were allocated entirely by the totally unrestricted market, under conditions of unlimited competition,” carried out by ever more concentrated corporations. Chief among the dangers of such a system was the likelihood of “irreversible and catastrophic consequences for the natural environment of this planet, including the human race which is part of it.”

Hobsbawm’s position was roundly criticised at the time, even by many on the left, as overly “pessimistic” with regard to the course of capitalist development. Today, however, a quarter-century later, it is clear that he hit the mark, as the concerns that he voiced then are even more evident today. Nevertheless, there are still progressive intellectuals in the wealthy countries who hope that the pendulum will swing back again, leading to a more affirmative-style liberalism or social democracy. This sustains the belief that the failures of unregulated capitalism can be countered by a return to regulated capitalism, a new Keynesian age— as if history had stood still.

This, however, denies the material reality that neoliberalism today is ingrained in capitalism itself, in the phase of monopoly–financial capital. The earlier age of industrial–capital dominance, on which Keynesian economics was based, is now gone. Even if progressive or socialist or left parties come to power in these circumstances, and attempt to implement Keynesianism, they will invariably fall prey to the laws of motion of capitalism in this phase.

So, the question arises, what next? Of course, the actual course of

history can never be predicted. The only thing certain about historical change is the existence of the struggles that drive it forward and that guarantee its discontinuous character. Both implosions and explosions inevitably materialise, rendering the world for new generations different than that of the old. History points to numerous social systems that have reached the limits of their ability to adapt their social relations to allow for the rational and sustainable use of developing productive forces. Hence, the human past is dotted by periods of regression, followed by revolutionary accelerations that sweep all before them.

Could such a revolutionary acceleration of history, though on an incomparably greater scale, happen in the twenty-first century?

As a direct result of capitalist social relations, the material challenges now facing humanity are greater than anything ever seen before, pointing to an accumulation of catastrophe along with the accumulation of capital. Hundreds of millions of people under these circumstances are already being drawn into struggles with the system, creating the basis of a new worldwide movement toward socialism. Yes, the working people can indeed change the world, but they can only do so through a unifying struggle by workers and peoples aimed at genuine socialism.

It may be objected that socialism has been tried and has failed and hence no longer exists as an alternative. However, like the earliest attempts at capitalism in the Italian city-states of the late Middle Ages, which were not strong enough to survive amongst the feudal societies that

surrounded them, the failure of the first experiments at socialism presage nothing but its eventual rebirth in a new, more revolutionary, more universal form, which examines and learns from the failures. Even in failure, socialism has this advantage over capitalism: it is motivated by the demand for “freedom in general,” rooted in substantive equality and sustainable human development—reflecting precisely those collective social relations, borne of historical necessity and the unending struggle for human freedom, crucial to human survival in our time.

It is capitalism’s undermining of the very basis of human existence that will eventually compel the world’s workers and peoples to seek new roads forward. An inclusive movement toward socialism in this century will open up the possibility of qualitative new developments that the anarchy of the capitalist-market society with its monopolistic competition, extreme inequality, and institutionalised greed cannot possibly offer. It introduces the prospect of long-term democratic planning at all levels of society, allowing decisions to be made and distributions to occur outside the logic of the cash nexus. Socialism, in its most radical form, is about substantive equality, community solidarity, and ecological sustainability; it is aimed at the unification—not simply division—of labour.

Once sustainable human development, rooted not in exchange values, but in use values and genuine human needs, comes to define historical advance, the future, which now seems closed, will open up in a myriad ways, allowing for entirely new, more qualitative, and collective forms of development. This can be seen in the kinds of needed practical

measures that could be taken up, but which are completely excluded under the present mode of production. It is not physical impossibility, or lack of economic surplus, that stands in the way of the satisfaction of basic needs—clean air and water, food, clothing, housing, education, health care, transportation, and useful work—for all. It is not the shortage of technological know-how or of material means that prevents the necessary ecological conversion to more sustainable forms of energy. All of this is within our reach, but requires pursuing a logic that runs counter to that of capitalism.

The very waste and excess of today’s monopoly–finance capitalism, together with the development of new means of communication that allow for greater human coordination,

planning, and democratic action than ever before, suggest that there are countless paths forward to a world of substantive equality and ecological sustainability once the world is freed from the fetters of capital.

The mainsprings of human action throughout history lie in the drive for human freedom and the struggle to master our relation to the world. The first of these ultimately demands equality and community; the second, human development and sustainability. It is on these struggles for collective advancement that we must ultimately rely if humanity is to have a future at all.

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Defiant Resistance: The Venezuelan Crises and the Possibility of Another World

Jeremiah Gaster

Bob Dylan once said, “Let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late.” February 23rd, 2019, was the day that Juan Guaidó, the self-proclaimed President of Venezuela, had “authorised” “humanitarian aid” to enter Venezuela, an attempt to force the Maduro government, and thus the Venezuelan people, to their knees. There is great urgency as an ever-increasing escalation of violence is being perpetuated by those who would destroy Venezuela, including several attacks on Venezuela’s electrical grid over the last few weeks. But let me be clear: the Venezuelan poor are resilient, and any change will be on their terms. Most importantly, Venezuelan

politics is collective, and there is a deep form of solidarity across communities along with an abiding interest in building a different form of politics. In short, if one does not unearth this collective politics, one cannot understand what is happening in Venezuela.

While in Venezuela doing field work in July 2018, in conversations with many Venezuelans, I noted the consistent insistence that Venezuela must be respected.

A primary feature of Venezuelan life is that politics is not only discussed but is everywhere, and as such, many Venezuelans could teach graduate courses in political science. This is well exemplified

in a recent news item on the Real News Network in which a woman on the street, clutching a well-worn copy of the constitution, says to the interviewer, “If Juan Guaidó needs a constant reminder” she “will be happy with her fellow citizens to read him the constitution every day”. That a factor of everyday life is the importance of the Venezuelan constitution is not to be discounted and helps us understand something essential: the gravity of politics for Venezuelans. Another core aspect of this is the ease with which poor Venezuelans viscerally, expressly, and collectively are directly involved with politics. It was not always thus.

Pacted Political System

Early in the twentieth century, oil was found in Venezuela. Soon Venezuela’s elites became capitalist, rich beyond imagination, and they also grew concerned that they faced too much disruption from rural and urban crowds who had a tendency toward fomenting strikes and other political upheavals. In 1958, three political parties implemented a pacted political system wherein in one election, Action Democratic would win, and in the next election, the Social Christians would win, and so on. While the third party quickly disappeared, this pact, which continued for several decades against the threat of communist organising and against the poor, eventually joined by the Catholic Church, business leaders, and even unions.

In the 1970s, following a successful decade of pacted democracy, flush with oil monies, the Venezuelan state started a few social welfare programs. While some Venezuelans began to experience a measure of relief, poverty persisted.

Then in the early 1980s, the state shut off the small flow of oil money to the poor, and thus, poverty in Venezuela grew to 62 per cent, and extreme poverty grew to 30 per cent.

In 1989, in the wake of re-electing Carlos Andres Perez as president, Venezuelans were hopeful. However, in the week after his inauguration, Venezuelans learned Perez intended to integrate the state even closer with global capital, pushing further austerity. In response, on February 27, 1989, a series of bus and food riots started that lasted almost a week. This revolt throughout Venezuela by the poor against the state and society was called the Caracazo (the explosion of Caracas). In its attempt to quell the revolt, the state killed upwards of 2000 people. Nevertheless, since the Caracazo, the state and elites found themselves unable to govern Venezuela as before.

Rather than the elites governing Venezuela, the poor, those who were starving, those informally working, other workers including the underemployed or unemployed, farmers, Afro-Venezuelans, Indigenous Venezuelans, the differently abled, LGBTQ, youth, seniors, women working in their homes caring for their children, women working outside the home and then keeping house, people forgotten by politics of exclusion, came down from the barrios (means neighbourhoods, especially the slums of urban cities), changing Venezuela. Consider that for the next decade the average number of protests grew to over 1000 per year, an increase from the pre-1989 average of 200, signifying that all-across Venezuela there were at least two protests every day during this period. In 1992, a Colonel in the

Venezuelan army, Hugo Chávez Frías, led an attempt to end the state’s continued repression, and when this failed, he took responsibility for it. Chávez, born poor, being Afro-Indigenous, recognised that the marginalised had to be the major force in any political project geared toward their particular and specific needs.

The Revolution, Cemented

After serving some time in jail, Chávez ran for president in the 1998 elections. His win did not start the revolution, but rather, cemented it. While still an uphill battle, even with Chávez at the helm, the state itself was restructured to support communities. This restructuring was unthinkable just prior to his election. Turning it into something quite unthinkable to us here in Canada. In him, the poor found a friend, a teacher, a comrade. Now without him, a common phrase is that “Chávez is a seed in all,” and this keeps them fighting.

Many benefits continued to accrue to those from whom Venezuela’s wealth had once been robbed, including huge advances in access to healthcare, education, and a general well-being for all Venezuelans, especially the poor. Pursuant to Nicolás Maduro’s second election, twenty years since Chávez’s first, unlike in many other states around the world that impose austerity and neoliberally reorganise state services, there remains in Venezuela the sense that the state must provide for its citizens. Significantly, the current economic and political crises under such intense misinformation and international scrutiny are not the result of Venezuelan state policies. While some monetary inflation is

an indirect result of state policies, the crises are a direct result of speculation and inflation sparked by Venezuelan capitalists and the horrific interventions, meted out by some nations, including Canada and the USA, such as sanctions and blockades.

On one hand, free or low-income housing, universal healthcare, public and universal education (including the distribution of free tablets or computers to all children), subsidised gas, the provision of basic food stuffs to all who need it—the Venezuelan state’s social programs remain sturdy despite the manufactured economic and political crises of 2019. When I was there in July 2018, because the cost to print urban public transit tickets in Caracas was more expensive than the government was willing to make the price, public transit was free. Of course, Maduro remains accused of “buying votes” via these programs.

The beneficiary of current Venezuelan government policies continues to be the poor themselves. Significantly, what has been Venezuela’s strength even more than the social welfare policies themselves, as revolutionary as they are in this current world of austerity, is the fact of community control of this revolution, for they control the process. Through Chavismo, many communities have arranged themselves into organisations as community councils, misiones, and various other forms of assemblies. The government is involved, e.g., the government mandates that a community council is to be constituted of two hundred families (less in rural and Indigenous areas), must meet quorum, etc., and then the government provides funds to the community organisation

based on the mandates to provide various social services and to foster community production. The government provides support, but these organisations are run by the communities themselves, and they have done so for the past two decades. Presently, tens of thousands of such community organisations exist throughout all of Venezuela.

There has also been exponential growth in communes throughout Venezuela. In areas where several community councils intersect (thousands of members in the cities, less in the rural areas), further entrenchment of community organisations has been fostered. Communes that intersect have begun to institute communal cities of 20,000 members each. These institutional structures, and the communities’ protagonism and cooperation forming them, reveal the depth of the change during the last two decades in Venezuela.

One thing is clear: in all of these social endeavors the revolution is constituted through the multiple tendencies of Chavismo, and it is only through the masses in their work against all forms of domination that the revolutionary state exists. Notably, Chavismo is a consciously socialist-feminist practice throughout all of Venezuela. Many communities that before were denied their dignity, have collectively altered their country based on principles of social equity and egalitarianism. Changes have been happening here that have rarely happened at any point in human history.

To be certain, Venezuela as a country remains capitalist, colonial, racist, machista, and embedded in imperialism’s world; the state is a state with all of its corresponding dangers.

Significantly, the Venezuelan state is not the site of counter-revolution. Even though it is a residual capitalist state, against which the masses constantly battle for their gains, it is not the state who wars against the masses; rather in Venezuela, the state is with the masses’ revolution. Although new elites have emerged, and problematise the revolution, the revolution is neither the state nor the new elites, and for sure, it is not the old elites. Rather, even though in any society in which they exist they are the fulcrum, it is the poor’s gravitonic pull which explains politics in Venezuela, and in Venezuela the poor have begun the slow and long process of ending these residual conditions of inhumanity.

Elites Try for a Comeback

No longer rulers of Venezuela, the old elites after Chávez’s death in 2013 and with the subsequent fall of oil prices, saw an opportunity to reassert themselves, attempting to construct a perfect storm by increasing their economic war against their fellow citizens. Excluded from their “natural place” at the top of state and society, the elites remain frustrated; they have been ineffectual against the masses. World leaders as “diverse” as Trudeau, Harper, Martin, and Chrétien; Bush, Obama, and Trump; and many others of Latin America and the European Union have also long hated the revolution.

There are many reasons for the imperial desire to end the Bolivarian revolution, including wanting to suppress the control and involvement exercised by the Venezuelan people over themselves. The fact that Venezuela is rich in natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, gold,

bauxite, iron ore, and diamonds just adds to the frustration with the revolution. These “leaders” have contributed to the economic war with ever increasing sanctions (especially since early 2015) and blockades of imported essentials such as medicine, food, and other goods—a war that has had quite a violent outcome against a sovereign people.

Presently, high inflation is a serious problem in Venezuela, but significantly, neither production nor distribution are under government nor specifically community control. Private ownership and the imperial blockades strangle the Venezuelan economy, “making it scream” (As Nixon and Kissinger conspired to do in the Chilean economy against the experiment of socialist-democracy in the early 1970s in Chile). An example of how Venezuelans resist this problem can be seen in the growth over the last decade of urban cultivation, and in their return to the land to produce what they need.

Loyalty to the revolution is evidenced in the outcomes of the last several elections. In both 2014 and in 2016–2017, the opposition held increasingly violent protests. In the December 2015 election, the National Assembly (AN, 167 seats total) was completely flipped in favour of the opposition, which won 109 seats and received almost 8 million votes in contrast to the Chavista parties who received almost 6 million votes, winning only 55 seats.

In response to the increasing violence on July 30, 2017, following constitutional procedure, a new constituent assembly (National Constituent Assembly, ANC) was elected with more than eight million votes. The ANC, plenipotentiary

by definition, has more than 500 seats for both regional and sectoral representatives. Despite the opposition’s call for a boycott of the elections, the eight million who did vote is a tangible and meaningful voter expression. The day after the ANC vote, all violent protests ceased until 2019’s return to violence. This shows the value of the ANC as two years of social peace was wrought even though the brutality of the economic war remained. The persistent violence of the opposition to the revolution is clear, and the rejection of such violence by the majority of Venezuelan society is also obvious.

Since the 2017 elections of the ANC, three more Chavista electoral gains have been made, winning the majority of governorships (October 2017) and city councillorships (December 2018), flipping many opposition strongholds. Maduro also had a substantial May 2018 presidential win with more than six million votes and a hefty four million lead over the closest rival. These considerable votes are not negated, even with the opposition’s attempted boycott of the election.

The 2015 NA is old news with new NA elections long scheduled for next year. The NA itself is a remnant of old state formations contained within a contradictory process, and Venezuelans know this. The poor are waging a war on both capitalism and the capitalist state in the name of a communal state, and they know that it is only through the current Maduro / Chavista government that they can achieve their victory. While reserving their right to tell him how things should be done, Maduro remains their president.

Manifestly Venezuela’s elites have been increasingly isolated

in Venezuela, especially since Chávez’s first election in 1998. In 2019, presuming to have the right to stop the Bolivarian experiment, the elites started a new initiative aimed at ending the Maduro government, and so bringing an end to the revolution. Beyond the opposition’s base, and its reliance on the obvious Trojan horse of US and Canadian “humanitarian aid,” the early 2019 gambit of Guaidó’s “presidency” has not culminated in the desired end. Neither sparking violence in the streets, nor in the claim of the “abandonment” of Maduro’s presidency, Guaidó’s coup has failed at the time of writing (the second week of April). This failure is due to the absence of the masses of Venezuela, who remain the core of any substantial change in Venezuela. Tensions remain high as the opposition claims the right to “invite” invasion to secure their power, but this only reveals their very illegitimacy.

The government, having consistently renounced violence, has always been open to direct talks with the opposition, if they too renounced violence. However, the elites are reluctant, for they know that without violence they are unlikely to prevail. The elites know that for the majority of Venezuelans, the opposition is worthless and the elites themselves are superfluous.

Concluding Thoughts

So, what can we do? Despite an inhumane blockade enacted over the past four years, Venezuelan poor continue to receive greater benefits from their government than Canadians, for example, have ever received from ours. Consequently, if what Venezuelans participate in is democracy, then what the rest of the

world has is not. In short, the poor in Venezuela are the government. Thus, to support Venezuela is to fight for a better world, one wherein the poor are the government too. Fighting back against neoliberal restructuring of Canada, resisting the continued formation of the “common-sense” of austerity, resisting all of the accompanying horrors of early twenty-first century capitalist imperialist states is how we can support Venezuela.

As stated at the outset of this article, in Venezuela, it is oft repeated that “Venezuela must be respected.” This phrase is the basis for the fact that Venezuelans resist rather than simply folding in the face of aggressions by the opposition and other countries. Venezuelans have taken to heart the lessons of Chile 1973, and both the military and the Venezuelan people will defend themselves if attacked. It is also clear that there is much that we can learn from them. Nevertheless, the positive in Venezuela is still exceptional, and Venezuelan resistance to neoliberalism is ever more an example to us all. In conclusion, whilst undergoing many challenges, Venezuela remains the place where human possibilities have been flourishing, and this expression of direct democracy will be protected by Venezuelans and must be respected.

(Jeremiah Gaster is both a political theorist and a comparativist. He writes for Socialist Project, a Toronto based organisation that promotes socialist thought and action.)

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The Yellow Vests of France: Six Months of Struggle

Richard Greeman

I am writing you from Montpellier, France, where I am a participant-observer in the Yellow Vest (Gilets jaunes) movement, which is still going strong after six months, despite a dearth of information in the international media.

But why should you take the time to learn more about the Yellow Vests? The answer is that France has for more than two centuries been the classic model for social innovation, and this unique, original social movement has enormous international significance. The Yellow Vests have already succeeded in shattering the capitalist myth of ‘representative democracy’ in the age of neoliberalism. Their uprising has unmasked the lies and violence of republican government, as well as the duplicity of representative institutions like political parties, bureaucratic unions, and the mainstream media.

Moreover, the Yellow Vests represent the first time in history that a spontaneous, self-organised social movement has ever held out for half a year in spite of repression, while retaining its autonomy, resisting cooptation, bureaucratisation and sectarian splits. All the while, standing up to full-scale government repression and targeted propaganda, it poses a real, human alternative to the dehumanisation of society under the rule of the capitalist ‘market’.

A Different Kind of Uprising

Six months ago, on November 17, 2018, Yellow Vests burst ‘out of

nowhere’, with autonomous local units springing up all over France like mushrooms, demonstrating on traffic circles (roundabouts) and toll-gates, marching every Saturday in cities, including Paris. But unlike all previous revolts, it was not Paris-centered. The humid November soil from which these mushrooms sprouted was the near-universal frustration of French people at the abject failure of the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) and other unions to effectively oppose Macron’s steam-roller imposition last Spring of his historic Thatcherite ‘reforms’: an inflexible neoliberal program of cutting benefits, workplace rights, and privatising or cutting public services, while eliminating the so-called Wealth Tax designed to benefit the poor.

The immediate cause of this spontaneous mass uprising was to protest an unfair tax on fuel (fiscal justice), but the Yellow Vests’ demands quickly expanded to include restoration of public services (transport, hospitals, schools, higher wages, retirement benefits, healthcare for the poor, peasant agriculture, media free of billionaire and government control, and, most remarkably, participatory democracy. Despite their disruptive tactics, the Yellow Vests were, from the first, wildly popular with average French people (73 per cent approval), and they are still more popular than the Macron government after six months of exhausting, dangerous occupations of public space, violent weekly protests, and slanderous

propaganda against them.

Tired of being lied to, cheated, manipulated, and despised, the Yellow Vests instinctively from the beginning rejected being instrumentalised by the corrupt ‘representative’ institutions of capitalist democracy—including political parties, union bureaucracies, and the media (monopolised by billionaires and subsidised by the government). Jealous of their autonomy, a concept which radical intellectuals have been exploring for years, the Yellow Vest movement eschewed ‘leaders’ and spokespeople even among their own ranks, and are even now very gradually learning to federate themselves and negotiate convergence with other social movements.

Macron’s Repressive Response

Right from the start, the Yellow Vests’ basically non-violent unauthorised gatherings were met by massive police repression—teargas, flashballs, beatings, 10,000 arrests, immediate drum-head trials, and stiff sentences for minor infractions. The Macron government just passed a new “anti-vandalism” law making it virtually impossible to demonstrate legally. Macron’s orthodox neoliberal French Republic has arguably become as repressive of domestic opposition as the right-wing ‘populist’ regimes in Poland, Hungary, and Turkey.

Macron’s violent repression of political opposition is responsible for at least two deaths, 23 demonstrators blinded in one eye, and thousands seriously wounded. It has been condemned by the UN and the European Union. But Macron has never acknowledged these injuries, which are rarely shown in the media. The TV news concentrates on

sensational images of the violence (to property) of the Black Block vandals at the fringes of Yellow Vest demonstrations, never on the human victims of systematic government violence. A popular slogan proclaimed in Magic Marker on a demonstrator’s Yellow Vest reads: “Wake up! Turn off your TV! Join us!”

Since the Yellow Vests have no recognised spokespersons, government propaganda, abetted by the media, has had a free hand to dehumanise them in order to justify treating them inhumanly. Macron, from the height of his monarchical presidency, at first pretended to ignore their uprising, then attempted to buy them off with crumbs (a very few crumbs, which were rejected) and then denounced them as “a hate-filled mob.” (N.B. In real life the Yellow Vests are largely low-income middle-aged folks with families from the provinces whose trademark is friendliness and improvised barbecues.) Yet for Macron and the media they constitute a hard-core conspiracy of “40,000 militants of the extreme right and the extreme left” often characterised as “anti-Semites” who threaten the Republic.

Small wonder that, subjected to increasing violence and continuous slander, the numbers of Yellow Vests willing to go out into the streets to protest every week has diminished over 27 weeks. But they are still out there, and their favorite chant goes: “Here we are! Here we are! What if Macron doesn’t like it? Here we are!” (*On est là! Même si Macron ne veut pas, On est là!*)

Finally, Support from Other Groups

Fortunately, in the past few

weeks the League for the Rights of Man and other such humanitarian groups have at last turned out to protest police brutality, while committees of artists and academics have signed petitions in support of the Yellow Vests’ struggle for democratic rights, condemning the government and media. At the same time, Yellow Vests are more and more converging with Ecologists (“End of the Month/End of the World/Same Enemy/Same Struggle”) and feminists (who play a major role in the movement).

Workers have also played an important role, many of them active as opponents of the bureaucracy in their unions. Red CGT stickers on Yellow Vests are now frequent sights at demos. Philippe Martinez, the General Secretary of the CGT, who has heretofore been sarcastic and negative about the Yellow Vests, has now been forced to admit that the cause of their rise was the failure of the unions, “a reflection of all the union deserts”. He was referring to “small and medium size businesses, retired people, poverty people, jobless people, and lots of women” (the demographic of the Yellow Vests) that the unions have ignored.

The Yellow Vests are still here, in the fray, holding the breach open. The crisis in France is far from over. If and when the other oppressed and angry groups in France—the organised workers, ecologists, North African immigrants, students struggling against Macron’s educational ‘reforms’—also turn off their TVs and go down into the streets, things could change radically. The Yellow Vests’ avowed goal is to bring France to a grinding halt and impose change from below.

What if they succeed? We know what the ‘success’ of structured

parties like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain led to. Maybe a horizontal federation of autonomous base-groups attempting to re-invent democracy could do better.

P.S. Latest news: the CGT just held its convention and voted unanimously for “convergence”

with the Yellow Vests, something our group in Montpellier has been working toward for months. On May 18th, for the first time, we are meeting with the other Yellow Vest groups in our region. “*On ne lâche rien!*” (Nothing escapes us, we don’t give in).

(Richard Greeman is a socialist scholar long active in human rights, anti-war, anti-nuclear, environmental and labor struggles in the US, Latin America, France, and Russia.)

How is Mexico’s Fourth Transformation Progressing?

Claudio Fabian Guevara

As he nears his sixth month in office, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly known as AMLO) travels around the nation holding public events to report on his social policies and asking citizens for help in removing the vices of the old regime from the State.

AMLO exhibits a unique leadership in this enormous country, which he knows from end to end, and where he managed to organise a great national coalition around himself. He is one of the few presidents with the ability to speak and reply for hours, without assistants or teleprompters, on countless aspects of the country’s public life. He is the author of 17 books, has a political career of over three decades and is an unparalleled personality in Mexico today.

After running for the presidency three times and finally defeating the electoral fraud apparatus of the PRI – PAN, Andrés Manuel (as he is affectionately called by those who have followed him for years) proposes to achieve the fourth historical transformation of Mexico, an ambitious goal that has led to him being labelled “arrogant” and “messianic”.

In order to defeat a hostile

media that is a strong supporter of the traditional corrupt elites who had been in power for decades before finally being defeated in the Presidential elections held last year, one of the first steps taken by AMLO was to organise long morning press conferences, where he is accompanied by specialists, secretaries and ministers who report on the what has been happening in each area of governance. Thus, he achieved a direct line of communication, without intermediaries, with millions of people.

This strategy was deepened with his tours around the country, and organising face-to-face mass meetings with citizens. In these public interactions, the Mexican president speaks colloquially and intimately, accompanied by members of his cabinet, about how the transformation process is progressing. He provides figures and data on the social welfare programs launched. He justifies how these expenses are financed with the money previously used for corruption. And he preaches moral principles with historical themes as a backdrop to these policies. He also tells anecdotes of the waste and

greed of the previous regime.

These mass meetings are turning out to be a huge success, with people participating in them in very large numbers. The local municipal and state authorities also participate in these meetings, in which the programmes and works undertaken by the federal government and funds allocated for them are announced. The whistles and shouts of the people, especially when they see an official with an unsavoury reputation in the President’s entourage, add a condiment of colour and spontaneity to the meeting. The political ironies and puns of the main speaker complete the show.

Andrés Manuel’s public meetings are, like his morning press conference and many other elements of his government, a communication policy of great originality. What is AMLO’s central message in this campaign? What is he saying to the people during the first six months of his government?

Here is a summary of the main points he conveys in his public pronouncements:

1) The first priority is to pacify the country: Mexico’s statistics of violence, especially after the

launch of Felipe Calderón's war on drugs, show that the country is suffering from a real internal war. AMLO proposes to stop it along three axes: i) Giving attention to young people by providing them scholarships, full employment and opportunities to study, in order to move them away from the mafia. ii) The legalisation of drugs to weaken the power of criminal cartels, as well as the decriminalisation of drug users. iii) Greater availability of personnel for internal security. To this end, the constitution has been modified to allow the creation of the National Guard, by which the Army and Navy participate in internal security operations. This gesture earned him harsh criticism from the Zapatistas, who accuse AMLO of having deployed more troops than any previous government.

2) Austerity, by example: The PRI presidential staff had thousands of staff employed for its security. AMLO has transferred them to internal security and now they take care of the people. Cuts have been made in the salaries of the public employees getting very high salaries, and the lowest salaries have been raised. A law has been passed capping the highest salaries. No one can earn more than the president, whose salary is a modest 108,000 pesos a month, equivalent to about 5600 dollars. The million-dollar pensions for former presidents have been eliminated. The former President Peña Nieto's expensive presidential plane in California was put up for sale. "Let's see if Trump will cheer him up," AMLO ironically says, "because even Trump doesn't have a plane like that." As a part of his policy of austerity, the president now travels with his entourage

by land, sometimes in four-hour trips, because he deactivated the air fleet which was grossly misused by the ruling elite: "They went by helicopter to play golf."

3) Fighting corruption and promoting social programs, hand in hand:

The Mexican president claims to have severed corruption "from the head". As part of the fight against corruption, the government claims that huachicoleo (organised theft of gasoline from the state oil company Pemex) has been reduced by 95%. The savings generated by eliminating corrupt practices and cutting down wasteful government expenditure are being used to finance social welfare programs. The government has launched a mix of scholarship programs for students and pensions for the elderly, the disabled, some of universal scope and others sectoral. These funds have also been used to finance programs such as interest-free loans for small and medium-sized entrepreneurs and merchants.

According to the Welfare Census, the benefits reach 24 million people. The government's strategy is to make them available to the people without intermediaries, or by directly depositing the money in people's accounts. The problem: only around 40% of Mexicans have bank accounts.

4) Moralising public life with traditional values:

There is a strong component of traditional values and principles in the messages of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. They are open and broadly inclusive messages, most of them about traditional values, which would suggest an attempt to balance a wide range of currents of opinion.

There is an insistent moral message against the greed that underpinned the open pillage of the nation's public coffers and wealth: "Those sick of corruption must be cured. To defeat corruption, it must be stigmatised. Before it was a merit, an act of audacity, a prototype. . . . Now we have to change that."

He has also made many bold and innovative pronouncements, such launching a debate for the legalisation of drugs, and has also explicitly rejected agro-toxins and transgenics.

On June 1, 2019, AMLO will complete six months in office. In his public agenda there is much more: the Mayan Train megaproject, reversing of the energy and education reforms sanctioned by the previous government, a proposal to combat illegal immigration through development plans and economic integration with the neighbouring nations. He also has to wage a political battle against the old elites displaced from power who promote a battery of criticisms and negative propaganda through their control of the media. The Zapatistas also oppose him—they have fiercely opposed his Mayan Train project and consider his policies to be a revamped and deceitful version of the neoliberal development model that was implemented by the previous governments.

On the other hand, the Mexican President has also generated considerable hope among the citizenry. He also the support of a formidable number of intellectuals and first-rate political cadres, apart from the apparatus of his Morena party (a heterogeneous grouping of his own party leaders and recycled leaders of the former governing party)..

AMLO travels around Mexico pushing an elephant. It is a peaceful, gradual, and law-abiding process that seeks to pacify a country ravaged by mafia pacts and internecine wars, modernise an inefficient and corrupt state, and maintain peace with its

arrogant northern neighbour. Will he succeed?

Note by Editors: On May 20, 2019, AMLO announced that his government is going to end the tax breaks of billions of dollars given to the large corporations by

his predecessor, saying that it was equivalent to theft by gangsters.

(Claudio Fabian Guevara is an Argentinian journalist and researcher.)

Youth Strike Once Again Globally

Julia Conley

People in more than 100 countries are expected to take part in well over 1,000 strikes on Friday, May 24 to demand climate action from their governments.

Two months after what was reportedly the largest international climate demonstration ever, young people around the world are expected to make history again on Friday with a second global climate strike.

Sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, who began the global movement in which students around the world have walked out of their classrooms on a weekly basis since last fall to demand climate action, reported Tuesday that at least 1,351 separate strikes are now scheduled to take place all over the world on Friday.

Climate justice advocates plan to walk out of their schools and workplaces on every continent on the globe and in more than 100 countries.

Two strikes are planned in Antarctica, according to a map on the #FridaysForFuture website; countries including Afghanistan, Namibia, and Uzbekistan are each planning at least one strike, while hundreds of rallies have been planned across Germany, France, the US, and several other countries.

On March 15, an estimated 1.6 million people demonstrated in 123 countries. The number of planned protests for Friday surpassed the 1,325 which took place two months ago.

350.org called on supporters to stand with the students leading the global call for an end to fossil fuel extraction in order to keep global warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Thunberg held the first climate strike last fall, holding a one-person protest outside Swedish Parliament and demanding that her elected officials begin a shift toward renewable energy sources to help stem the warming of the globe.

Young people who have organised their own protests in recent months argue that they will still be relatively young in 2030, the year that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns the climate crisis will be irreversible unless world leaders take action now to stop the carbon emissions which are rapidly warming the planet.

While government officials who refuse to act now may not have many more decades left on the planet, youth organisers argue, young people will face the consequences of that inaction.

In recent weeks, grassroots

climate protests have successfully pressured some government leaders into officially recognising the climate crisis and pledging to take action. Lawmakers in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales officially declared a climate emergency in the wake of mass protests by the global movement Extinction Rebellion in April. And the head of the European Commission pledged in February to spend a quarter of the EU's budget on combating the climate crisis beginning in 2021, under pressure from Thunberg.

"Activism works. So act," Thunberg tweeted this week, sharing a video featuring young people who plan to walk out of their schools on Friday.

(Jon Queally is managing editor for Common Dreams and Julia Conley is a journalist who writes for Common Dreams, an independent non-profit newscenter based in the USA.)

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Gandhi's Last Message

Sudhir Chandra

Gandhi . . . had wanted to avoid the country's partition. Failing in that, he engaged himself in preventing the division of hearts, emphasising that even as the country had been divided, the hearts must not be divided. Also knowing that if the hearts had not been divided, the country could never have been divided and contending with this paradox, because he understood that neither India nor Pakistan stood to gain in the absence of mutual friendship. Should one become hell, the other can never be heaven.

Seventy years have since gone by. In the meantime, the division of hearts has perhaps deepened in both countries—across the border and within the border as well. People's hearts have experienced new divisions. Gandhi's warning has assumed greater relevance today as compared to earlier periods.

But only if we are able to see, which is not easy. And when people cannot see, saying or doing something to reach out to them becomes that much more difficult.

Why was Gandhi running in his old age from pillar to post? To be immortalised in history? To save the Hindus and the Sikhs from the Muslims? To save the Muslims from the Sikhs and the Hindus? Or to save

humans from humans, by saving their humanity for them? . . .

Gandhi's helplessness was such that he was reduced to admonishing everybody by turn because everybody was succumbing to the prevailing frenzy. He knew, and was repeatedly saying so, that between the Hindus and Muslims [both of whom had become animals] for one to refrain from becoming an animal is the only straight way to get out of this violence. But no one was ready to heed him, to refrain from becoming an animal. When he admonished the Hindus and the Sikhs, he was told to see what the Muslims in Pakistan were doing, and also that the Muslims staying on in India were traitors. Gandhi would listen attentively and respond publicly. But such had become people's mentality in the midst of that collective hysteria that Gandhi's slightest concern for the Muslims seemed like outright favouritism to the Hindus and Sikhs, and when he criticised the Muslims or gave them advice, he was disregarded. . . .

Gandhi laid stress on, along with humanity, civic responsibility in a democracy:

Had man not become so ruthless as to commit atrocities against his brother, these thousands of men,

women and innocent children [in refugee camps] would not have been so helpless, and in many cases hungry . . . Was all of this inescapable? A strong voice came from within me: 'No'. Is this the first fruit of a month of independence? . . . Have the citizens of Delhi become mad? Do they not have even a shred of humanity left in them? Does the love for their country and its independence not appeal to them at all? I may be forgiven for putting the blame primarily on the Hindus and the Sikhs. Can they not be worthy as humans to halt this tide of hatred? I would strongly urge Delhi's Muslims to let go of their fear, put their trust in God and surrender all their firearms to the government. Because the Hindus and the Sikhs are afraid that the Muslims possess firearms, it does not mean that they do not have weapons of their own. It is only a question of degree. Some may have less, some more. To obtain justice, the minorities will either have to depend on God or on the human created by Him, or they will have to depend on their guns, pistols and other weapons to protect themselves against those whom they do not trust.

My advice is firm and unchanging. Its truth is self-evident. Have confidence in your government that it will protect every citizen from those who commit injustice, no matter how many more and superior weapons they may have . . . By their actions the people of Delhi will only make the task of seeking justice from the Pakistan government difficult. Those who want justice will have to do justice. They should be guiltless and true. Let the Hindus and Sikhs take the rightful step and ask the Muslims who have been chased out of their homes to return.

If the Hindus and Sikhs have the

courage in every way to take this rightful step, the refugee problem will become very easy to handle. Then not only Pakistan but the whole world will acknowledge their claims. They will save Delhi and India from disgrace and destruction.

"Those who want justice will have to do justice." This was not mere idealism. Gandhi was providing a formula for a viable morality.

In any civilised society, said Gandhi, if avenging ill-will is considered proper, it can be done so only through the agency of the government, certainly not through individual interventions. . . .

Gandhi believed that if the safety of the Muslims was assured in India, he would be able to go to Pakistan and do a great deal for the minorities there. . . . He said:

What shall we do about the Muslims who have left? I have stated that we will not bring them back right now. We will certainly not bring them back by means of the police and military. We will bring them back only when the Hindus and Sikhs tell them, you are our friends, please return to your homes, you don't require the military or police, we are your military, we are your police, all of us will live as brothers. If we are able to accomplish this in Delhi I assure you that our way will become absolutely clear in Pakistan. And with that will commence a new life. When I go to Pakistan I will not let them off easily. I will die for the Hindus and Sikhs there. I would be happy to die there. I would be happy to die here, too. If what I say cannot be achieved here, then I must die.

That a new life should commence was Gandhi's desire. He was desiring this amid the barbarity of 1947. It was either this or else a vow of self-annihilation.

How did Gandhi's mind work? How could he visualise and project, in that impossible situation, the possibility of a humane beginning? Did he have any notion of the impossible?

Was Gandhi's desire plain impossible?

We must, each one of us, reflect on this question in our individual ways. We must also reflect on how that desire came so naturally to Gandhi. In that savage time, how could he even think that, regardless of the happenings in Pakistan, India's Hindus and Sikhs would recall the displaced Muslims, and do that with love and respect? If we could somehow understand this, we would have little difficulty in accepting that such an eventuality would actually have made it possible for Gandhi to go to Pakistan and, without dying, do much for the Hindus and Sikhs there.

If the law of action and reaction drives human nature as powerfully as we think it does, the justice and respect accorded to the Muslims in India would surely have made an impression on the Muslim rulers and people of Pakistan. This is not mere logic. Take the change of attitude towards Gandhi that the Muslims demonstrated following his fast unto death in Calcutta. It provides ground for supposing that if the condition of Muslims had improved across the country, their attitude towards the common Hindus and Sikhs, too, would have undergone a similar change. We shall see ahead that Gandhi's fast unto death in Delhi was quite effective in creating goodwill in Pakistan.

The question was, as it invariably is in such human predicaments, whether anybody was willing to take the initiative to break the vicious

cycle of action and reaction—the initiative to stop being an animal. The initiative of believing in what Gandhi called the “effect of decency”, and acting accordingly.

When an initiative towards decency begins to seem impossible, what remains possible?

Only that the police will step in and suppress the violence of citizens. In course of time, the police too will be seized by the communalism that affects the citizens. Paramilitary forces will then be created and pressed into action in such situations. They will also undergo a similar psychological transformation, causing the army to be summoned to maintain civil peace. How long will the troops remain untouched by communal rancour? Assuming that they do remain unsullied, will the rulers who are elected democratically by a society steeped in communalism call them out and leave them free to do their work?

These are not mere academic questions. Gandhi could not even think of employing the police or the army as a solution to the problem of communalism. Today our very first response is to want the army to be deployed to control communal violence, even though we may later talk about the need for far-reaching interventions. In fact, the question of far-reaching interventions is nothing more than an academic exercise in the prevailing state of affairs. Indeed, the argument today is that the police, defence and other armed forces, and administrative services will, in the absence of adequate minority representation within them, continue to be influenced by majoritarian communalism and hence will be incapable of discharging their duty honestly.

So dependent have we become on the armed forces for controlling communal conflagrations that our energies remain almost entirely focused on devising methods to make those forces effective instruments for maintaining social peace.

What we have started believing to be possible—is that really possible? It is, perhaps, our limited and illusory idea of the possible that prevents us from accepting Gandhi’s idea of the possible. Our idea of the possible further prevents us from seeing that what we believe to be possible is itself impossible. It is the problem, not the solution.

Our inability to distinguish between the possible and the impossible has, by and by, brought us to a point where communal violence results not from the frenzy of citizens alone but is orchestrated under the direction of a state’s popularly elected government. Where a coalition of political parties ensconced in power at the centre chooses to maintain a deafening silence on the misdeeds of that state government. Where, not just in the immediate wake of that violent frenzy but five years later as well, in a comparatively restrained atmosphere, the people of that state reward such misdeeds by re-electing the same government to power with a heavy majority.

Gandhi used to emphasise a basic principle: “A civilised society should not need the protection of guns to uphold fundamental rights.” But here even guns are failing to protect the fundamental rights of the minorities—not just the Muslims—and of the weaker sections of society. They will remain unprotected so long as Gandhi’s possible—which is no more than an essential requirement of a democratic polity—continues to

be impossible for us.

Though not in its present virulent form, the problem of the communalisation of the armed forces, the administration and the council of ministers was not entirely absent in Gandhi’s time. In the discourse in which he expressed the hope of the beginning of a new life [18 September 1947], Gandhi mentioned a “big complaint” that had come to him:

Our police and military, which comprise Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Gorkhas, are supposed to be protectors, but they have become predators instead. How true this is I don’t know. But I want to communicate to the policemen that they should be upright. I have heard that in some places they themselves have indulged in looting. I was told today about an incident in Connaught Place where the soldiers and policemen stationed there started looting. Perhaps the information is false. But if there is an iota of truth in it then I would remind the police and the military that the days of the British are past. Then they could do as they pleased but today they are soldiers of India; they must not become enemies of the Muslims. When they are ordered to protect them, they should protect them.

Gandhi’s hope of a new life, without which any democracy would be inconceivable, has not become any more possible in our public life than it was in his lifetime. If anything, the relationship between the possible and the impossible in the past 60 or more years has got inverted in much too vulgar a manner. What Gandhi considered possible—the practicability and utility of which many of Gandhi’s contemporaries, too, had begun to

appreciate—has started appearing all but impracticable and impossible today even as it seems useful and necessary. On the other hand, we have made possible what to Gandhi was inconceivable.

In the course of this inversion, the good has been pushed in the direction of the impossible, and the bad has been made eminently viable. For instance, the path of ahimsa, which Gandhi considered a difficult but the only straight and clear path, has seemed increasingly impossible and impractical. There is another aspect of this inversion which can be understood through a remark made in the same discourse [18 September 1947]. Referring to the Muslims who had fled their homes and sought refuge in Delhi's relief camps as well as those who had gone to Pakistan out of fear, Gandhi said:

The world's largest mosque, the Jama Masjid, is situated here. What will happen to this mosque if we kill most of the Muslims, and the ones who survive go to Pakistan driven by fear? Will you send the mosque to Pakistan or raze it or convert it into a Shiva temple? Suppose that some Hindu presumes to build a Shiva temple there or the Sikhs consider building a gurudwara there. That, if you ask me, would be but an attempt to bury the Hindu and Sikh religions. Religion cannot be preserved this way.

Gandhi has no more than an inkling of the kind of presumption that he cautions against, warning that this would destroy religion itself, not just the Hindu or Sikh religion. He was afraid that, forgetting the essence of religion under the impact of communal frenzy, people—average Hindus and Sikhs—might actually translate their vain presumption into public action. His fears soon started

materialising. Two months later [21 November 1947], he was obliged to say in his prayer discourse:

As per the information I have received, about 137 mosques of Delhi have been virtually destroyed in the recent riots. Some of them have been turned into temples. One such mosque is near Connaught Place, which no one can escape noticing. An Indian flag is flying over it today. It has been turned into a temple and an idol has been placed in it. To despoil mosques in this manner is to put Hindu and Sikh religions to shame. In my opinion this goes against every tenet of religion. . . . The magnitude of this act cannot be mitigated by saying that Muslims in Pakistan have also despoiled Hindu temples or turned them into mosques. In my view, any such act would destroy the Hindu religion, the Sikh religion and Islam.

The situation went from bad to worse. Twenty days later, in the month of December 1947, Gandhi said:

I hear speeches are being given—I will not disclose the names right away for all the particulars have not come to me as yet—that only a few Muslims remain here and they will not be allowed to stay on. Whatever mosques remain will be occupied for Hindus to live in them. What they will do next, God alone knows, I do not. . . . We are committing acts of destruction.

Gandhi really did not know. Who knows if God did? We do know. Now.

Gandhi was seized by an unimaginable fear. We have made possible what for him was unimaginable. It has taken us a little over 40 years to turn into a virtue what to Gandhi and his time was reprehensible. Granted, more than

a 100 mosques were vandalised—temporarily—during the riots in Delhi and there was similar—and more lasting—destruction in other parts of the country. But, Gandhi apart, even the collective conscience of the country had not surged with pride on account of those misdeeds. Many were seized by the hysteria of revenge then. Yet, there was within a feeling of shame, a feeling that what had happened was not right. There was also a realisation that what Gandhi said was right. There wasn't that ideological fervour which, forgetting Gandhi's simple question—"will you raze the mosques", today honours the destroyers of mosques as supreme well-wishers of Hindu religion and the Indian nation (the two being inseparable); rewards and enthrones them; or renders them incapable of grasping Gandhi's warning: "If we raze their sacred sites, we too will be obliterated."

Gandhi's fear ran very deep. If the worsening situation was not brought under immediate control, it would have inconceivably dangerous consequences. His idea of control, as we have seen, did not mean keeping communal violence under check by whatever means possible. It was imperative to change people's way of thinking. So, determined to do or die, Gandhi devoted every moment of his to reason with the people.

Gandhi reached Delhi on 9 September. For three months he did everything he could, but the 'atmosphere' of Delhi did not change. Finally, he was convinced that the time to 'die' had arrived. . . .

Gandhi commenced his fast unto death on 13 January 1948.

(Excerpted from historian Sudhir Chandra's book, Gandhi: An Impossible Possibility.)

Is This My Vote?

Anupam Saraph

Electronic voting machines (EVMs) are magic machines that convert candidates into representatives. This magic depends on the number of votes counted on the EVM as having been cast in favour of a candidate. Candidates and people accepting the EVM count as a representation of the people's mandate depends on their trust in EVMs.

The trust in the EVM's ability to capture votes and count them correctly comes from the conviction that the polling agents of various political parties participate in a mock election conducted by the presiding officer in each voting booth. The mock election is meant to demonstrate that the tally of votes cast in favour of the candidates by each polling agent is reflected correctly on counting. This voting test, in other words, declares a machine to be capable of capturing votes correctly if it is impossible to distinguish between results declared after a manual counting of votes recorded on paper and after a counting by the machine.

The voting test is eerily similar to the test of machine intelligence devised by Alan Turing, the founding father of computer science. According to the Turing test, a machine will be declared intelligent if an interrogator cannot distinguish between the responses of a machine and a human challenged with similar questions. [1]

John Searle, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of California Berkeley, challenged the Turing test [2], asserting that

imitating instructions was not a sufficient condition to conclude that machines were intelligent or that they could think. He required ones that are challenged with questions to have the ability to establish meaning in order to declare that they could think. Searle devised a test called the Chinese Room Test to demonstrate the ability of a machine to respond to questions in Chinese on the basis of a script and rules and thereby illustrate that the machine still had no means to establish the meaning of the questions or answers.

While Searle may not have provided a test for intelligence, he undisputedly demonstrated that the inability to distinguish between the responses of a machine and a human was insufficient to establish intelligence.

What would undisputedly establish the ability of a machine to capture votes and count them correctly?

The meaning of a vote

The meaning of a vote lies in it being cast by a real voter and then being counted for the candidate it was intended for. The meaning of a vote is altered by allowing it to be cast by a non-existent voter or by counting it as a vote for an unintended candidate. To demonstrate that an EVM can capture votes and count them correctly, it will have to allow the voter to verify that his/her vote has not only been counted but counted for his/her candidate. It will have to allow candidates and voters to verify that the votes polled by a candidate were all cast by real and

legitimate voters and were all meant for the candidate.

Currently no EVM can establish that the meaning in votes is unaltered and that every vote cast is genuine and counted in favour of the candidate it was meant for.

Like the voting test, neither the Turing test nor the Searle test can recognise different responses at different times or non-deterministic responses. At most, such seeming randomness, if recognised at all, may be taken for intelligence. The assumption is that there is nothing that can alter the response from time to time.

Joseph Weizenbaum, Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and one of the fathers of modern artificial intelligence, created ELIZA3, an early natural language processing computer program, to demonstrate the superficiality of communication between humans and machines. The response of ELIZA to human interaction varied to the same question, giving it the appearance of being human. Weizenbaum established how a simple set of instructions can allow the machine to respond differently to the same question.

Auditing the code

Without auditing the code of a computer program, it is foolhardy to assess the behaviour of a computer program. The program embedded in the chips of the EVM is not available in the public domain. It is therefore impossible for anyone to inspect it and certify its behaviour. There is no third-party audit of the program

supplied for embedding into the chips and the one that is embedded into the chips. Unsurprisingly, there is a petition seeking an audit of the source code pending before the Supreme Court. To complicate matters even more, this program is embedded into the chips by vendors outside India [4], and Electronics Corporation of India Limited and Bharat Electronics Limited only assemble the EVMs. In a meeting I had in August 2009 with the then Chairman of the Technical Committee of the Election Commission of India and the then Election Commissioners, they confirmed that they had not used any mechanism besides the voting test to verify that the EVM was running the program supplied by them.

In March 2017, *WikiLeaks* disclosed that “the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] lost control of the majority of its hacking arsenal including malware, viruses, trojans, weaponised ‘zero day’ exploits, malware remote control systems and associated documentation. This extraordinary collection, which amounts to more than several hundred million lines of code, gives its possessor the entire hacking capacity of the CIA. The archive appears to have been circulated among former US government hackers and contractors in an unauthorised manner, one of whom has provided *WikiLeaks* with portions of the archive. The malware includes ‘software that enables hackers to remotely control a compromised device—are “very, very complex”.’[5] The malware also includes code that can be implanted in devices not connected to the Internet by using thumb drives or other devices.

It is also widely known that

chip makers build backdoors[6] for future exploitation of hardware. Unfortunately, there is no way of guaranteeing that chips have not been tampered with. Experts note that as few as 1,000 transistors in a chip could cause them to do a lot of “very interesting” things with the extra transistors. If the rogue transistors, or transistors that are not part of the original design, are programmed to respond to a specific 512-bit sequence of numbers, you might have to cycle through every possible numerical combination of 512-bit sequences to discover the rogue code, using software testing. Surveillance cameras[7] across the world have been recognised as easy targets for hackers.[8] These can also work in tandem with other devices in their proximity to regulate rogue chips. Security experts say maintenance, repair businesses, and subcontractors may also pose a greater danger to hacking hardware. [9] Even missile systems have been hacked remotely due to such vulnerabilities.[10]

“Even if most voting machines aren’t connected to the Internet,” says the cybersecurity expert Jeremy Epstein[11], “they are connected to something that’s connected to something that’s connected to the Internet.” Adds Alex Halderman, a computer scientist at the University of Michigan: “Before every election, the voting machines have to be programmed with the design of the ballots—what are the races, who are the candidates.”[12] The programming is usually done on a computer in a central election office or by an outside vendor.

VVPATs

In 2009, I reported to the Election Commission of India the presence of

coded results of the entire Lok Sabha election on its website a good 10 days before voting was over.[13] This led Subramanian Swamy to petition the courts for EVMs that had Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs). Hundreds of candidates across India have cried foul over EVMs when the machines appear to have favoured their opponents. Even political parties have not demonstrated trust when they have suffered and have forgotten the unfairness once they are in power. Behind closed doors, they are familiar with the technical details of hacking EVMs in a block where their opponents have more support. It is little surprise, therefore, that a 2011 Report of the National Institute of Standards and Technology found that voter-marked paper ballots are the only way to securely record and preserve voter intent.[14]

By now it should be obvious that like any machine subjected to the Turing or Searle test, an EVM subject to the voting test can be programmed to work differently at different times, either triggered by a stimulus, internal programming or simply by randomness. The machine passing the voting test is no evidence of its inability to generate votes on its own or to not count votes in favour of one candidate over votes for another.

Consider the likelihood that you will deposit money in a machine that is demonstrated to accept money to a particular bank account in a test, but it does not issue any receipt of the transaction and neither does it have the possibility of an audit to verify that the deposits not only went to the correct account but also that they did not get altered. Why should you do any differently with your vote that is a blank cheque to not just your tax

money but also to your rights?

EVMs do not provide voters with a receipt of the vote they cast. It is a huge leap of faith that the machine not only allocated the vote to the candidate intended by the voter but also allowed the same vote to be counted for the same candidate. Given the stakes, electoral malpractices are rampant. The Election Commission has not simplified voting; it has made the simple process of making a choice extremely complex, drawing attention away from the ability of the vote to be counted to the paraphernalia of elections. This is almost like the magician or thief who distracts the attention of people from what they are really doing in order to perform magic and trickery.

Auditability test

There is no certainty unless the EVM passes the “Auditability” test. The Auditability test will need the EVM to allow voters to verify that their vote has not only been counted but counted for their candidate even after it is cast. It will have to allow the voter or candidate to verify that the votes polled by a candidate were all cast by real and legitimate voters and were all meant for the candidate. This will necessitate providing voters either a receipt or a vote “account”, like a bank account, whose “balance” they can verify. This will also require the ability to audit the votes deposited in each candidate’s account and verify them as having been generated by a genuine voter, and not spontaneously by the program itself, and having been meant for the candidate.

Subramanian Swamy’s petition to the courts resulted in EVMs that were called EVMs with VVPAT. The VVPAT was introduced to create

an audit trail of votes cast on an EVM. The VVPAT is an audit trail assuming each voter has verified the vote printed by the VVPAT EVM. If the printouts are voter-verified votes, they can be counted to verify the votes counted from the control units of EVMs. The control units would have counted correctly if the VVPAT votes match.

To confirm that the votes counted across EVMs by the control unit are the same as those counted by the VVPAT, the votes polled for each candidate on the control unit and in the paper trail should not be statistically different. To determine this, statisticians compare the votes counted from a sample of the EVMs using both the methods. The question is, how many comparisons will establish confidence that their choice of EVM was not biased or just a fortuitous one?

A good deal about choosing the number of EVMs to count depends on the variability expected between the EVMs. Each EVM or booth has demographically high variation or could be homogeneous. For example, because of their demographic make-up, some polling booths could be expected to be favouring one candidate over another. In case of high variability, a larger number of booths will need to be compared for VVPAT and control unit counts. There was an average of 1,708 EVMs in every parliamentary constituency in 2014. While each EVM can store 3,840 votes, an average of 904 voters were assigned to cast votes on every EVM during the 2014 election. This means a greater variability was introduced between booths than necessary. Typically for constituencies that have 1,708 EVMs and high variability in booth voting, a choice of less than 200

booth VVPATs for counting would be poor to certify that the control units have counted the correct votes.

That said, the VVPAT itself does not satisfy the Auditability test.

The Auditability test requires the EVM to allow voters to verify that their vote has not only been counted but counted for their candidate even after it is cast. Voters have no means to confirm verification of the printout shown to them. The printout is merely a paper vote, it is not a voter-verified vote. The voter has no recourse to cancel or object to an incorrect printout without facing disproportionate penalties and no means to demonstrate the stealing of votes. The term VVPAT is therefore incorrect. There is no means to establish that voter verification happened.

The Auditability test also requires that voters or candidates can verify that the votes polled by a candidate were all cast by real and legitimate voters and were all meant for the candidate. The printout of the VVPAT does not have any means of authenticating itself as a voter-verified or genuine vote. It is quite possible that the counted printouts from VVPAT were not the ones printed during the voting. The printouts can neither establish that they were cast by legitimate voters nor that they were cast for the candidate they indicate. The printouts from the VVPAT are not counted by any third-party auditor. The same entity that has counted the votes on the control unit counts the VVPAT. This is bad auditing practice.

For the Auditability test to work, voters will need a receipt or a passbook entry that their vote has been deposited to the account of the candidate. They will need the ability

to verify, any time, that the Election Commission records still have the same entry as in their passbook.

Hacking elections to steal them is unfortunately widespread across the world. The use of electronics has made it easier, not more difficult, to hack into elections as such hacks are difficult to detect. The 2006 Robin Williams starrer *Man of the Year* is the story of the United States presidential elections being fixed by EVMs. While we have focussed only on EVMs, it is important to recognise that strategies to steal an election combine the use of electronics not just for the casting of votes but also for deciding who can cast votes, which votes get counted, who gets to be a candidate, who gets to reach out to voters and also what messages get seen by whom. The Election Commission of India has demonstrated naivete if not ignorance in asserting that electronics makes elections unhackable.[15]

Undermining people's voices

The multiple ways in which electronics undermines people's voices in elections was evidenced in the 2016 US presidential election.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Russia allegedly took advantage of the many online vulnerabilities in US' voting network to control the 2016 presidential election.[16] The voting network that was allegedly compromised includes software companies, online registration sites and vital information that election officials willingly send to each other over email. The hack reportedly affected 39 States, twice as many as were originally reported. According to the CIA, the FBI and the National Security Agency, they had evidence of Russian efforts to undermine

confidence in the US electoral system and affect the outcome of the US presidential election.[17]

Elizabeth Warren told CNN that the 2016 Democratic Party primary was rigged.[18] Interestingly, an analysis of US Democratic Party primaries with or without paper trails shows a voter preference for Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton wherever the paper trail was used, casting a shadow on the lack of transparency of electronic voting.[19] According to the Electronic Privacy Information Centre, "investigations undertaken by private security firms, apart from the FBI, indicate that the attacks on the 2016 US presidential election also threaten democratic institutions in other countries".[20]

Channel 4 secretly filmed the managing director of Cambridge Analytica's political division Mark Turnbull and the chief executive Alexander Nix boasting about tampering with over 200 elections around the world, in places like Sri Lanka, Nigeria, India and Argentina. [21]

Gloomy future

The future of trusting the vote in the machine is dull, dark and gloomy. Machine readable ballots are a possible way that provide auditability.

By defending the EVMs needlessly, the Election Commission has neglected its mission of protecting the representation of people. Democracy has apparently given way to majoritarianism of representative politics. Representation cannot be about majoritarianism but about delivering the constitutional promise of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. This defines public interest. It is about delivering the

constitutional promise of protecting sovereignty, democracy and the republic. This defines national interest. Representative politics has evidently become more concerned with majoritarianism and winning elections rather than protecting public and national interests.

As pointed out by Prof. Lawrence Lessig of Harvard Law School, our choice of representatives has already been hijacked by those, like political parties and their anonymous donors, who choose and restrict the candidates we can vote for.[22] In the process we have forgotten that democracy is not about voting or winning an election but about participation in decision-making to protect public interest and national interest. We urgently need better ways to provide equity in decision-making than to simply leave it to "elected" representatives. Counting votes on EVMs or fighting to save EVMs certainly does not help us to accomplish that.

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Reassurance That Isn't

Apoorvanand

Commenting on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's victory speech, *The Indian Express* wrote: "In his speech in Central Hall in Parliament on Saturday, the first after being elected leader of the BJP-led NDA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi struck a heartening note of magnanimity. Among other things, he said the new government would make efforts to earn the trust of minorities, and of those who disagree (with the BJP-NDA). He urged the newly elected MPs to puncture the 'myth' or illusion of fear among the country's minorities . . . these are statements of inclusive intent." ("Weight of words", IE, May 27.)

The editorial rightly asserted that we need more to be reassured. This implies that such statements should be backed by actions. Yet, the word "magnanimous" was particularly hurtful and cruel. Assurance of inclusion to the minorities is not an act of large-heartedness in a secular democracy. It is not something granted to them by the majority. It pertains to rights that flow from the Constitution—and not the intent of the rulers. The use of the word, "magnanimous" cannot be ascribed to carelessness or a lapse of attention.

One would like to believe that the word was used to convey irony, since it expresses the state of helplessness of those who believe in secular principles in India—we are expected to be thankful or grateful to those being generous to us. Is this not what the minorities have been told all along? Not only by the RSS but even by well-intentioned people who hold that India is secular because of its

Hindu majority. It is the catholicity, diversity and openness of Hinduism which has made secularism the most natural state-principle in India.

Returning to the immediate context of the PM's speech, it was only right that the rest of the editorial explained that the feeling of fear and persecution among minorities was not a product of their imagination. While it is right to ask Modi to rein in his leaders, and also mind his tongue, it would have been better if he was reminded of his own words after his first victory in 2014. Even that time, he was magnanimous to the minorities in intent. Was that translated into action?

Should it take a faraway voice to tell us that the leader himself was the source of fear and also the justifier of the persecution of minorities, especially the Muslims? Did he not lead his ministers and members of his party in making the Muslims figures of hate? Did he not make them the other that the Hindus should dread? It was not just the desperation of electioneering which drove him towards it. The past five years bear ample proof that it was he and his party president who instigated the desire to dominate among the Hindus. Who, after all, were to be dominated? It was not only his silence on the hate crimes against Muslims and Christians but his incitement for Hindu mobilisation, which was most threatening to the minorities. This includes the scaremongering in Gujarat about Muslims during the assembly elections in 2017.

The Muslims are thus allowed

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to vote but not aspire to lead. It is the pleasure of the majority Hindus they should try to earn. This is the message that the first Modi regime has effectively conveyed to Muslims: they need to follow the rules framed by the Hindu majority, that too in the language framed by the BJP and its affiliates. More than physical violence, it is this feeling of being dominated and disciplined by a patron, which is humiliating to the Muslims. It is unacceptable that Hindus—however largehearted—should be the big brothers of Muslims.

Mahatma Gandhi had asserted that Muslims are not the vassals of Hindus. It was this insistence of the Mahatma that led to his murder. We must not forget this foundational principle of the Indian republic. It is this principle which has been repeatedly violated not just under the watch of PM Modi but he himself is a repeat offender in this respect.

Modi has also maligned and criminalised the language of rights—the language which human rights workers tried to use while combating his majoritarian project. He denigrated them as five-star activists and called them the Khan Market gang, while his ministers hounded them by calling them the *tukde tukde gang*.

One sometimes feels that we are so embarrassed about the prime minister that we try to live in denial. We tend to believe that the leader does have noble intents but is troubled by his unruly followers. We ignore that it is he who follows the lumpens. It is he who fashions and instigates the majoritarian instinct in the Hindus. So, much more than his followers, it is Modi who needs to be watched for his words and actions and held accountable at each step.

Modi is a master of the art of deception. Or, it would be more correct to say that he is both transparent and crude in his deceptive acts. It is actually the media and analysts who are looking for ways to justify him. Or is it the popular mandate that inhibits us in calling him by his name? Do we disrespect the people when we say that the leader they have chosen has been violating the oath he has taken in the name of the Constitution? Sadly, the last stint of Modi proved that his instincts

are contrary to the Constitutional values. Therefore, we have no reason to applaud his patronising words now. The minorities have survived the worst phase of their existence in Independent India. The question now is whether the republic itself will survive another five years under the same leadership. So, it would be our duty to keep calling people by their names and not clothe them in words which express our pious wishes.

(The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University.)

Debate: Beware Glib Explanations for Modi's Election Victory

Dilip Menon

Indian elections are preceded by predictions such as either X will win with a majority, or Y will win with a majority. If neither gets a majority they will team up with other parties. It is also possible that X or Y may get less votes than they thought. This mindless psephology finds its counterpart in post factor stocktaking in which intellectuals and columnists work backwards to show that the election results were inevitable and provide arguments of much sophistry and sophistication.

It was only a misguided few or those who live in the eternal sunshine of the thoughtless mind who believed that the Bharatiya Janata Party would not win the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. It was always a question of the margin of victory. The results have surprised everyone; not only the majority that the National Democratic Alliance commands in parliament, but the decimation of the Congress. There has been much ink spilt since on how this election

was about the personality of Modi; that the BJP campaign had been run like a presidential campaign; that the Congress and “liberals” were not disciplined enough to create an election machine, and so on.

Increasingly, there is the idea being put around that Modi won because India identifies with him. This is wisdom after the fact, since before and during the elections, farmers marches, diatribes about demonetisation, public hilarity about the photo-op prime minister and the unprecedented spike in stand-up comedy routines about Modi indicated that there was much skepticism both about the person and his policies.

In a post-election column for the *Indian Express*, one of our most astute public intellectuals, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, has expressed the view that “All our normal categories of political analysis and statistical jugglery come to nought when they are faced with Narendra Modi.” To

use the BJP's supercharged Hindu vocabulary, Modi is a *brahmastra*, he is the *visvaroop* of Vishnu in the face of which all words succumb and so on. This is neither here nor there. The inability of a person to analyse a phenomenon does not mean that the phenomenon is in itself beyond rational explanation. Otherwise, all our social science students would get away with a mere sense of awe before questions.

Mehta offers three ineffable postulates: first, that Modi "is the purest distillation of the idea of politics" – a 100% proof single malt in the face of country liquor; second, that "he has fully grasped the potential of a dangerous idea in democracy"—quite unlike amateurs like Golwalkar and Savarkar before him, Modi is the fulfilment of all that went before him; and finally, that "he has crafted a way of being everywhere"—he is ubiquitous like brahman, he "colonises our imaginations". This febrile prose, which suggests that Modi is ineffable essence as much as corporeal politician is startling.

A landscape of corrupt midgets

Such discourse becomes possible in a political landscape of corrupt midgets, with the likes of Digvijay Singh, Mayawati, Mulayam Singh, Sharad Pawar and so on. There has also been a triumphalism regarding what is being seen as the "decimation" of the Left, in which the story of Bengal has been conflated with that of Kerala—where the BJP has not secured even one seat.

It is also being put about that this victory is the end of the identitarian politics of caste, that bugbear of upper caste BJP supporters as much as of our social

science establishment. This desire that caste will softly and silently vanish away has been with us since independence, connected as much with Marxist misunderstandings of caste as merely a mystification of class, as much as the belief of an upper caste establishment that affirmative action was a needless challenge to the idea of inscrutable merit.

What is clear is that the near extinction of the Left in Bengal has to do with the internal dynamics of Hindu *bhadralok* politics in the region as much as the bleeding of CPI(M) cadres and votes to the BJP in the face of the Trinamool Congress's prior destruction of an elite Left politics which had been Hindu in all but name.

Again, the destruction of the SP and BSP in Uttar Pradesh had to do with the particular form of the politics of patronage and corruption and not a rejection of caste politics as such. It remains to be seen as to what new form of caste politics will emerge in UP. Hindutva has triumphed not in some final and eternal sense, but conjuncturally, given the rotten state of politics in the states where it won and was expected to win. Not Odisha; not Kerala; not Punjab; not Andhra Pradesh; not Tamil Nadu. That the BJP won in the BIMARU states where development has been a chimera for over 70 years is not unsurprising.

While there has been much chest-thumping about *vikas*, *swacchata* and so on, it is clear that in the states where there has been governance and development, the BJP has little to offer except its Hindu rhetoric. Both in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the struggle against caste from the early 20th century has produced

a discourse of rights, equality and governance which has been realised in substantial measure.

It remains to be seen whether the BJP can transform its parliamentary mandate and bring a measure of economic progress and social justice to the historically backward states where it has largely won. Or whether we have another five years ahead of a degeneration of the public sphere, attacks on Dalits and Muslims, and an erosion of institutions which are portrayed only within a retrograde vocabulary of sickularism and libtardness. Modi and Amit Shah have shown what is possible through a radical recasting of grassroots organisation and of working diligently at the local level. This is what the Congress and the Left did. Once. It's probably time to do so again, before the apocalypse.

(Dilip Menon is Mellon Chair in Indian Studies and Director, Centre for Indian Studies in Africa at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.)

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How the BJP's Political Narrative Filled the Holes in the NDA's Actual Performance

Arun Kumar

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—and more than that, Narendra Modi—has come back with a larger mandate than what it was given by India's voters in 2014.

At one level, this is remarkable given the economic distress all around, which should have led to a strong anti-incumbency and a decline in the saffron party's votes. The mandate is, in part, a reflection of short-term politics trumping the longer term issues facing the nation.

This is not the first time that this has happened in India.

In 1984, after Indira Gandhi was assassinated, her son came to power with a majority that even Nehru never had. In 1991, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated between the two rounds of elections, the vote share of Congress dramatically increased in the second round. It came to power as the single largest party with P.V. Narasimha Rao becoming prime minister.

In 1984, the big issue confronting the nation was the separatist movement in Punjab. How voting massively for Rajiv Gandhi—a reluctant politician, with little experience of politics and the issues at hand—would solve the problem was not of concern to the voters.

Similarly, for the 1991 elections, the critical issue was a sinking economy. Many voters who were not voting for the Congress suddenly shifted allegiance to that party because its leader was assassinated. The critical issue at hand became immaterial.

It is clear that a political narrative can either emerge or be created that diverts the attention of the public from the critical issues facing the country. Modi has managed to do that by focusing on muscular nationalism. This trumped the key issues of youth unemployment, the farmer crisis and growing alienation of minorities.

In media interviews and ground reports, many of the poor said yes they were hurting but when the nation is in danger that is more important.

Many, believing that the nation is in danger, wanted a strong leader and Modi projected himself as just that. If the threat was from Pakistan, it was easy to consolidate the Hindu vote. Finally, the opposition was projected as a rag-tag grouping without a common strong leader—so, there was no alternative (TINA). The BJP also strongly pushed the narrative that nothing had happened in the last 65 years and all gains in the country were achieved in the last 5 years.

Missing the forest for the trees

It's often easy to think of the immediate and not the long-term. An immediate retaliation against Pakistan is seen as more important than having a nuanced foreign policy which serves the wider long-term national interest. For a majority, India's isolation in the neighbourhood and an ineffective foreign policy vis a vis China matter little.

Instead, the bear hug with

foreign dignitaries becomes a symbol of India's growing external clout and is more important than the content of the relationship with those nations. Obama's chiding Modi for a deteriorating communal climate is less important than his hug. Trump's praise is more important than the spoke he has put in our relationship with Iran and the impact it will have on our energy security.

The well-being of people is not just economic but has political and social features which may be more important, depending on the situation. Slogans that have a ring with the public have often mattered more than the issues. So, *garibi hatao* became a big pull. Now it is nation in danger.

When one's own life is precarious due to economic hardship, it is easy to believe that the nation is in danger.

Modi's two big economic actions—demonetisation and the Goods and Services (GST) regime—were projected as being inherently nationalistic. Demonetisation was said to be a *mahayagya* for the nation in which everyone had to give *ahuti* by bearing hardships. A parallel was drawn between jawans standing at the border and people standing in queues at the banks.

GST was projected as a new freedom and unification of the nation. But ultimately, these nationalistic issues were hardly used in the election campaign as they sparked crises in the unorganised sector of India's economy.

Indeed, these economic shocks were neatly sidestepped. At the

time of the Uttar Pradesh elections soon after demonetisation, people willingly accepted their hardship because they felt that it was done to tackle the menace of black economy. They believed that the rich and the poor had been brought into the same queue and those with black money had been hurt and irretrievably damaged. They felt that justice had been done. This narrative changed when it was realized that all the money had come back to the Reserve Bank of India and none of the black money was demobilised. So, in the national elections this issue could not be used. Similarly, GST had hurt the economy with hundreds of changes in the last 22 months and could not be used as an issue of nationalism.

If these two issues had been highlighted, especially as nationalistic moves, it would have backfired upon the BJP. What came in handy was the Pulwama and Balakot incidents. The first reflected the danger confronting the nation and the second highlighted a muscular response establishing Modi's credentials as a strong leader. People forgave or did not recall Modi's unscheduled stop in Pakistan to greet Nawaz Sharif or the invitation to ISI after the terrorist attack in Pathankot. Modi repeatedly referred to martyrs of Pulwama and invoked Balakot to appeal to the voters. He asked the first-time voters to vote for the men who executed the surgical strike (meaning his party).

On the economic front

If there was economic distress at various levels, how was this contained? We know that India's poorest were hit by the two big shocks to the economy which led to a decline in the growth rate of the

economy, rising unemployment and a farm crisis. This has meant a loss of Rs 25 lakh crore in incomes in the unorganised sectors of the economy in the last two and a half years.

Firstly, there was partial compensation for this loss through schemes like Ujjwala, Mudra and Swachh Bharat, whose aim was to primarily build rural assets, but whose implementation has not been the best.

The messaging around the different programmes was excellent. The BJP in particular did a good job of publicizing them, though many of the schemes were not new and merely continued the efforts of past governments.

For instance, rural electrification has been going on for the last 70 years. Before this government took over, electricity had reached 6.3 lakh villages. Modi's government added another 20,000 villages but tried to portray as if they had electrified all villages in the country.

These schemes, however, did not give the BJP a significant advantage in the recent 2018 assembly elections where it lost. Even in specific by-elections in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP lost. The question then becomes why these schemes yield dividends in the national elections but not in the assembly elections?

That Pulwama and Balakot turned the tide in favour of the saffron party is clear from the fact that there was some amount of panic within the BJP till these events occurred. For instance, to overcome the perceived anti-incumbency, in the budget on February 1, the government offered Rs 6,000 per annum to 12 crore farmers, pension to the unorganised sectors workers, and tax concessions to the middle class—even though revenues were

inadequate and the fiscal deficit was likely to rise.

There was a rush to give the first tranche of Rs 2,000 before the announcement of the elections but only about 10% of the farmers could be identified and given the first tranche. Its various state governments offered loan waivers to farmers. Allocation to MGNREGS was jacked up to Rs 60,000 crore to provide work in rural areas.

All these steps were taken even though many of them go against the economic and social rhetoric that the BJP often deploys.

The crisis many poor Indians faced due to economic shocks also opened them to the idea of a nation in crisis, caused by outside forces or the 'other' in society.

These immediate issues have taken precedence over long-term ones. Building a harmonious society becomes secondary to defending one's faith and imposing one's beliefs on the other. The other is projected as a source of trouble and must be subjugated.

India is not alone in this trend of short-term trumping the long term. It is visible globally in the election of Trump, vote for Brexit, rise of Le Pen in France, decline of popularity of Angela Merkel, rise of Erdogan in Turkey, what is happening to the ANC in South Africa or to Suu Kyi in Myanmar, changes in Egypt, Brazil, Philippines and so on. Modi is in step with this global trend.

But India is far more heterogenous than any of the countries mentioned above and needs a far more nuanced approach to its problems—will this now happen?

(Arun Kumar is Malcolm Adiseshiah chair professor, Institute of Social Sciences.)

Searching for Glimpses of Nehru in a Parochial, Post-Nehruvian India

Avijit Pathak

[May 27 is the death anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru. This article is being published courtesy The Wire.]

India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost as an alien critic, full of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past that I saw. To some extent I came to her via the West, and looked at her as a friendly Westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India?

Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*

May 27, 1964: I was a student of Class II, and my father told me about the demise of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was a small sleepy town in West Bengal, and even as a small child I could feel the moment of mourning and sadness all around. However, everything moves, and with the passage of clock time I too grew up, and experienced many political/historical transformations.

The grandness of Nehru—say, the visual depiction of Nehru with Nasser and Tito generating the spirit of non-alignment; or Nehru with a red rose pinned close to his heart hoisting the national flag as my early memory of calendar art—did remain in my consciousness. But then, after the brief tenure of Lal Bahadur Shastri, we saw the arrival of a major symbol of power, the charismatic Indira Gandhi reminding me of the brilliant letters her father wrote to her, her golden moments during the Bangladesh liberation movement, and eventually the manifestation of her authoritarianism causing the toughness of Emergency and simultaneous growth of the civil liberties movements in India.

Indira's rise and fall, from her early 'socialist' gestures to Operation Bluestar leading to her assassination illustrated the way in which the political landscape of India was changing. Violence became the order

of the day. The spectacular victory of Rajiv Gandhi notwithstanding, the Congress system was falling apart. Coalition politics, the rise of regional forces, the blooming of identity markers as part of Machiavellian calculations, and the normalisation of corruption and scams—it was clear that the political realm had become increasingly separated from Gandhi's conscience and Nehru's vision. And now as my hair is turning grey I see yet another twist in our political history—the unholy alliance of neoliberal economics and the social conservatism of religious nationalism. Under these changed circumstances filled with violence, herd mentality and anti-intellectualism, I ask myself whether it is still possible to revisit Nehru, and learn a couple of lessons from him.

Modernity and romance with a civilisation

To begin with, I think, it is important to understand the mind of Nehru and his worldview. Yes, he was 'modern' in the sense that, as *The Glimpses of World History* would indicate, he was heavily influenced by the major transformations that post-Enlightenment Europe was passing through. The critical enquiry of science, the promise of industrial revolution, the turning

point in human thinking through the discourses of Marx, Freud and Darwin, liberal philosophy, and above all, the method of Marxian historical method and socialist experimentations—Nehru embraced the spirit of modernity.

Yet, his modernity was subtle, with a deep sense of humility and wonder. This possibly led him to 'discover' India. In a way a careful reader of *The Discovery of India* would agree that it was the story of a romantic (yet critical) engagement between a modern mind and an old civilisation like ours with its many layers, and peaks and valleys. Far from debunking all civilisational values and aspirations, Nehru could retain a sense of enchantment. At Sarnath near Benaras, he could see the Buddha preaching his first sermon; he could still hear the inspiring *Upanishadic* prayer: "Lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality!" And in the *Bhagavad Gita*, he saw "an inner quality of earnest enquiry and search, of contemplation and action, of balance and equilibrium in spite of conflict and contradiction." No wonder, far from erecting a wall between new age and old civilisation, Nehru had the sensibility to observe:

We can never forget the ideas that have moved our race, the dreams

of the Indian people through the ages, the wisdom of the ancients, the buoyant energy and love of life and nature of our forefathers, their spirit of curiosity and mental adventure, the daring of their thought, their splendid achievements in literature, art and culture, their love of truth, beauty and freedom, the basic values they set up.

Yet, despite this romance, Nehru retained the spirit of critical enquiry. It is important to have sensitivity to the past. But we should not keep glorifying the 'golden past' because, as he reminded us, such a 'foolish and dangerous pastime' would take us nowhere because spiritual greatness could not be founded on starvation and misery. 'India', he asserted boldly, 'must break with much of her past, and not allow it to dominate the present'.

One way of doing this was to popularise 'scientific temper'—or, "the adventurous and yet critical temper of science, the search for truth and new knowledge, the refusal to accept anything without testing and trial, the capacity to change previous conclusions in the face of new evidence"—which could help us to come out of the "heavy burden of the past". Well, with some amount of metaphysical wonder Nehru felt that there were 'invisible' domains that science could not explain. Yet, for him, there was no escape from science because "it is better to understand a part of truth and apply it to our lives, than to understand nothing at all."

As he became the iconic prime minister of a newly independent country—traumatised by partition, characterised by unstable foundations, worried about autonomy and sovereignty in a divided world because of Cold War politics, and

shocked after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi—history posed new challenges. No wonder, Nehru's agenda of nation-making, or 'national philosophy' assumed three central characteristics.

First, the state, he thought, ought to become an ethical state endowed with the responsibility of modernising a traditional country like ours with its new educators—economists, scientists, technologists, artists—promoting a 'scientific temper', a secular ethos with composite culture and a broadly pan-Indian national identity.

Second, with a mix of Fabian socialism and mixed economy, the state ought to play a great role in building the economic infrastructure. Big industries (or 'temples of new India'), science labs, institutes of technology and new universities for creating a resurgent human force: rational, secular, and progressively nationalist.

Third, despite his charisma and immense popularity, and at times an uneasy relationship with the radical left as well as the extremist right, he took great care to strengthen the pillars of liberal democracy with periodic elections and a delicate balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces implicit in a country with mind-boggling diversities.

Hearing the Lost Voice

Wrote Nehru in his autobiography, "We cannot stop the river of change or cut ourselves adrift from it, and psychologically we who have eaten of the apple of Eden cannot forget that taste and go back to primitiveness."

Nehru's admirers are many. And at the same time, with the rise of ecological consciousness and neo-Gandhian radicalism, there is

no dearth of critics. For instance, Nehru's 'state-centric development planning'—its centralising tendency, its reliance on techno-economist experts (symbolised by the Bhabha–Mahalanobis duo), its biases towards heavy industry—is said to have created unevenness in the country and led to the devaluation of agriculture and the rural economy, the withering away of local resources and knowledge traditions, and the widening cleavage between the educated elite and the masses.

Likewise, as 'subaltern' historians see the limits to 'nationalist/bourgeois' historiography and plead for the 'autonomous domain of people', we witness yet another critique. The meta narrative of Nehru is seen with suspicion, and the histories, struggles and resistances of the peasantry, the working class, Dalits and adivasis are seen as counter narratives. And again, there are political philosophers who would argue that there was a mismatch between the Nehruvian rhetoric and the actual performance. His socialism remained half-hearted; it could not really break the hold of semi-feudal landlords and the industrial capitalists; science eventually became the language of the state, and its secularism remained elitist because it could not articulate itself through the language of people's folk religiosity.

Yet, I feel it is difficult to resist the call of Nehru. We are living at a time when mainstream politics has lost even the slightest trace of idealism; its business-like instrumental character retains no philosophic engagement, no grand dream, no romance with ideas and visions. Nehru reminded us of this lost idealism. Even in this cynical era, when I invoke Nehru's 'tryst

with destiny' it enchants me; it makes me feel that politics ought to be a vocation with a missionary zeal. His writings, his speeches, his grand vision: we see a source of great treasure that should not be allowed to be forgotten—especially given the mood of our times.

With neo-liberal global capitalism, we have an aspiring class that cherishes reckless consumerism and the gospel of privatisation of resources, a team of economists whose principle of 'growth' is devoid of social justice with the minimalist role of the government, and a brigade of hyper-masculine nationalists for whom the state is essentially a militaristic institution. Under these circumstances socialism seems to have become a bad word. Nehru was not an ideal socialist. Yet, he brought socialism in the collective conscience of the nation. And today amidst jobless growth and the increasing insecurity amongst the poor and the underprivileged, we need this spirit of socialism—an ethical state deeply engaged with collective welfare.

Finally, when the onslaught of majoritarianism or the assertion of narrow parochial identities—'I am my religion, my caste, my race, my ethnicity'—is taking us to a dark, segmented world, Nehru's spirited humanism or cosmopolitanism can be seen as a refreshing departure: a path leading to pluralism, the fusion of cultures and traditions and a blend of nationalism and internationalism. Amidst the noise of loud, narcissistic politics, are we ready to hear the call of this lost voice?

(Avijit Pathak is a Professor at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.)

CO2 Levels Hit 415 PPM for First Time in 3 Million+ Years

Jon Queally

Atmospheric levels of carbon registered 415 parts per million over the weekend at one of the world's key measuring stations, a concentration level researchers say has not existed in more than 3 million years—before the dawn of human history.

Taken at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the measure continues the upward trend of atmospheric carbon concentration that lies at the heart of the global warming and climate crisis:

Meteorologist Eric Holthaus, a journalist who covers the climate crisis for Grist, contextualized the latest readings in a tweet that was shared widely on Sunday:

This is the first time in human history our planet's atmosphere has had more than 415ppm CO2. Not just in recorded history, not just since the invention of agriculture 10,000 years ago. Since before modern humans existed millions of years ago. We don't know a planet like this.

One person responded to the Holthaus tweet by asking, "How is this not breaking news on all channels all over the world?"

Rich Pancost, head of the School of Earth Sciences at the University of Bristol in the U.K., said that the best guess of the scientific community is that global atmospheric carbon levels have not been this high for "about 3 millions years . . . maybe more."

Writing on his Informed Comment blog Monday, historian Juan Cole said that life on Earth in that pre-historic era, known as the Pliocene Period, is not a place humans would recognize:

In the Pliocene, it was much hotter. In the Pliocene, oceans were much higher, maybe 90 feet higher.

That is our fate, folks. That is what 415ppm produces. It is only a matter of time, and some of the sea level rise will come quickly. Amsterdam, New Orleans, Lisbon, Miami – the list of cities that will be submerged is enormous.

Elsewhere online, reaction to the unsettling milestone was met with a mix of frustration, alarm, and fresh demands for urgent action to address the crisis.

Despite the new measurement, it is not as if humanity has not been endlessly warned that this is the path it's on.

"If the threshold seems unremarkable (it shouldn't)," wrote Jonathan Shieber at TechCrunch, "it's yet another indication of the unprecedented territory humanity is now charting as it blazes new trails toward environmental catastrophe."

While scientists have stated that much of the future warming is already "locked in," Cole points out that humanity's main focus must be to make sure all efforts are made to reverse the emissions trend in order to limit the scale of the destruction.

"What can be stopped is its getting any worse," Cole concluded. "But that would require moving with blinding speed to wind and solar power and electric cars."

And the message from the global climate justice movement has been crystal clear: It's an emergency. Act like it.

(Jon Queally is managing editor for Common Dreams, an independent and progressive non-profit newscenter based in the USA.)

Students from 1,600 Cities Protest Climate Change

Suyin Haynes

Hundreds of thousands of students around the world walked out of their schools and colleges Friday in the latest in a series of strikes urging action to address the climate crisis. According to event organisers Fridays for Future, over 1664 cities across 125 countries registered strike actions, with more expected to report turnouts in the coming days.

The “School Strike for Climate” movement was first started by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who began her strike outside the country’s parliament in Stockholm in August 2018 and has said that she will continue to strike until Sweden is aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Since then, her singular action has spread into an international climate movement, organised by young people around the world. This strike followed the last co-ordinated event on March 15, which saw over 1.6 million people across 133 countries turn out at demonstrations, according to organisers.

Thunberg was recently profiled on TIME’s global cover as a Next Generation Leader, along with nine other people shaping the world’s future. “This is not about truancy or civil disobedience, this is about the climate and the ecological crisis, and people need to understand that,” Thunberg told TIME in Stockholm, a couple of weeks ahead of the global strike.

“May 24 is the last chance to affect the E.U. elections. Politicians are talking about the climate and

environmental issues more now, but they need more pressure,” she said. Voting across the European Union takes place May 23–26, where the 751 representatives of the European Parliament will be elected by citizens across the continent. Recent polling suggests environmental issues and policies tackling climate change are high on the agenda for voters considering who to elect. (European Parliament election results are out and the Greens have made gains, winning 69 seats, 17 more than the previous election, out of 751 seats – Note from Editors.)

The school strike movement has emerged in tandem with other environmental movements worldwide. The British-based direct action group Extinction Rebellion occupied major locations in London for ten days in late April, and their first demand, for the British government to declare a state of “climate emergency,” received approval from parliament on May 1. And in the US, the young activists of Sunrise Movement have pushed to transform climate action into a political reality by calling for a Green New Deal, attracting the support of several legislators and 2020 Democratic presidential candidates.

While Thunberg is well-known worldwide, she says it is the strike organisers in each country that she looks up to. “Young people who are in developing countries are sacrificing their education in order to protest against the destruction of their future and world,” she

told TIME. “They are the real heroes.” Photos and videos from strikers in the eastern hemisphere started flooding social media in the morning, ranging from Seoul, South Korea to Auckland, New Zealand, and later in the day images of crowds surfaced in European cities such as Berlin and Paris, where organisers say an estimated 23,000 turned out to demonstrate.

Here is a look at some of the places around the world where young people took action on May 24.

Sweden: Thousands of students and young people took part in Friday’s strike marching through the streets of Stockholm. While there’s an acknowledgement that the strikes have placed the climate crisis back on the agenda in Sweden, for Thunberg it is not enough—her focus is on the global carbon emissions, which continue to rise. However, in the nine months since she first started her strike, her cause has galvanised support from a wide cross section of Swedish society, with grandparents and scientists turning out to support the strike on May 24.

Philippines: In the Philippines, one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, organisers say there were strikes in at least fifteen cities. In recent years, the archipelago of islands has been hit by a series of extreme weather events, such as Typhoon Haiyan (known as Super Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines) in 2013.

Australia: Australia has just experienced its hottest summer on

record with the country's farmers facing a punishing drought, and recent research has shown that warming seas are preventing the Great Barrier Reef's ability to regrow. As well as strikes in Sydney, around 1000 activists staged a die-in in the heart of Melbourne's business district just after lunchtime, "acting as physical reminders of Earth's sixth mass extinction which scientists have attributed to anthropogenic climate change," organisers Extinction Rebellion Australia told TIME. Young people also gathered outside Parliament House in Perth, Western Australia, a state where mining accounted for 85% of exports in 2017-18.

India: In Delhi, schoolchildren marched carrying a banner referring to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading international body for the assessment of climate change. In October 2018, the IPCC stated that the impact of a 1.5C increase in global temperatures over pre-industrial levels would "disproportionately affect disadvantaged and vulnerable populations through food insecurity, higher food prices, income losses, lost livelihood opportunities, adverse health impacts, and population displacements."

Germany: With more than 218 strike events listed on the Fridays for Future website, Germany is expected to host more events on May 24 than any other country in both big and small cities. Recent polls have shown that German voters think climate and environment protection are the biggest challenges for the future of the EU, ahead of other issues such as migration.

United Kingdom: Hundreds of school children gathered outside the

UK Houses of Parliament, chanting and holding the inventive placards that have become hallmarks of the strikes. The scene was replicated at cities across the UK.

South Africa: Along with Nigeria, Kenya and several other countries across Africa, students and young people in South Africa organised actions on May 24 and 25 to coincide with Africa Day, commemorated on May 25. As part of a continent-wide campaign #AfrikaVuka, organisers are demanding that local leaders "commit to building a fossil free Africa that puts people and justice before profits."

Support for the climate strikes

Adults have backed the school strike movement, with several prominent thinkers and activists including Naomi Klein, Bill McKibben and Margaret Atwood supporting the movement's next event, a global strike on 20 September, saying that "disrupting our normal lives is the only way to secure our future." Leading scientists and academics had also previously signed an open letter in support of Greta Thunberg and the school strike movement in February.

While Thunberg may have started her strike alone, May 24 proved that people all around the world are in solidarity with her and willing to spread the message. "I'm not planning to stop this movement, and I don't think anyone else is either," she told TIME. "We have to start acting now, even if we don't have all the solutions."

(Suyin Haynes is a Senior Reporter with TIME Magazine.)

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Atomic Veterans Were Silenced for 50 Years. Now, They're Talking

Emily Buder

Nearly everyone who's seen it and lived to tell the tale describes it the same way: a horrifying, otherworldly thing of ghastly beauty that has haunted their life ever since.

"The colors were beautiful," remembers a man in Morgan Knibbe's short documentary *The Atomic Soldiers*. "I hate to say that."

"It was completely daylight at midnight—brighter than the brightest day you ever saw," says another.

Many tales of the atomic bomb, however, weren't told at all. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an estimated 400,000 American soldiers and sailors also observed nuclear explosions—many just a mile or two from ground zero. From 1946 to 1992, the US government conducted more than 1,000 nuclear tests, during which unwitting troops were exposed to vast amounts of ionizing radiation. For protection, they wore utility jackets, helmets and gas masks. They were told to cover their face with their arms.

After the tests, the soldiers, many of whom were traumatized, were sworn to an oath of secrecy. Breaking it even to talk among themselves was considered treason, punishable by a \$10,000 fine and 10 or more years in prison.

In Knibbe's film, some of these atomic veterans break the forced silence to tell their story for the very first time. They describe how the blast knocked them to the ground; how they could see the bones and blood vessels in their hands, like viewing an X-ray. They recount the terror in their officers' faces and the tears

and panic that followed the blasts. They talk about how they've been haunted—by nightmares, PTSD, and various health afflictions, including cancer. Knibbe's spare filmmaking approach foregrounds details and emotion. There's no need for archival footage; the story is writ large in the faces of the veterans, who struggle to find the right words to express the horror of what they saw during the tests and what they struggled with in the decades after.

Knibbe told me that he has long been fascinated with the self-destructive tendencies of mankind. When he found declassified US civil-defense footage of soldiers maneuvering in the glare of the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb, he was "absolutely amazed and wanted to learn more about their stories." His efforts to dig deeper were curtailed by the fact that most of the information about the nuclear tests was classified—including reports on the illnesses the veterans suffered and the radioactive pollution that was released into the environment around the test sites. "I was baffled by the lack of recorded testimonies available," he said.

Knibbe began trying to contact veterans through the National Association of Atomic Veterans, eventually travelling across the United States to meet them and hear their stories. He was stunned and saddened by what he learned. "They were confronted by such an incredible destructive power that they were immediately shocked into an existential crisis," Knibbe said. "It was like they saw the creation of the universe. They were confronted with

an enemy they could never defeat. It was something really difficult for them to describe."

What appalled Knibbe the most was how the US government failed the veterans. "Until this day, a lot of what has happened—and the radiation-related diseases the veterans have contracted and passed on to the generations after them—is still being covered up," Knibbe said. "The veterans are consistently denied compensation."

"For 10 years now, I've been trying to get compensation, but the government does not want to admit that anybody was harmed by any radiation," says one man in the film. Knibbe said he has spoken with more than 100 US atomic veterans, all of whom share similar stories of the government's intransigence. One of the few studies conducted on atomic veterans found that the 3,000 participants in a 1957 nuclear test suffered from leukemia at more than twice the rate of their peers.

Bill Clinton relieved the veterans' oath of secrecy in 1994, but the announcement was eclipsed by news from the O.J. Simpson trial. "Most of the atomic veterans didn't even know the oath of secrecy was lifted," Knibbe said. Most went on to believe that they were not allowed to talk about their experiences, even to seek help for their health problems. Many took the secret to their grave.

"It haunts me to think of what I had witnessed," says a man in the film, "and not realized at the time the import of what we were doing . . . serving as guinea pigs."

(Emily Buder is a film curator at The Atlantic.)



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Modi’s Electoral Triumph

Prabhat Patnaik

The result of the recent Indian elections, which gave Narendra Modi’s Hindu Supremacist Party a second five-year term, confirms the basic argument regarding the nature of fascism. There is a fundamental difference between the 2014 elections that brought Modi to power and the 2019 elections. In the 2014 elections Modi’s victory was made possible by his slogan of “vikas” or “development”. He did not spell out how he was going to bring about “development”, which is typical of all fascism: his only “analysis” was that “development” had suffered because of the preceding Manmohan Singh government’s weakness. He would overcome this weakness, while pursuing the same neo-liberal policies with greater vigour.

While he won those elections, his five years in power have brought little respite from the crisis; on the contrary the crisis has worsened. The real per capita income of the agriculture-dependent population has barely moved up after 2013–14; within it the peasants and agricultural labourers must have become worse off. Unemployment is reportedly at a 45-year high, prompting the government to suppress employment data altogether. In the 2019 elections

therefore, there was no mention of “development” at all. This only shows that fascism has no economic programme and relies on a discourse shift, towards Hindutva “nationalism”, to come to power, which it has done.

Looking at the election results, it is obvious that people were not voting for a flesh-and-blood character called Modi, seen objectively for what he was. Each voter rather saw in him an idea: a muscular leader, a “messiah”. They voted for Modi the concept, not the man. Even when he had actually done nothing, he still got voted because he was seen as the only person capable of doing something! If there were no incidents on the border, then the credit went to him: the neighbouring country was afraid of taking liberties because he was at the helm! And if there were incidents then there were compelling reasons to vote for him, for he alone could stand up to the neighbour!

Thus, no matter what happened, he got the credit for it. No matter what he did, he was still applauded. Incidents which should have discredited the government brought him kudos. Modi had become a myth, a concept manufactured

to fulfill people's needs which themselves had been largely created. It is now clear that his first term in office was spent not in coping with the country's problems but in manufacturing this mythical image of himself. Helped with a pliant media, with an army of trolls employed to take on critics on the social media, and huge funds from the corporates, he has manufactured this mythical image of himself. His always referring to himself in the third person is symptomatic of this.

Myth-making must be distinguished from charisma. Charisma is based on some real achievements; it is not conjured out of thin air. But myth-making entails creating a persona that has no real counterpart. The Modi government has little to show by way of achievements in its first term. Its two big moves, demonetisation and the GST, had disastrous consequences. Peasant distress, unemployment, recession, stalk the economy. Besides, there is the destruction of institutions, the attack on civil liberties, the terrorising of minorities and Dalits by vigilante groups and the rampant atmosphere of hate-mongering.

It is this hate-mongering and the inculcation of a sense of insecurity among the people that helped in building the Modi myth. The need for a "messiah" got greatly exaggerated. Fascism and the "messiah" are inextricably linked. From this perspective, the 2019 elections are completely different from the elections we have had in the past, which is why all predictions about the outcome, including most Exit Polls, were so completely wrong. All the usual calculations, based on attributing "normal" behavior to the people, based on assuming a degree

of stability of preferences, but altered at the margin by unfolding new issues like peasant distress, were completely off the mark.

The 2019 elections lead irrevocably towards a fascist State; the 2014 elections were not so clear about where they would lead, but not the 2019 elections. They have been won by a non-existent person. Pointing to his non-existence will be deemed "sedition".

Breaking myths is not easy, but eventually people must tire of myths when their stomachs are empty and when they remain jobless. The Modi administration will keep diverting attention from the discourse of material deprivation to one of national security which can be more easily nourished by tales, as the Balakot air-strike was. But, even this will wear thin after a time. And the spontaneous development of the crisis as it affects the Indian economy will force Modi willy-nilly to confront the discourse of material deprivation.

The Left has been virtually wiped out in these elections. But the Left's strength must be judged not just by the number of parliamentary seats won. It still has substantial trade union bases; and it must resume the peasant mobilisation that had got interrupted by the parliamentary elections. It must play a proactive role not just in mobilising all the forces opposed to fascism, not just in defending the democratic institutions, not just in fighting for civil liberties, but also in shifting the political discourse towards bread-and-butter issues.

The 2019 elections were also fought by an opposition that was disunited, and lacked a credible leader who could take on Modi. This may not have mattered in

normal times; but in 2019 when the electorate had been fed on a diet of hatred and insecurity, its consciousness was not what it would have been in normal times. In future it would not be enough simply to change the discourse, to make it more bread-and-butter-focussed; there must be a credible face to lead the opposition alliance who has much greater moral stature than Modi and can take him on. Even Parliamentary systems, and not just Presidential ones, require clear leaders with sufficient moral stature. Nothing should be left to chance when it comes to fighting fascism.

(Prabhat Patnaik is Professor Emeritus at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.)

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Over 4 Crore Are Jobless Now, Much More Than Earlier

Subodh Varma

Finally, the government has released the suppressed report on unemployment, now that elections are done and dusted with. Meanwhile, joblessness has worsened dramatically with an estimated 4.17 crore people unemployed, according to another recent report of the CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy), based on a similar sample survey.

The government had directed the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) to carry out the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) to get estimates of employment and unemployment on an annual basis. The first such survey was done in 2017–18. That report had said that joblessness was at a 45-year high of 6.1%. But the latest report of CMIE’s periodic surveys shows that the unemployment rate was much higher in 2017 (7.66%) and has steadily worsened since then, standing at a whopping 9.35% as of April 2019 (see Chart 2).

In numbers, this means some 4.17 crore persons are unemployed and willing to take up jobs (Chart 1). Included are both those actively looking for jobs as well as those who may have become frustrated and were, at the time of survey, not actively looking for jobs.

The CMIE’s report, released a few days ago, makes for shocking reading. There has been an over 24% increase in the number of jobless persons since January–April 2017 to the same period in 2019. The major part of this increase has actually taken place between 2018 and 2019, coinciding with the period when the government was actively suppressing the PLFS report.

17% Graduates Jobless

As has always been the trend, unemployment is particularly high among those with a graduate degree or higher qualifications. CMIE’s report says that in Jan–Apr 2019, joblessness among these educated sections was 17% (Chart 4), almost

double that of general unemployment rate.

In numbers, this means that some 1.1 crore graduates are unemployed. An additional 2.2 crore persons who are between 10th to 12th standard pass-outs are unemployed. Not surprisingly, illiterate persons have the lowest unemployment share of about 2%, mainly because they are the poorest and have to undertake whatever kind of job is available in order to survive.

But, what happened to all the skill development programmes and the entrepreneurship incentives (like Mudra) which the Modi 1.0 government had tom-tommed? That’s something Modi 2.0 needs to answer because if they simply continue with that approach, joblessness is not going to get controlled. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appointed senior BJP leader Nitin Gadkari as the MSME (medium, small and micro enterprises) minister which means they want to give this sector (destroyed by the twin shocks

Chart 1: Number of Jobless (crore)

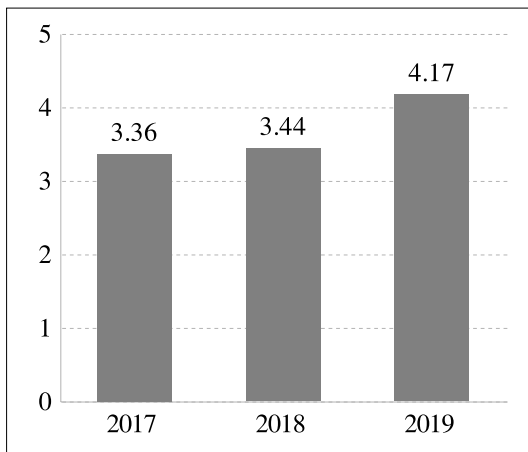


Chart 2: Unemployment Rate (%)

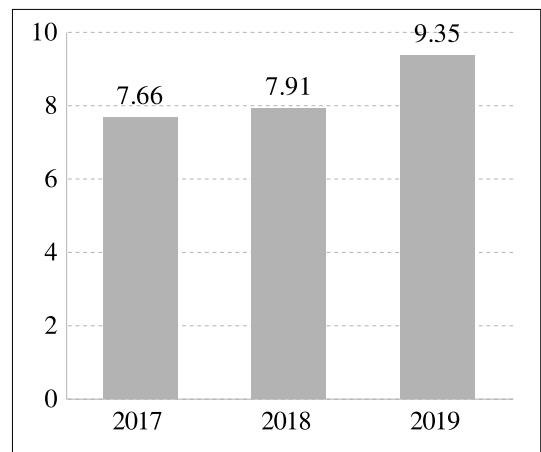
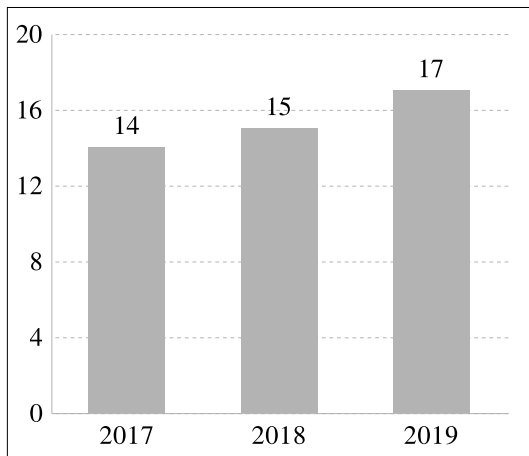
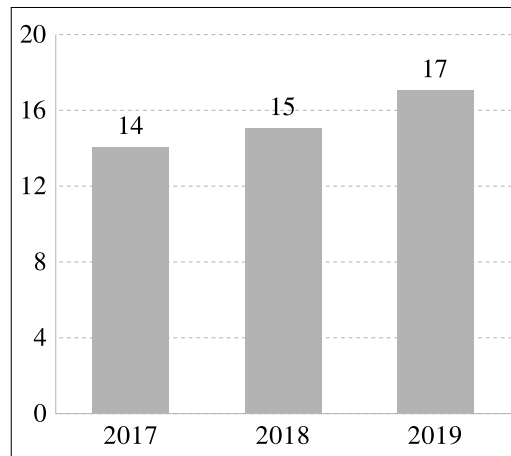
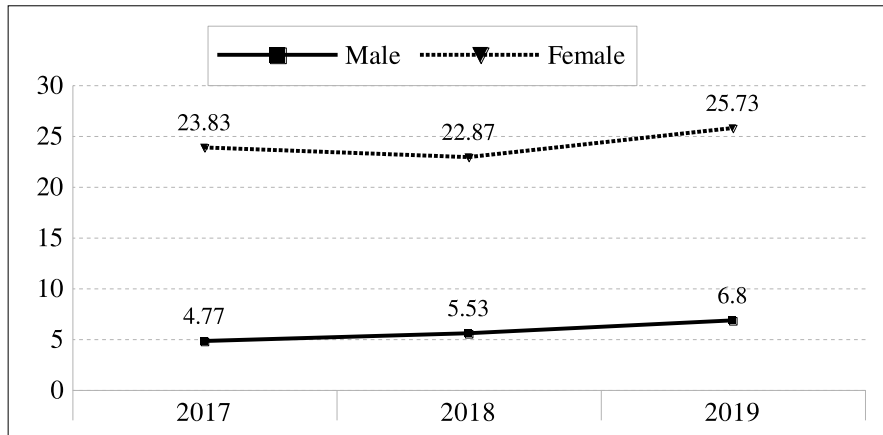


Chart 3: Number of Jobless Graduates (lakh)**Chart 4: Percentage of Graduates Jobless****Chart 5: Joblessness among Men and Women (%)**

of demonetisation and GST) some attention. But what will that be?

High Women's Unemployment

Another feature of the unbridled jobs crisis is women's joblessness. It was always high but as Chart 5 shows, the crisis has worsened. According to the CMIE report, women's joblessness rate stands at an incredible high of 25.7%—that means every fourth woman in the labour force is unemployed.

With men's joblessness at 6.8%, clearly a disproportionately large number of women are unemployed, although this is a constant feature of the Indian economy.

This is another area that has received much lip service but practically no attention on the ground, in terms of policy.

Winning Elections Does Not Solve Unemployment

Perhaps it may seem to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that since it handsomely won the elections, the joblessness issue has vanished, or that it was nothing but hoopla. Nothing could be further from truth. Because the ruling party did not talk about the jobs crisis, and the Opposition too failed to raise it effectively, the voters were left with no choice but to put aside their anger

or discontent on it.

As the situation continues to deteriorate, and in the absence of any effective measures, the blowback is bound to come. Modi 2.0 needs to prepare for it.

(Subodh Varma is a senior journalist.)

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“Sabka Vishwas” Tracker

On May 25, 2019, two days after sweeping back to power, Prime Minister Modi made a speech at the Central Hall of Parliament. He said, “We belong to those who voted for us and with those who consider us their enemy.” He spoke of minorities living in fear, but claimed that this fear is an imaginary creation of vote-bank politics. In his speech, he evoked the memory of Baba Saheb Ambedkar as the camera panned obligingly to the portrait of him hung in the historic hall. Modi said the new government must take it upon itself to win the faith of all minorities: “Sabka Vishwas”.

May 18, Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu: Abdullah, a 32-year-old auto driver was beaten to death for trying to defend a female passenger from an inebriated harasser. The police are calling it a “drunken scuffle”. Abdullah’s wife, Tashmin, insists that he was not drunk and would never be so when driving.

May 20, Padra Taluka, Gujarat: A Dalit couple were attacked by over 200 upper-caste men. His “offence”? Pravin Mackwana had made a Facebook post accusing the Gujarat government of not allowing Dalits to marry in temples.

May 22, Mumbai: Dr. Payal Tadvi, a postgraduate student of gynaecology at the National Topiwala Medical College, took her own life. She was hounded, bullied, called casteist slurs and denied essential training because she came from Tadvi Muslim Scheduled Tribe.

May 22, Seoni, Madhya Pradesh: Three Muslim youth, including one woman, beaten up on suspicion of carrying beef. They were made to shout “Jai Shree Ram”. Ram Sena leader Shubham Baghel

is one of the accused. Eight people arrested, including the three victims of the violence.

May 22, Manekwada village, Gujarat: A 17-year-old Dalit, Rajesh Sondarva was hacked to death by those accused of his father’s murder. Nanjibhai Sondarva, an RTI activist, was killed a year ago for demanding transparency and asking for details about funds spent on the construction of a village road. The village sarpanch is among the accused.

May 25, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh: A 14-year-old Dalit girl was gangraped, murdered and her body burnt in a brick kiln. The accused have been booked under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act. The girl’s father alleges that the police and the administration are colluding to hush up the incident.

May 25, Sakchi, Jharkhand: Jeetrai Hansda, an Adivasi professor, was arrested for a two-year-old Facebook post about his right to eat beef. The state is ruled by the BJP.

May 26, Begusarai, Bihar: Rajiv Yadav stopped Mohd. Qasim on the road and asked him his name. On realising he is a Muslim, he shot him and told him to go to Pakistan. Md. Qasim was injured, but survived. In the recently concluded general election, former Union Minister Giriraj Singh won the Begusarai seat.

May 26, Gurgaon, Haryana: A 25-year-old Muslim man wearing a skull-cap was stopped by a gang of youth and forced to shout “Bharat Mata Ki Jai”. He was then asked to shout “Jai Shree Ram”. When he refused, he was beaten up.

May 26, Connaught Place, New

Delhi: Well-known gynaecologist, Dr. Arun Gadre from Pune, was staying at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Jantar Mantar. He was in the city to deliver a lecture organised by the Indian Medical Association. A group of men stopped him near the Hanuman Temple in Connaught Place, where he’d gone for a walk. He was forced to shout “Jai Shree Ram”.

May 26, Singampalli village, Andhra Pradesh: Bikki Srinivas, a Dalit man, was chased, thrashed with sticks and murdered for stealing mangoes from the orchard of an upper-caste man. His body was taken to the local panchayat office and hanged from the ceiling to project that he had committed suicide.

May 27, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi: The incident occurred in March, but came to light recently. Two Dalit research scholars and one from the ST community were forced to clean the toilets by a professor from the Home Science Department. The matter is being probed.

May 30, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: Pratap Chandra Sarangi is the newly elected MP from Balasore, Odisha. He has gained huge popularity across the country for his “humble” background. Photos of the frail old man emerging from his bamboo hut have turned him into a hero for BJP supporters. Sarangi was the head the Bajrang Dal in Odisha in 1999 when Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons who were only 7 and 11 years of age were burnt alive in the vehicle they were sleeping in. They were in Manoharpur in Odisha at the time. The Bajrang Dal has been linked to the murders. Sarangi

has several other cases pending against him for rioting, arson and damage to government property among others. He was sworn in to

thunderous applause at the country's seat of power. He will hold two Minister of State portfolios in the new government.

This list is sourced from news reports and is by no means complete.

Courtesy: Indian Cultural Forum

Basavanna: India's First Free Thinker

Gauri Lankesh

Today, on May 9, Basava Jayanthi is being celebrated across the state. The tragedy is that most Lingayats, who say they admire Basavanna, neither follow his religious teachings nor live according to the credo propagated by Basavanna and other Sharanas. Let's take B.S. Yeddyurappa, who is considered as the strongman of Lingayats in the state, as an example. Basavanna proscribed worshipping idols and fire. But one would be hard put to find a single idol that Yeddyurappa has not prayed to; and no one has kept score of the yagnas and homas he has performed.

The revolution that Basavanna led in the twelfth century is unique in Indian history. Many, many years after Buddha, it was Basavanna and his contemporary Sharanas who launched a very strong spiritual, social and religious rebellion against Brahminical hegemony.

Hundreds of years before German philosopher Friedrich Engels said "labour created man", Basavanna had declared "Work is worship". By doing so, he exalted physical labour into a religious ideology and gave a severe blow to a society which looked down upon different professions since labour was intrinsically woven in the fabric of caste.

Born into a Brahmin family, Basavanna was taught the Vedas, Shastras and the Upanishads. But he rejected both his caste and its scriptures and said that the spiritual

experience of the labouring classes would be the well-spring of his social movement. In fact, most of the things that Basavanna did was to turn Brahminical beliefs on its head.

Basavanna founded the Anubhava Mantapa (hall of spiritual experience) where people of all segments—be he a cobbler or she a sex worker—could articulate their thoughts. In his times, women were not only considered 'second class', they were also denied the right to offer worship. Basavanna, however, gave women equal status in his movement. In order to take the social movement closer to the people, Basavanna and all the other Sharanas voiced their concerns in simple Kannada so that even lay people could comprehend them. Basavanna asked everyone to not only share their lived experiences, but to also share the fruits of their labour. This had a two pronged purpose. Sharing the fruits of their labour and participating in community dining encouraged a feeling of kinship overcoming caste and class barriers.

Thousands of people were attracted to Basavanna since he stressed on egalitarianism, humanitarianism and rationalism which were sorely absent in a Brahmin-dominated society. It is for this reason that the Sharana movement is not only recognised as the first major revolt of the working classes for social equality but also as the first anti-priestly struggle after Buddhism.

Basavanna's most famous vachana says:

*The rich
Will make temple for Shiva,
What shall I, A poor man do?
My legs are pillars,
The body the shrine,
The head of cupola of gold.*

(translation A K Ramanujan)

Since temple entry to non-Brahmins was prohibited, through this vachana Basavanna turned both idol worship and temple entry into erroneous issues. Since Basavanna had declared that the Ishtalinga (which is worn around the neck near the heart) is one's innate god and that everyone is a 'mobile temple' the shudras and the untouchables found it unnecessary to worship idols in temples.

The concept of heaven, hell, punya, paapa, rebirth, moksha, etc. are all products of the 'Karma' philosophy and form the basis of Brahminism. The Sharana movement rejected all such concepts and stressed on good conduct. They not only disapproved of animal and human sacrifice (even the symbolic sacrifice of coconuts and pumpkins were frowned upon) as part of rituals, they also strove to fight against superstition.

Basavanna empathised with the oppressed 'lower castes' in one of his vachanas where he said, "I am born to the servant of Madara Channaya and the tanner maid of Kakkayya."

Even today, ‘dishonour killings’ take place when individuals from different castes or communities dare to fall in love with one another. But nearly 900 years ago, Basavanna had encouraged inter-caste weddings. That the wedding plans of a cobbler boy Sheelavantha and a Brahmin girl Lavanya ended in tragedy is another matter.

The fact that Basavanna, other Sharanas and their followers had dared to even think of such an inter-caste union is remarkable indeed.

Basavanna was clearly way ahead of his times. When there existed great discrimination on the basis of caste, gender and class, Basavanna and his contemporary Sharanas strived for an egalitarian society. When blind faith was the order of the day, they spoke about rationalism. When feudalism was the accepted structure of society, they spoke about a shared existence. No wonder, Basavanna is considered by many as India’s ‘First Free Thinker’.

Basavanna had said, “Things standing shall fall, but the moving ever shall stay.” It is disheartening to note that today his supposed followers are doing their very best to destroy both Basavanna and his philosophy. Because they are celebrating Basavanna in the static form of busts and statues while simultaneously ignoring his teachings. It’s not enough to celebrate Basavanna’s birth anniversary. The ideals of the revolutionary Sharana movement should be propagated. Because those ideals are very similar to the resolve we have made in the preamble of our Constitution: to make India a sovereign, socialist, secular and a democratic republic.

(Gauri Lankesh was a journalist turned activist from Bangalore, who was murdered by assailants outside her home on September 5, 2017.)

UK Mobilises to Make Sure Trump Knows He 'Is Not Welcome'

Jake Johnson

June 3, 2019:

With the city of London effectively on "lockdown" in anticipation of the protests—complete with the now-famous Trump Baby Blimp—that are expected to flood the city's streets on Tuesday (June 4), US President Donald Trump touched down in the United Kingdom on Monday, June 3, for his first state visit shortly after tweeting an attack on London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

“Sadiq Khan, who by all accounts has done a terrible job as Mayor of London, has been foolishly ‘nasty’ to the visiting President of the United States, by far the most important ally of the United Kingdom,” Trump tweeted just before landing at the Stansted Airport in London on Monday. “He is a stone cold loser who should focus on crime in London, not me.”

Trump's attack on Khan came after the London mayor—who granted permission for protestors to fly the Trump baby blimp during Tuesday's mass demonstrations—accused the US president of behaving like "the fascists of the 20th century to garner support" and said he would join the UK Labour Party in boycotting the state visit.

“Donald Trump is just one of the most egregious examples of a growing global threat,” Khan wrote in an op-ed for The Guardian on June 1. “The far-right is on the rise around the world, threatening our hard-won rights and freedoms and the values that have defined our liberal, democratic societies for more than

seventy years.”

Khan's view of Trump as the face of a global far-right movement was echoed by the organisers of Tuesday's demonstrations, which are expected to bring hundreds of thousands of people into the streets across the UK.

Anna Vickerstaff, part of the team of demonstrators that will be "babysitting" the Trump blimp on Tuesday, said the protests against the US president are about far more than displaying a silly balloon designed to humiliate Trump.

“We know Trump isn't a joke—he is responsible for rampant xenophobia, sexism, and transphobia and the creeping rise of far-right politics,” Vickerstaff wrote in an op-ed for The Independent on Monday. “His climate denial and persistent facilitation of the fossil fuel industry is a death sentence for communities in the global south. But if flying a balloon caricature is what gets under his skin—then that's exactly what we're going to do.”

“Our balloon,” wrote Vickerstaff, “is part of a proud history of political satire in the UK that sends a clear, orange, message to Trump and his politics of hate that they are not welcome here.”

According to the UK-based Metro, a “huge police and security operation” is in place as London authorities prepare for the mass protests against the US president's three-day state visit.

In addition to the Trump baby blimp, the Metro reported, a “16ft talking robot of Mr. Trump sitting

on a gold toilet is also expected to make an appearance. It depicts the American leader with his trousers round his ankles while tweeting and says some of his well-known phrases such as 'stable genius' and 'no collusion', as well as breaking wind."

Ahead of Trump's arrival in the UK, The Guardian expressed the view of many Britons when it declared in an editorial on Sunday that "the president is not welcome."

"Mr. Trump is a demagogue who represents a threat to peace, democracy, and the climate of our planet," the newspaper said. "As elected leader of the UK's closest ally, he can't be ignored. But making him, his wife, and four adult children the honored guests of the Queen risks legitimising his destructive policies, his cronyism, and his leanings towards autocracy."

June 4, 2019:

Protesting both the individual cruelty of US President Donald Trump and the globally ascendant "politics of hate" he represents, tens of thousands took to the streets in London and across the UK on Tuesday as Trump enjoys "royal treatment" from the British government on his first official state visit.

Trump claimed in a tweet on Monday that he had not "seen any protests yet", but the demonstrations on Tuesday will be impossible to miss, with the 20-foot-tall Trump baby blimp flying over London and crowds of Britons pouring into the streets throughout the country.

"We are here to take on misogyny, racism, fascism and hatred," Guardian columnist Owen Jones declared during a speech in London.

Jones emphasised this point in a column ahead of Tuesday's mass demonstrations, noting that the protests "aren't just about Trump, they're about everything he stands for."

"These protests won't simply be about Trump and the perverse reality TV show he's treated the world to," Jones wrote. "The protests will be about Trumpism: about confronting a resurgent global far right, defending the rights of women and minorities, fighting the climate emergency, opposing the threat of war, and standing against an attempt to gut the NHS and trash hard-won rights and freedoms."

Journalist Shaista Aziz echoed Jones, telling the crowd gathered at a London rally on Tuesday that "this protest is about Trumpism—the hatred and poverty that is spreading."

"Our movement is about joining the dots between hate, bigotry, and inequality," Aziz said.

The demonstrations and marches kicked off on Tuesday morning as Trump met with British Prime Minister Theresa May, who is resigning on Friday after failing to negotiate a Brexit deal.

Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the British Labour Party, declined to attend a state banquet for Trump on Monday night and joined demonstrators in the streets after calling the protests "an opportunity to stand in solidarity with those he's attacked in America, around the world, and in our own country."

(Jake Johnson is a staff writer for Common Dreams, a non-profit, independent newscentre created in 1997 and based in the USA.)

Regime Change is Urgently Needed . . . in Washington

Andre Vltchek

I am surprised that no one else is saying it, writing it, shouting it at each and every corner: It is not Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Iran that are in dire and crucial need of 'regime change'. It is the United States of America, it is the entire European Union; in fact, the entire West.

And the situation is urgent.

The West has gone mad; it has gone so to speak, bananas; mental. And people there are too scared to even say it, to write about it.

One country after another is falling, being destroyed, antagonised, humiliated, impoverished. Entire continents are treated as if they

were inhabited by irresponsible toddlers, who are being chased and disciplined by sadistic adults, with rulers and belts in their hands yelling with maniacal expressions on their faces: "Behave, do as we say, or else!"

It all would be truly comical, if it weren't so depressing. But . . . nobody is laughing. People are shaking, sweating, crying, begging, puking, but they are not chuckling.

I see it everywhere where I work: in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

But why?

It is because North American and European countries are actually

seriously delivering their ultimatum: you either obey us, and prostrate yourself in front of us, or we will break you, violate you, and if everything else fails, we will kill your leaders and all of those who are standing in our way.

This is not really funny, is it? Especially considering that it is being done to almost all the countries in what is called Latin America, to many African and Middle Eastern nations, and to various states on the Asian continent.

And it is all done ‘professionally’, with great sadistic craftsmanship and rituals. No one has yet withstood ‘regime change’ tactics, not even the once mighty Soviet Union, nor tremendous China, or proud and determined Afghanistan.

Cuba, Venezuela, DPRK and Syria may be the only countries that are still standing. They resisted and mobilised all their resources in order to survive; and they have survived, but at a tremendous price.

The victims keep crying. A few independent countries keep expressing their outrage. But so far, there is no grand coalition, which would be ready to fight and defend each other: “one for all, all for one”.

Until the recent ‘rebellion’ at the UN, no one has been openly and seriously suggesting that international law should apply to all nations of the world, equally.

People talk about ‘peace’. Many are begging the brigands to ‘stop’, ‘have mercy’, show some compassion. But neither Europe nor North America has ever shown any compassion, for long, terrible centuries. Look at the map of the beginning of the 20th century, for instance: the entire world was

colonised, plundered and subjugated.

Now it is all moving in the same direction. If the West is not stopped, our planet may not survive at all. And let us be realistic: begging, logical arguments and goodwill will not stop Washington, Paris or London from plundering and enslaving.

Anyone who has at least some basic knowledge of world history knows that.

So why is the world still not forging some true resistance?

Is Venezuela going to be the last straw? And if not Venezuela, that is if Venezuela is allowed to fall, is it going to be Nicaragua, Cuba or Iran next? Is anything going to propel people into action?

Are we all just going to look passively how the socialist Venezuela, a country which has already given so much to the world, Venezuela which managed to create beautiful visions and concepts for our humanity, is going to be burned to ashes, and then robbed of all of its dreams, its resources and its freedom?

Are we all such cowards? Is this what we—human beings—have actually become; been reduced to? Cowards and cattle, selfish and submissive beings; slaves?

All this, simply because people are too scared to confront the empire? Because they prefer to hide and pretend that what is so obvious is actually not taking place?

Therefore, let me pronounce it, so at least my readers do not have that ‘luxury’ of claiming that they were not told:

This world is being brutalised and controlled by the fascist clique of Western nations. There is no

‘democracy’ left in this world, as there is near zero respect for international law in North American and European capitals. Colonialism has returned in full force. Western imperialism is now almost fully controlling the world.

And begging, trust me—begging and talking of peace is not going to help.

During WWII, fascism had to be stopped. If not, it was going to devour the entire planet. In the past, tens of millions have already died fighting for freedom and for our mankind. Yes, some nations tried to compromise and negotiate with Nazi Germany, but we all know where it all ended.

Now, the situation is the same. Or worse, perhaps much worse, because the West has nukes and a tremendous propaganda apparatus: it controls human brains all over the world with ‘mass media’, and ‘education’.

And because the citizens of the West are now much more brainwashed than the Germans and Italians were in the late 1930s and early 1940s; more brainwashed, more scared, submissive and more ‘disciplined’.

Look, seriously: are the people who are now writing those “peace essays”, in which they argue with the Western regime about who is right and who is wrong, seriously thinking that they are going to move people like Donald Trump, or Pompeo, or Abrams, or Rubio?

Do they believe that Washington is going to stop murdering millions of people all over the world? Or that the neo-colonialist plunder would stop, after the US Congress and Senate suddenly understand that

they have been on the wrong side of history?

This is not some rhetorical question. I am serious: I demand answers!

Does 'peace movement' think that by amassing arguments it could stop Western expansionism? Yes or no?

Do they believe that Pompeo or Trump will suddenly hit their foreheads and exclaim: "You people are correct! We did not see this!" And call their troops, their thugs and mercenaries back?

If not, if this is not what peace movements believe would be done by North American and European leaders, then why all those thousands of wasted pages?

Would you go near a crocodile that is ready to devour an innocent child, and try to reason with it? Would you, seriously? Do you think it would stop, drop a few tears, wag its tail and leave?

Sometimes I tend to believe that 'peace movements' in the West are making things worse. They create false hopes, and they behave as if the empire is some entity that has a soul, and understands logic. They grossly underestimate the threat, the danger.

And they tend to analyse the Western threat from a Western perspective, using Western logic.

It somehow gets lost in interpretation that fascism, terror and bestiality have to be confronted and fought.

One cannot negotiate with a group of countries which are already bathed in the blood of some 80% of the planet. If it was to happen, it would just be a mockery and it would simply humiliate everyone

that is sincerely trying to stop the assassins.

Right now, Venezuela needs solidarity. It requires direct help, actions; not words. And so do many other countries.

Instead, it gets an endless avalanche of best wishes, as well as premature obituaries.

The Bolivarian Revolution has gotten plenty of colorful words. But what it urgently needs is volunteers, money, and internationalist brigades!

I know that billions of people all over the world are now cheering from their armchairs; in fact, doing absolutely nothing, while also spending zero. Their love for Venezuela is 'platonic'.

I have just left Syria, where I was covering the Idlib war zone. There was not one single foreigner near me, during those days. Eva Bartlett and Vanessa Beeley usually work all over the toughest areas in Syria, but how many others do? And most of the time we work with near zero backing, just because we feel that it is our moral obligation to inform humanity.

I am wondering, how many foreigners are fighting for Venezuela, right now?

Who is going to face the Western spooks implanted into the Caracas and the Venezuelan borders with Colombia and Brazil? A few RT and TeleSur reporters, those true heroes, yes, but who else?

Only direct action can save Venezuela, and the world.

This is no time for debates.

This is worse, much worse than the late 1930s.

The proverbial crocodile is here; its enormous ugly mouth open, ready to devour yet one more brilliant,

proud country.

It is time to stick a big metal rod into its mouth. Now, immediately; before it gets too late.

Let us shout LONG LIVE VENEZUELA! But with our hands, muscles and purses, not just with our mouths.

And let us not be scared to declare: if anywhere, it is Washington where regime change is truly and urgently needed!

(Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist.)

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Building Socialism from Below

Cira Pascual Marquina interviews Martha Lia Grajales

[Martha Lia Grajales is part of the Surgentes Collective (a human rights organisation) and a founding member of the San Agustín Convive cooperative in Venezuela. She is a lawyer, and has a master's degree in human rights and democracy. In this interview, we ask her questions about the relationship between state power and popular organisation, with a view to understanding how grassroots initiatives might breath new life into the socialist project.]

Cira Pascual Marquina (CPM): *From the beginning, the Chavista movement had two ways of understanding and carrying out politics: on the one hand, there was popular protagonism, direct democracy and grassroots organisation. On the other hand, Chavismo also pursued state and institutional power. This double approach was productive for a time, and it opened the way for unforeseen expressions of popular power. Now, however, there seems to be a clear prevalence of state-level politics over popular power and grassroots organisation. What's going on?*

Martha Lia Grajales (MLG): The state is a disputed territory, and entering into it is necessary if we want to promote popular interests, but state power is not in any way the goal. In any effort to build popular power, there must be synergy between the bottom and the top. The key issue here is that what is done "from above" must strengthen popular power from below.

We can't ignore the important role that the government has played in fostering spaces of participation

and political organising for subaltern groups. Expanding and deepening popular organisation in Venezuela has been, without doubt, one of the Chavista government's goals, and we can count the build up of grassroots organisations on a large scale as one of its big successes.

What is the problem then? First, the work that is done 'from above' should not replace or appropriate that which is done 'from below'. That's to say, state institutions shouldn't manage or instrumentalise (that is, trivialise) popular power.

There are many conceptions of popular power, and one of them considers it simply as an instrument for seizing state power. However, once the power is in your hands, then you appeal to 'historical necessity' and 'national interest' to justify centralising power. In this way, the party and the state gradually supplant popular projects and the autonomous organisations of the oppressed classes.

The other conception of popular power, which is the one we believe in, considers popular power to be both a means and an end. Popular power is about creating a new set of social relations that are outside the logic of capital, and the aim is self-government. Chávez warned that the state or party should not institutionalise or co-opt popular power. That, obviously, does not mean we should take an isolationist attitude and cut off all relations with the state for fear of losing autonomy. As I said earlier, the state is a disputed terrain which the popular movement must not ignore, but it

shouldn't be considered the main objective.

Thus, the problem is not that popular power has been promoted from above. The problem is that often those operating in the government conceive of popular power as something that is merely auxiliary and which is only good for maintaining formal or traditional power. This conception strips popular power of all of its transformative potential. It treats the masses as passive recipients rather than as political subjects with the capacity and power to guide the revolutionary process.

But it should be said that this is not only a question about how the state does things. Popular forces also need to strategise their approach, the most important requirement being that they need to develop economic autonomy, which not only politicises their movements but also limits the possibility of state co-optation.

A popular movement that does not have its own economic muscle and depends completely on state resources is very vulnerable. If it does not behave as the state expects it to, it will lose support and its organisational work can easily collapse. Or when the government, wanting to support the initiative, is lacking in resources, that can also lead to the collapse of the movement's organisational efforts. So when popular power builds a relationship of dependence on the state, that reduces its capacity to self-govern.

Obviously, all this doesn't mean that popular organisations should

reject state support, but it does mean that when support is received, it must be oriented towards collectively developing and collectively owning the means of production according to a logic that is different from capital, and which must be sustainable without the state's intervention. Otherwise it will be impossible to advance on the path of self-government and transitioning to socialism.

This is a complicated business, because here the government must support the initiatives for building of popular power that should gradually replace the government itself. In that process, we will naturally run into resistance from constituted power, which does not want to be replaced. However, it is only if this transfer of power takes place, that we can advance toward socialism.

The role of a popular government is to contribute to building power from below, fostering a constant modification in the relations of power in favour of the people. There must be a process of permanently generating conditions for the growth of popular power. Paraphrasing Miguel Mazzeo (noted Argentine intellectual-activist) : those from above should foment, not replace popular power.

CPM: *You have claimed that the Chavista popular movement needs to organise all of its forces, with the aim of reorienting the Bolivarian Process. The popular movement—consisting of people organised in communes, cooperatives, worker councils and autonomous feminist organisations—must become something that can guide the masses. This requires a great deal of collective work but also, and very importantly, an effective communications strategy.*

MLG: The crisis in Venezuela is much more than a struggle to maintain state power. It is about the struggle to maintain socialism as a strategic goal, not only in Venezuela but in the continent as a whole.

In this regard, in the midst of the brutal blockade and with internal errors having been made in the direction of the political process, there is now a strong national and international tendency claiming that Venezuela's attempt to build an alternative to capitalism is a huge failure. Moreover, it is said that the problems that we are now experiencing are associated with the socialist model. This view associates socialism with scarcity of food, widespread impoverishment, the restriction of political rights, corruption, etc., and uses this as a reason to reject it as an alternative to capitalism.

So when I talk about the need for the Chavista popular movement to organise and reorient itself, one of the things I'm talking about is publicising and popularising all those grassroots projects that have taken shape during the emergency—all those communal projects that, in the midst of this crisis, cast their lot with building alternatives to capitalist relations, to colonialism and to heteronormativity (*the belief that heterosexuality is the norm – Editor*)—and which layout the path to socialism as a strategic horizon.

In the midst of this profound crisis, these grassroots efforts expand and enrich participation in politics. They also produce and guarantee food in a sustainable and sovereign way. In other words, those who are self-organised and collectively manage shared assets are more protected. These grassroots experiences are living proof that the

socialist model hasn't failed. Quite the contrary, these projects go to show us that the way out of the current crisis involves placing our bets on a truly emancipatory course of action.

There are so many projects that show this. Plan Pueblo a Pueblo is a project involving some seventy small campesinos—essentially farming families—and it manages to distribute food to more than 1,200 urban families every week. In three years, they have produced more than 1,000 tons of fruits and vegetables on their own. They are also recovering native seeds and agroecological practices, while promoting campesino organisation not only for the sake of food sovereignty, but also with a view to building an independent distribution network. This initiative generates new fraternal relations between the people of the countryside and the city, and productive relations geared towards common welfare and towards eliminating intermediaries.

Pueblo a Pueblo's internal organisational process helped raise the small farmers' capacity to grow and distribute in an independent and autonomous manner, which in turn helped them get better pay for their labour. At the same time, the organised buyer communities are able to purchase food with around 60% savings when compared with standard market prices. All this happened in the midst of a terrible crisis, and it was made possible, first, by planning production; second, through the organisational work both in the countryside and in the city; and, third, by eliminating intermediaries from the productive chain. This shows that organisation can not only help us overcome the crisis, additionally, it's also a

game-changer, allowing us to avoid capitalist pragmatism, and deepening our commitment to socialism as a strategic goal.

So we have to question both the usual explanation of the causes of the harsh situation that we are currently facing and at the same time publicise all those practices that are led by subaltern groups: projects that will allow us to find a way out of this crisis while radicalising the process.

This, however, requires a big effort on the part of the popular movement to generate spaces of articulation. That's because, whenever these initiatives get going, pragmatists will always say that one truck of produce by a cooperative will not solve the huge difficulties that we are living.

When faced with such arguments, I would answer in two ways. First, this is not only about the collective effort that is promoted at a local level, because undoubtedly such an effort taken in isolation is absolutely insufficient. The aim here is to multiply the local productive projects based on the characteristics of each territory and what is needed for reproducing life there. The local projects should also be linked to other such projects, allowing for the growth of what Chavez called a great spider web: a new geometry of power. This new power might well have its epicenter at the local level, but its true power consists in the capacity to connect people and communities across the entire region. It is in this way that what might seem insignificant at a local level can contribute to new practices, new policies and new economic relations which could meet the most serious needs of the people.

Thus, the objective is not only generating local productive projects,

it is also to generate spaces of encounter, articulation and collective action that must be promoted beyond the local level where each initiative is taking place.

I would also like to add something in response to those who think that it's naïve to imagine solving crisis from below, from the local level, and step by step. Well, we are not naïve, we are not forgetting the struggle that must take place at the level of state politics. But it is precisely by accumulating grassroots force—through organisational work and forging alternative productive chains—that we can develop real capacity to exert our influence at the level of state politics.

CPM: *In the face of the crisis (and governmental responses that often involve reducing popular participation) new grassroots projects have been emerging. These projects are often self-managed and try to solve problems outside the logic of capital. We have seen people using new organisational forms that are much more democratic and horizontal. These spaces have been important for re-politising people during the crisis and in the face of imperialist aggression.*

MLG: As a result of the multi-dimensional crisis that we are facing in Venezuela, many people from the popular classes no longer involve themselves in state-sponsored organisations. In some cases, this is due to their understandable anger with the government—both with regards to the overall orientation of its national policies, and the behaviour of its local representatives in the local territory, particularly the people assigned from above to head the CLAP (Local Food Production and Provision Committees, which organise the distribution

of subsidised food) or the UBCh (Bolivar-Chavez Battle Units, which are the basic organisational structures of the Socialist Party of Venezuela at the local level). In other cases, it's simply because solving day-to-day problems takes a lot of time and effort, due to the crisis.

However, it's a different story with the organisational efforts that are being made to respond to the crisis, such as: the projects that operate outside the logic of capital and address people's material needs, such as food, and do this with a practice that turns people into protagonists and political subjects again, as opposed to the clientelistic logic promoted by the government; the projects that question the logic of privileges in the distribution of scarce resources; the initiatives that promote relationships built on transparency and equality. These kinds of organisational initiatives have managed to maintain themselves and grow, not only from an economic standpoint, but also politically. These organisations have not only survived, they have also been growing and getting stronger.

This shows that it's not just about solving the food issue (which is what the CLAP tries to do), but also about doing this in ways that are opposed to the logic of capital, through methods that are collective and democratic. In the words of Mazzeo, *it's about government by an entire class and not by an elite.*

Those efforts seeking to build popular power from below—and that do so by developing forms that allow for a more collective and democratic way of doing politics, while also addressing people's material needs—work to re-politise the population and raise public morale. This recharges and

strengthens the mass organisation, while maintaining socialism as a strategic goal. Even though they don't actually get us to socialism, they work to build conditions for it.

CPM: *Finally, I would like to ask you about Unidos San Agustín Convive, as a concrete self-organised project. If you could describe it, that would help us to understand the practical experience and its political reverberations. We would also like to learn how this experience re-politises people and raises morale, and how it belies the claim that socialism has failed and the only solution now is privatisation.*

MLG: San Agustín Convive is a cooperative formed mainly by women from 13 communal councils in the San Agustín del Sur barrio in Caracas. It got going in August almost three years ago. The cooperative took shape to deal with the issue of food. When it started in 2016, there was one hub made up of five communal councils, and now there are three hubs bringing together people from 13 communal councils. Besides the distribution of food in collaboration with the Plan Pueblo a Pueblo, the cooperative is also taking steps to develop textile and food production; the making of sauces, jams, and ice cream; and children's social and leadership activities—all this through a self-managed and deeply democratic process involving collective organisational forms. It is an attempt to develop revolutionary theory through practical work. Thus, it is not just an effort aimed at meeting specific demands, it is also about building the conditions for socialism to take shape, starting at the local level.

How does it re-politise and re-mobilise people? Well, it re-politicised people through practical

experience that showed that cooperative and collective action can protect us, in the midst of Venezuela's deep crisis. Thanks to the organisational work we have done, people in the cooperative have access to food with more than 60% savings compared with the regular market prices (which, in turn, means that we are likely to be eating more and better). The cooperative also decreases our level of dependence, making us more autonomous and less vulnerable. Finally, the experience demonstrates, in the midst of a brutal crisis, that the only way out is through collective projects, not through capitalism.

The project re-mobilises us

because, to build our non-capitalist alternative, we have had to overcome the condition of being merely dependent 'recipients' and remake ourselves as political subjects capable of critically addressing our reality and of organising to transform it. It is not about waiting for the solutions to arrive from above, it is about building them from below. Of course, for something like this to work, everybody has to participate and get involved.

(Cira Pascual Marquina is Political Science Professor at the Universidad de Bolivariana de Venezuela in Caracas and is staff writer for Venezuelanalysis.com.)

The People are with Evo: A Glimpse of New Bolivia

Interview with Rodolfo Machaca Yupanqui

[As the general elections in Bolivia are approaching and the campaign for socialist president Evo Morales is gaining vigour, Peoples Dispatch interviewed Rodolfo Machaca Yupanqui, the leader of the Unified Confederation of Bolivian Peasant Workers Union (CSUTCB). The CSUTCB is the largest peasants' union in Bolivia. Since 1967, it has been continuously struggling for various transformative processes. President Evo Morales is also a member of this confederation.]

Peoples Dispatch: *What are the main agenda points and objectives of your organisation?*

Rodolfo Machaca Yupanqui: The primary objective is to organise people. The indigenous peasant sector has been historically marginalised and forgotten. So it was

very important that our indigenous peasant grassroots movements were taken into account in the Bolivian state structure. This means having political rights, including the right of indigenous people and peasants to become president, member of parliament, legislator, judge, attorney general, professor or university teacher—basically, the right to be treated on par with any other citizen.

Social rights are the next thing we fight for. It is important to have equal rights in health care and education, without being discriminated on the basis of culture and language.

We also fight for economic rights. It is worth mentioning that we, as peasants, farmers, livestock breeders, fishermen and craftsmen, also want to have our own form of

economy. We want an economy based on community and social values. We do not want a private economy or capitalism or neoliberalism. So, these are the reasons why we mobilise.

As a result of years of struggles, we have Evo Morales as the president of Bolivia. He is the first indigenous peasant to lead the country.

The second important objective is to fight for universal human rights. We, the indigenous peasant people, have our own knowledge, wisdom and experiences. We want a social environment in which these are recognised.

While we are an indigenous people's organisation, we have also built international linkages. We have organised at continental level, at global level with La Via Campesina and we also are members of the Social Movements of ALBA. It is worth noting that all indigenous organisations and unions in the countryside, as well as in the cities—whether they be of salaried employees or the self-employed, of mine workers, transport workers, factory workers, retail and wholesale traders or craftsmen—all unite at the global level to fight for our demands. This is very useful for peasants from across the globe. The reason for organising a common struggle at a global level is to defeat all those plans of the ruling classes that are capitalist, oligarchic and sectoral, and to fight the governments that only serve the rich people.

In order to defeat these plans, it is necessary to fight for a new model of a state that would be closer to our needs, a model of a people oriented state. In this model, the form of government and the structure of the State should be such that it includes those sectors that have been

forgotten or marginalised in the past. How to fight for building such a state, and what would be its form, are the issues that we discuss and debate in the meetings between trade union leaders, indigenous people, peasants and workers from all over the world and this must continue progressing.

PD: *What have been the significant changes brought about by Evo Morales' government? Which are the sectors that benefited from these changes?*

RMY: A major change that is an example for the whole world is that after being marginalised and neglected for hundreds of years, the indigenous people, peasants, workers and labourers have been incorporated into the state structure through the constituent assembly.

Through Morales' reforms, these sectors have all the essential rights that the rich, powerful and strong people have. Now, even one of us can become the president. It is not just the elite, but an indigenous person and a peasant who can also run the country. We have the right to be a member of the assembly, a member of parliament, a governor, a judge or a lawyer. We have the right to join the military academy and the police academy, and to participate in elections and win electoral power, which controls the democratic system in the country.

Another significant change has been breaking with the neoliberal notion of the state that only recognises the private sector. We have built what is called the state economy, in which the state takes control of the wealth and not only regulates it, but also has administrative control.

We have also implemented a community-based economy, which recognises the economy of the poorest people and the unionised

sectors. These economies have been incorporated within the structure of the state. Earlier, the private economy was the main driving force of the economy. Only the rich and the powerful could manage and head it while we, the indigenous, peasant and poor people were subservient to this model. Similarly, societal control has been strengthened instead of private control. So, these are the most important changes that have taken place in Bolivia.

The Bolivian state has also taken over the natural resources such as petroleum, hydrocarbons and the mining industry, as well as the telecommunication, electricity and transportation sectors. We have taken control of all the strategic areas, and whatever resources are generated from there are invested by the state in roads, education, construction of schools, hospitals, communication centers, universities, etc.

We are confident that in the coming decades, because of these profound advances, Bolivia will be as developed as China or any other advanced country.

PD: *What can you tell us about the upcoming presidential elections in Bolivia?*

RMY: Sometimes, the set of rules of a state, in the name of democracy, places limits on a president even though his administration might have been good. For example, Evo Morales has been governing the country for 12 years and they did not want him to stand in elections again because of these constitutional limitations.

We, the indigenous people, peasants, social movements and people's organisations, demanded that the rules be changed so that a president who does positive things for the benefit of the people should

continue. We believe that 12 years are not enough for profound changes to materialise. For this reason, we are re-nominating president Evo Morales for 2020–2025. On behalf of our party, the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), his nomination has already been registered with the electoral body.

The elections are a challenge. The Latin American continent is going through a very difficult and complicated situation, where the neoliberal and fascist model is dominant again. It has returned to power in Brazil and it is there in Argentina. Ecuador had a socialist leader but his successor is actually serving the capitalists. Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro is suffering a brutal frontal attack. The big capitalists are attacking our presidents from popular backgrounds.

We are going through difficult times, but we are confident that there is light at the end of the tunnel and that we will set an example for the world. Only by organising ourselves and continuously resisting without arms will democracy triumph again. These are great challenges, but they can be won with unity that is rooted in the diversity of social movements. The secret is in uncompromising resistance. If we resist, we will win for sure. A new dawn will come. We hope that in the world and in the Latin American continent, in the coming years progressive presidents will come to power and work for the poor, who are the most neglected people on this planet Earth.

(People's Dispatch is an international media organisation whose mission is to highlight voices from people's movements and organisations across the globe.)

Official Language Vs Social Justice

Prem Singh

(This paper was first presented at a five-day conference on 'Indian Constitution and Social Justice' held in Mysore in 1995, under the joint auspices of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and Dhwanyalok Center for Indian Studies, Mysore. It generated considerable controversy then, as the author had written and presented it in Hindi, even though a summary of the article had been circulated in English for benefit of the non-Hindi scholars. As the language question is again under discussion spotlight after the publication of the draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2018, it is being published here once again.)

I

The pledge to make “social, economic and political justice,” that is ‘social justice’ available to all the citizens of the country, is the pledge expressed in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. Constitution makers have made provisions to facilitate the availability of social justice to all people and groups, without “discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth”. The intention behind this is the creation of an egalitarian society. Ideas of social justice witnessed on the international political scene contain sharper and revolutionary perceptions as compared to the Indian Constitution. The revolutionary parties within India itself are not completely satisfied with this constitutional delineation of social justice. The scope of this paper does not allow one to go into the details of the other concepts of social justice.

The deprived and the oppressed sections of Indian society, for whom the Constitution’s provision for social justice was specially formulated, are the ones who really are denied the same. The general opinion after forty-five years of the implementation of the Constitution is that the ‘development’ and the ‘progress’ made by free India has only resulted in making the rich, richer and the poor, poorer. The causes for this are complex and multifaceted. Significant among these is the constitutional acceptance given to English as the Official Language of the country. The Constitution makers obstructed the process of social justice in the very beginning by bestowing upon English the position of Official Language in the country, though after independence Gandhi had voiced his apprehensions about this: “Unless the government and their secretariats take care the English language is likely to usurp the place of Hindustani. This must do infinite harm to the millions of Indians who would never be able to understand English.”[1] In free India, after Gandhi, Lohia argued consistently that the language issue has a direct bearing upon the social justice and democratic process.

A long ‘Mahabharata’ has been fought on the multifaceted language problem in the country. But the entire focus of the discussion gets suffocated and killed in limiting the argument to merely Hindi versus English, and Hindi versus other Indian languages. Like the monkey in the fable who devoured the loaf while meting out ‘monkey-justice’ to the quarrelsome cats, English has

kept winning at the cost of Indian languages which are unable to arrive at any solution among themselves.

English was given the status of the Official Language of India for the first fifteen years of the country's independence. But the position has not changed till today. English has also achieved the position of a language which commands power and social status. Deeply responsible for this are those English-knowing elite who keep the common public away from socio-political processes. Also responsible for this are those who play political games in the name of the language issue. Responsibility rests upon those 'progressive' thinkers too, who believe that English is necessary for the development of both capitalism as well as socialism. Commenting on such thinkers, Ram Vilas Sharma, the Marxist thinker and linguist, writes: "some progressive thinkers like to quote with pride Gandhi's ideas on the subject of state formation on language basis. But they very conveniently ignore what Gandhi said about doing away with English. These thinkers represent those middle class intellectuals who are hopeful of being admitted into official positions at all-India level by allowing English to continue at the Centre".[2] Gandhi and Ram Vilas Sharma both advocate the use of Hindi-Hindustani in place of English. The reference to both these luminaries has been made not to prove the validity of their argument in favour of Hindi-Hindustani, but in order to underline the fact that they both consider English to be a weapon in the hands of a particular class, which it uses against the remaining common people.

II

It was argued at the time of Independence that the Indian

languages were, for the time being, incapable of functioning as vehicles of communication and knowledge. And English 'as one of the major achievements made by the country during the foreign rule', was capable of building up national integration and bringing the country at par with the international scene of science and technology. The first two Education Commissions, the Radhakrishnan Commission (1947) and the Kothari Commission (1966) agreed that Indian languages should be the medium of instruction at universities, so that the chasm between the English knowing elite and the common masses is obliterated. The advocates of English however refused to believe that English could be the cause for this gap. The progressive writer, Mulk Raj Anand, considering English to be synonymous with knowledge itself, said that the "brown-sahibs" apart, the country has a "sincere English-knowing intelligentsia" which can make social justice and human dignity possible not only at the national level but also at the international level. This intelligentsia, committed to giving concrete shape to the India of Nehru's dreams, cautioned us against the usage of Indian languages, which, they believe, confine us to being mere "suburbans, provincials and village idiots".[3] As per the wishes of this "sincere intelligentsia" consisting of scholars like Mulk Raj Anand and other supporters of the English language, most of the work in advanced education and research institutions (except the work being done in academies of Indian languages), is in the English language. Consequently, most of the research and scholarship in the country is done only in English language. The natural fallout of the situation is that English alone becomes the yardstick of excellence.

Universities and institutions are laden with English texts and journals. This includes work done on the subject of social justice and revolution. All the political parties in India who are committed to the ideology of social justice carry out their work in the English language. There is hardly any national or regional political party which has its manifesto, policy etc. written down originally in Indian languages. This includes the party led by Ram Manohar Lohia which had pledged to do away with English "today and now" because it hampered social justice in the country. The Marxist parties inspired by the revolutionary goal, the highest form of social justice, carry out all their official proceedings in English. English, already endowed with the responsibility of unifying the country as a 'nation state', is also burdened with the responsibility of organising 'revolution' in the country. Prakash Karat maintains that after the formation of states on language basis "one of the obstacles to communist leadership links between states could be the gradual displacement of English . . ."[4]

The mere knowledge of English has come to be accepted as the touchstone of knowledge for achieving distinctive positions in the field of education, administration, judiciary and defense services. The same is true in the private sector as well. But what has been the outcome of all this? The result is simply the formation of a powerful and well-cushioned elite class on the one hand, and the deprived, oppressed common public on the other. The masses are unable to comprehend complex ideas regarding humanism, liberalism, socialism, communism, nationalism, pluralism, etc. and the elite are victims of alienation unable to identify with the cultural roots and the common man.

Language is a medium of exchanging views. In India, the English language performs this function only within a very limited circle. For the remaining people, its role is that of a barrier which has a deep and long-term effect in delaying the process of social justice. English, from the very beginning, has been a dark shadow between the common man and the constitutional promise of social justice. Viewed in the light of Lohia's words, English divides the nation into "two castes" and to quote Rajni Kothari, into "two Indias": the English knowing elite India on the one hand, and the poor, oppressed masses on the other.

The 'international language' thus accomplishes the job of keeping the majority of India's population away from the social and political processes. Since all projects, programs and plans are drafted in English by English-knowing people, the non-English knowing public is unable to partake in the conception and implementation of any of these programs and projects. Public opinion is limited to just elections. This, then, is the plight of the 'largest democracy' of the world—where a mere two to four percent people reign over the remaining ninety-eight percent.

III

It has been assumed that the rich indigenous experience and our ancient institutions, distanced from elitist India, are worthless for the work of 'nation-building'. It is not merely a coincidence that Gandhi, who supported the 'local' in form of village panchayats, and Lohia, who upheld the same in the form of 'Chowkhamba Raj', were both opposed to English and those leaders who uphold the 'universal' in the form of centralised governance uphold the use of English in the country. Nehru

maintained that: "A village normally speaking is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent." [5] Ambedkar too, wrote off the villages as "a den of ignorance and illiteracy, a habitat which perpetuates both physical and mental ill health." [6] Thus, the responsibility of nation-building was placed on the progressive intelligentsia whose minds have been illuminated by English.

However, today, the class interest which lies behind this apparent national interest is no more a concealed truth. The acceptance of English as the Official Language by the supporters of the language and our Constitution-makers has proved to be the secret door from which the entry of the neo-imperialism has been made possible. The New Economic Policies, liberalisation, the GATT agreement, etc. are a slap on the face of the same "sincere English-knowing intelligentsia" who upheld the use of English in the name of social justice, human dignity, national integration, abundance of knowledge, international relations and so on. The extent to which English has contributed to the wisdom within the country is proven by the fact that the larger section of the intelligentsia is content with simply circling around the synthetic-cosmetic socio-cultural and economic-political questions thrown up by the developed nations.

The documents related to the blue-print of the future of India are being prepared abroad by officials sitting in world institutions. The 'Bhagiraths' who claimed to flood India with the Ganges of wisdom brought in through the medium of English are now searching for their new roles in this new-fangled press-button technique of nation building.

The country is endangered once again by the shadows of slavery. This time, tagging along with political servility is the threat of a sub-culture. Will the intellectuals who propound 'universal' ever pause and think about the possibilities of the 'local'? This is the area in which live crores and crores of people, whose hands have not yet reached the basic requirements of life and whose feet have been uprooted from their soil. These are the people whose intervention and participation in the socio-political processes have been almost blocked.

If those who plead for the alternative ideology of 'humane governance' or those thinkers and leaders who strive towards the ideology of 'revolutionary democracy' actually wish to make people's participation in the socio-political processes a reality, then they must learn from the mistakes made in the past. The philosophy and politics of the liberation of the masses is possible only in the languages used by the masses. This is the bare, hard lesson of which history is the proof.

(Dr. Prem Singh teaches at the Dept. of Hindi, University of Delhi.)

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Let the Monk of Love Become the Country's Prime Minister!

Ranganatha Kantanakunte

They say that the country's PM works for 18 hrs,
Like a machine!
No need –
Let him work just 8 hours as our workers do.
Let him rest when tired,
Sleep when sleepy,
Smile when he dreams, like a baby,
Enjoy the beloved's hug.
Let him not set on fire those who are in embrace.

Let a human being become our PM instead of a machine!

They say the PM has no family!
That he doesn't make money or property.
No, I wish our PM has a family.
Let him work & earn some money and property to take care of his family,
Let him stop spending people's money on globetrotting.
Let him have children, grandchildren... a huge family.
Let him know what relationships mean,
Let him not raise the cost of fuel that cooks the poor man's food,
Let him be aware of the price of salt, millet, jowar, maize, vegetables.
Let him know how our farmers sweat to earn a few paise,
And let him handcuff those who steal the fruit of the sweat.
Let him first realise that beef is part of the nation's food culture,
And that a man's life is more sacred than a piece of beef.

They say our PM's chest measures so many inches...
But no, to become a human you don't need a 100 inch chest,
Doesn't matter if he has a heart, the size of a tiny sparrow, parrot or crow.
Let him consider all as his own.
Let him love people,
Let him not be a cruel beast who divides, kills and rules!

They say our PM is a good speaker,
That he can speak for hours.
No, it's OK even if our PM doesn't speak.
Let him not attack his opponents in fury,
Let his words not sow fear in anybody's heart,
Let him have a heart to listen to the twitter of birds and lovers' whispers.
Let him be aware that no crown sits on one's head forever,
Let him be a people's leader having won their love,
Let him not talk of atom bombs,
So we don't see a self-glorifying monster on the country's throne.

They say our PM is the upholder of our Dharma!
No...
No religion has uplifted people in this world till now.
We don't need a religion for that.
What people need is work and water to quench their thirst and fatigue.
A peaceful town.
Food, cloth, shelter and knowledge.
Work is the religion of workers.

Let the monk who walks barefoot on the path of the religion of love, be our PM.
May the light of Buddha Purnima become the light of our people.

(Ranganatha Kantanakunte teaches in Government First Grade College, Honnavara, Karnataka. This poem has been translated from Kannada by Suma Embar.)

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When Girish Karnad Joined the Fight to Preserve Bababudangiri

Gauri Lankesh

When the saffron brigade had laid siege to the Bababudangiri Dargah in Karnataka, calling it the 'Ayodhya of the South', journalist Gauri Lankesh mobilised writers and intellectuals to rally against the Hindutva surge in the historical site. In this piece published on December 3, 2003 in Lankesh Patrike, Gauri had recalled how Girish Karnad had eagerly joined the effort to preserve communal harmony. The Special Investigation Team probing Gauri's assassination has found evidence that suggests that Karnad had been first on the hit list of the same right-wing group that killed Gauri. We are publishing this piece, taken from The Wire, in memory of Girish Karnad, who passed away on June 10.

Such amazing things happened over the two weeks when we organised communal harmony meetings at Chikmagalur and Bababudangiri, and called upon people to stop Karnataka from becoming another Gujarat and Bababudangiri from being turned into Ayodhya by the saffron brigade. . . . I am confused about where to even begin!

The writer Girish Karnad, who had already expressed his support to protecting Bababudangiri which is a symbol of harmony, called me up and

asked, "Shall we make a trip there to understand the ground reality before the communal harmony conference on December 7 and 8?"

"It's a beautiful idea, let's go," I said. Karnad, Dr K. Marulasiddappa, G.K. Govind Rao, Shudra Shrinivas, Professor V.S. Sridhara and I headed to Chikmagalur in a Tata Qualis.

On the way we discussed the uniqueness of Bababudangiri and the poisonous environment being created around it by the saffron brigade. It is no secret that the monkeys of the Bajrang Dal are gearing up to create disruptions at Bababudangiri this year. The slogans of the Bajrang Dal last year stand testimony to this. Shridhar showed me the photos taken last year. One of the photos had a banner with the slogan: 'Committed to friendship, but ready to destroy!'

Karnad was furious when he read this. He thundered, "Whom do they want to destroy? Look at the words they use. 'Muscle power', 'streams of blood', 'destroying the enemy' . . . Is this even Kannada?"

Marulasiddappa remarked, "Our culture was shaped by Basavanna, Sharif, Kanakadasa and Kuvempu. 'Compassion is the core of religion'. . . This is the basis of Karnataka's religion. But these Bajrang Dal types

know only the language of Modi and Togadia.”

That photo had also captured the ‘demands’ of the Bajrang Dal—offering pooja at Dattapitha, installation of an idol, appointment of a priest, the removal of the tombs around Dattapitha and declaration of this entire region as a holy place for the Hindus.

The Bajrang Dal has made the same demands this year too. The Bharatiya Janata Party has declared its full support to them.

But every demand of the Bajrang Dal stands in direct contravention of the Supreme Court’s judgment. Meeting even one of these demands would amount to contempt of court. It is no surprise that the ignorant BJP supporters are unaware of this.

We discussed the judgment of the Supreme Court on Bababudangiri. According to this judgment, only the rituals that were practised till June 1975 can be continued and no new rituals are to be allowed. It had also listed the religious practices that were being followed in Bababudangiri.

Many of the rituals seen in Hindu temples are followed here. They are:

1. Offering flowers to the *paadukas* (footwear of the godhead).
2. Lighting the lamp.
3. Giving *theertha* (holy water) to the devotees.
4. Breaking coconuts as an offering.
5. Paying respects to the religious heads of Hindu mathas.
6. Blessing devotees by stroking their heads with peacock feathers.

The judges of the Supreme Court who wrote the judgment (in 1975) extolled the uniquely harmonious character of this holy shrine. In the judgment they said that while all the talk of ‘Ram-Rahim’ is often a cliché, it is a living tradition here. The judges further said that

above all, one needs to appreciate the stand taken by the *shakhadri*, the hereditary administrator of the shrine. Himself a Muslim, he had said that this holy space does not belong to just Muslims but as much to Hindu devotees. It is to be equally appreciated that Hindus, who are petitioners, have not claimed that the place is exclusively of the Hindus even though it has *paadukas* and *nanda deepa*.

The Muslims who have been worshipping at this place for hundreds of years have never claimed this space exclusively for themselves, the court noted. The Wakf Board, meanwhile, is trying to stake a claim over this space. When the world is falling apart because of fissures between religions and castes, this contentious centre, Guru Dattatreya Bababudanswamy Dargah, is a great example of real secularism, the judges said.

It is an act of evil that in such a place, an orthodox Hindu party like the BJP and its hell-raising arm, the Bajrang Dal, are demanding the appointment of a priest (I need not emphasise that it will be a brahmin) and the razing of tombs. They are keen to proclaim it a Hindu holy place.

Girish Karnad ridiculed the whole idea, saying, “Datta Jayanti or Datta Maala are not our tradition at all. It is not religion but politics in the name of religion that is behind such practices. It is very easy to understand the conspiracy behind brahminising the Dattatreya of the Natha tradition who had rejected the caste system.”

The Guru Dattatreya Bababudanswamy Dargah has its own history. Dada Hayat, who had come to Chandra Drona Mountain from Arabia, won the appreciation of shudras and dalits, then suffering at the hands of local chieftains, by

helping them. Some, impressed by the love, compassion, and tolerance shown by Dada Hayat, converted to Islam while many others became devotees of Dada Hayat without severing ties with their old religion, but by calling him an avatar of Dattatreya himself. There is a reason for this too. In Hindu mythology, Vishnu takes the avatar of Dattatreya to free people from slavery. So the Hindu devotees saw Dattatreya in Dada Hayat and gave him a Hindu name. It was common to give Muslim Sufi saints Hindu names back then. For example, Bijapur’s Sufi saint Khwaja Ameenuddin Allah was called Brahmanandayike Swamy by the Hindu devotees and Tintini’s Moiddeen was ‘Hinduised’ as Muniyappa.

In due course, the two names Dada Hayat and Dattatreya became one, and in the land documents of the dargah, the shakhadri came to be called ‘Jagadguru’. Both Hindu and Muslim kings have been devotees of this place for centuries. There was a steady flow of money to this dargah during Rani Chennamma’s time. Haider Ali also provided resources for its upkeep. Tipu Sultan granted hundreds of acres of land. Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar III visited the dargah multiple times for religious counsel from the pir. Not just that, the Mysore king provided special privileges to 16 Hindu religious authorities and Shri Guru Dattatreya Bababudanswamy Jagadguru. No other Muslim religious head was given this privilege.

In such a place the saffron brigade now wants *homa*, *yoga*, *yagna*, *pooja* . . . and such other pointless rituals.

(Gauri Lankesh was a journalist turned activist from Bangalore, who was murdered by assailants outside her home on September 5, 2017.)

The Gathering Storm Clouds of Recession

Prabhat Patnaik

The Index of Industrial Production has for the first time since June 2013 contracted in absolute terms by 0.1% in March 2019 compared to a year ago. This comes on top of a mere 0.07% increase in February, a 1.7% increase in January, a 2.6% increase in December, and a 0.3% increase in November. Industrial growth in short has been slowing down for some time now and the latest figure only reaffirms this trend emphatically.

Within industrial production, the manufacturing sector which has a weight of 77.6%, declined by 0.4% in March compared to a year ago, and this arose because of a decline of 8.7% in capital goods, a decline of 5.1% in consumer durables, a decline of 2.5% in intermediate goods and a rise by 0.3% in consumer non-durables. For the financial year 2018–19 as a whole, the growth in the index of industrial production was a mere 3.6%, which is lower than the 4.4% of 2017–18; but it is in the later months of the financial year that the recession has gathered momentum.

This recession in a sense is inevitable. It is a symptom of the fact that the Indian economy, like other economies of the world, is caught in a limbo, with neoliberalism having reached a dead-end and no other economic regime based on the home market having come to replace it.

The world economy has been witnessing a slowdown which has now begun to affect economies

like India and China via a lower growth rate of exports. But the lower growth-rate of exports is not even partially counterbalanced by any stepping up of growth of the domestic market. On the contrary, the home market is also shrinking at the same time because of rural distress, because of the second-order effects of the slowing down of export growth, and also because of the growing weight of non-performing assets, also on account inter alia of the slowing down of industrial growth, which squeezes credit availability for undertaking larger expenditures. The slowing down of export growth in other words, far from being counterbalanced, is further compounded by a shrinking of the home market.

This is clear from the fact that the consumer durables sector has shrunk and the consumer non-durables sector has remained virtually stagnant in April compared to the previous April. And the contraction in capital goods output which comes on top of a contraction that had already occurred in February, suggests that investment in the economy is falling.

The Reserve Bank of India has already twice announced cuts in the Repo Rate, of 25 basis points each; but this is unlikely to make much difference. What is holding up credit disbursement is not so much the cost of credit as its availability, which has got impaired by its being locked up in non-performing assets. Of course, even if credit was easily

available, it is not clear how much of a difference that would have made, but with credit availability itself being subject to some tightness, a mere lowering of the rates will not increase credit disbursement to any significant extent.

What is needed is fiscal expansion, but here we come to the nub of the matter. In this election season, various political parties have been promising larger transfers to the rural poor, which would certainly expand the home market and cause some revival in industrial output. The Modi government's budget had promised Rs 6,000 per capita annually to about 12 crore persons belonging to small peasant families. The Congress has gone much further in its election manifesto. It has promised under its NYAYA scheme to give Rs 6,000 per month, i.e., Rs 72,000 per year, to the bottom quintile of the households, which is about 5 crore households.

While these schemes, especially the NYAYA scheme, which is much more ambitious, will help in expanding the home market, the question is how the resources for it can be raised. Taxing the rich, especially through wealth taxation which is virtually absent in India and which can therefore raise substantial revenues precisely because it is absent in India, is the obvious way of mobilising resources; but this is going to be stoutly opposed by international finance capital. Manmohan Singh had said, rather

diplomatically when the NYAYA scheme was being launched, that there should be no problems about raising the resources; but finding resources for it within a neoliberal regime will be exceedingly difficult.

Likewise, if the scheme is even partially financed by an increase in the fiscal deficit, then the magnitude of the fiscal deficit will exceed its target of 3.4% of GDP, and this is likely to lead to a downgrading of India's credit-rating, making it extremely difficult to finance the current account deficit on the balance of payments. This problem will become even more acute if India falls in line with the American demand to stop buying oil from Iran, which is cheaper than the spot oil prices that India would otherwise have to pay. The Modi government has already indicated its willingness to fall in line with the American demand; if it comes back to power then it will simply reiterate this position.

Oil prices are already firming up, which will widen the current deficit; if the US sanctions against Iran are also taken into account, then the current deficit will widen further. And if in addition the fiscal deficit figure exceeds its target, then the inflow of finance will dry up as India's credit rating will drop, and there will be little hope of meeting this deficit in the normal course.

We therefore are in a bizarre situation. If the government tries to overcome the gathering recession, then it will find it difficult to meet the current account deficit; on the other hand if it does nothing to counter the recession, then the unemployment situation which is already grim, will become even grimmer.

The grimness of the unemployment situation has been

hidden from public view because the government has simply refused to publish any data on unemployment for over two years. But a leaked report from the Statistical Office of the government puts the unemployment rate at 6.1% which is the highest in the last 45 years. The Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy has put the unemployment rate at 7.6% in April. It should be noted that while movements in the unemployment rate give an indication of the direction of movement of unemployment, the rate itself does not capture the magnitude of the problem. This is because employment rationing in India takes the form of most people being employed for only a part of the time, rather than some being fully employed and others being fully unemployed.

Clearly therefore the government will have to do something to ameliorate unemployment; but doing anything will destabilise the balance of payments within the neoliberal paradigm. The neoliberal chickens in short are finally coming home to roost.

Since neoliberalism itself is running into a dead-end, this should have been an ideal time to disengage from it by introducing trade and capital controls. As the United States is introducing trade controls already, India could have introduced such controls in the shadow of US action. And with such controls in place, it could have introduced a wealth tax, and an inheritance tax. It could then have delivered on its promise of making transfer payments to the poor households, and thereby expanded the domestic market, and followed it up by taking steps to increase the rate of growth of foodgrain production. A drying up of

financial inflows in such a situation would not have made much of a difference to the country's ability to finance its current account deficit which would have narrowed anyway because of trade controls.

But the Modi government appears to have little awareness of the fact that neoliberalism has reached a dead-end. The industrial recession therefore is likely to accentuate.

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The 'Liberal' Education Envisaged by the Draft NEP Has No Role for Dissent

Pratishtha Pandya

The draft National Education Policy (2019) is right in emphasising what it calls “liberal” higher education but the manner in which it redefines the term robs it of its very essence.

The increased privatisation of higher education, and the handing over of its vision, provision and delivery largely to private hands are features that have been seen in earlier policy documents. Over the past decade, these documents have viewed an education in languages and the humanities as being antithetical to a professional education—considered to be the sole responsibility of private stakeholders. If an education in humanities had to be offered, it was the task of the government.

In sharp contrast to this trend, the draft NEP 2019 advocates building new institutions of higher education which are essentially multidisciplinary in nature, in addition to ones focusing on the study of Pali, Prakrit, Persian and Sanskrit. It further departs from existing policy in the way it seamlessly weaves the professionalisation of higher education with a redefined notion of what ‘liberal’ education entails.

It effects a shift in the meaning of the term ‘liberal’ across the neo-liberal universe by giving a clarion call to return to the great Indian traditions of the *Lalitavistara Sutra*, Bhavbhuti’s *Kadambari* and Yashodhara’s *Jayamangala*, all of which define an educated person as a master of a number of kalas.

Kalas include everything from

carpentry and engineering to music, painting and dance. “A liberal arts education, as so beautifully described and practiced in India’s past,” says the NEP, “enables one to truly develop both sides of the brain—both the creative and the analytical side” (page 224).

Liberal education is redefined in the entire document as this “Indian” concept of *education across kalas*. In a determined gesture to resurrect and locate the foundation of the present and a future within an untainted golden epoch in ancient Indian history, the document divests the term ‘liberal’ of both its inherent potential and aspiration to realising individual freedoms as well as its evolutionary understanding of enlightenment.

Etymologically speaking, the word ‘arts’ comes from the Latin root *ars*, or *art* meaning skill acquired through learning or practice. Areas of study during the Middle Ages were classified as the *artes mechanicae* or “the mechanical arts” and the *artes liberales* or “the liberal arts”.

Artes Mechanicae included seven areas such as tailoring/weaving, agriculture, masonry, warfare/martial arts, trade, cooking, metallurgy. The seven artes liberales comprised the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy).

The Latin word *liberalis* means free. The seven liberal arts of classical antiquity, therefore, were deemed essential for the education of a free person to fully realise his

potential.

While the notion of an individual freeing himself from constraints of nature by learning an art has been with us from the beginning, the free individual was always socially situated, culturally circumscribed. We know that at the origins of both Indian and Western traditions, the legitimate acquisition of education remained restricted to the few at the top. The ‘liberal’ in liberal education has, therefore, remained a contested term, debated across feudal, industrial, capitalist, and neo-liberal societies because of its inbuilt ambiguity.

In the late 20th and early 21st century, a number of movements for social and political rights across the world brought in a new criticality to the notion of ‘liberal’ education, reinforcing the centrality of dissent and leading to changes in the vision, structures and curriculum of departments within the academy.

The NEP draft fails to make any connections to this dialogic tradition of liberal education since it ignores the ‘how, when and where’ of the term liberal. The case for liberal education is made in the name of employability and choice, or flexibility in designing a study plan. The development of the individual is seen in terms of her productive engagement with the economic progress of her society that now requires a certain flexible disposition. Choice and flexibility are inherent in the idea of liberal education but they in themselves do not make liberal education. In and of themselves they do not hold the

liberating, democratic, dissenting potential which is at the heart of liberal education. They are mere attendants.

The proposed new programme in Bachelor of Liberal Arts or Bachelor of Liberal Education, however, is defined in terms of the flexibility it offers a student in terms of the courses she wants to study, when she wants to study, as well as how long she wants to study. The multiple exit and entry point with either a degree or diploma in a four years honours programme becomes the high point of 'liberal education'.

A multidisciplinary environment within higher education institutions, according to the NEP, can facilitate such flexibility and therefore becomes desirable. The integration of Humanities and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is being advocated on the grounds of a proved impact of such integration on positive learning outcomes like increased creativity, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, communication skills and increased social and moral awareness among many others.

A liberal education based on India's great legacy in arts and sciences is seen as the key towards India's success in the 21st century and the fourth industrial revolution, which then seamlessly weaves industry alliances and community service into its fabric. The goal of this education is articulated in terms of its ability to develop broad capacities and important dispositions.

The idea of developing disposition is antithetical to the idea of a liberal education as well to the idea of critical thinking, which the document says should be included in the common core

curriculum of such an education. However, the report's understanding of critical thinking has less to do with independent thought or free and critical inquiry into received traditions and wisdom and more to do with courses in statistics, data analysis and quantitative methods (page 229). The spirit of dissent that has come to characterise liberal education and the idea of critical thinking is completely absent from this document.

The end goal of liberal education has a free thinking individual at the centre—free to think, question and critique. The elimination of this essential component of liberal education, namely the ability to dissent, is in harmony with an overall culture of corporate efficiency, productivity and market relevance that the universities of the new knowledge economy are meant to serve.

A number of business leaders across the globe have embraced this same tamed version of liberal education in the interest of producing managers and employees who are better problem solvers, better team players, and more innovative and creative workers. The draft document uses the liberal education idiom to build a neo-liberal world, where liberal education is at the service of life-long learners/employees getting ready not for their first job but for their second, the third and beyond.

The practice of liberal education is tough to imagine in a knowledge economy that ties the future of the university with global trends and national economies. The question though remains: can we take away the internal tensions between freedom and discipline, the self and the other that characterise liberal education without shortchanging the

idea of education?

It is in this space defined by these tensions that education happens and a central component of this education is dissent. Incubation centres and venture studios cannot be the sources of creativity or innovation. Creativity by definition is situated within dissent. The history of humankind is a history of a series of informed dissents, and constant struggles that have brought about greater freedoms, better political systems, new inventions and visions of a better society, and a better world.

In every age and place where education has been used to reproduce social and political power structures, we have heard a voice that reinstated dissent at the centre-stage of education—a Socrates, a Freire. Let us not forget that the establishment of Takshashila and Nalanda, which the NEP so proudly reclaims as part of a glorious Indian tradition, also lie in the Buddhist traditions of knowledge, dissenting from an entrenched Brahminical tradition. Dissent is not only central to creativity and innovation but also to democracy. Education for democracy also has to be an education in freedom.

A policy for education that wants to embrace liberal education cannot afford to blank out the complexities involved in such an education for the teacher, the taught, and the content of what is taught. Great institutions are built on the infinite freedom of the human mind, on the indefatigable courage, to borrow the words from Thomas Jefferson, "to follow truth wherever it may lead" and "to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."

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Press Statement by Presidium, AIFRTE

AIFRTE Condemns Threats to the Life and Liberty of Dr. Ram Puniyani

All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) unequivocally condemns the dastardly threats to the life and liberty of noted academic and former Professor of IIT Mumbai, and a leading figure in the movement for defence of civil liberties, Dr. Ram Puniyani.

The articles, lectures and books of Dr. Puniyani, who is also a member of the Advisory Board of the AIFRTE, are an important resource for all civil society groups and activists in the struggle for promoting rationalism and scientific temper and opposing the Hindutva forces and ideology that are communalizing India's polity and social life, in blatant violation of the Constitution.

The cowards, who failed to identify themselves, telephoned his home on the night of 6th June 2019. They used highly abusive language and accused him of being 'anti-

Hindu'. Dr. Puniyani was threatened with dire consequences if he did not stop his activities and leave the city within 15 days. Dr. Puniyani has filed an FIR with the Powai police station in Mumbai and also written to the Police Commissioner. The National Human Rights Commission has also been approached.

However, it is essential

- that all democratic organizations and civil society groups unite to demand protection for Dr. Puniyani and his family.
- that the Govt. of Maharashtra take immediate action to identify and proceed against those persons who have threatened him and reveal the organizations which are behind their actions.
- that the National Human Rights Commission respond and act urgently on this case.

AIFRTE demands immediate, stern and stringent action by the

concerned authorities. The lives of a number of leading democratic rationalists and intellectuals, particularly in Maharashtra and neighbouring Karnataka, have already been lost at the hands of suspected adherents of a right-wing hindutva organization that is active in the region.

This politics and ideology of hatred and physical elimination cannot be allowed to function as if it has some form of 'immunity' under the current political dispensation.

It has to be put a stop to, and that must be done right away.

The ruling parties and governments at the level of the state and the centre must condemn these threats and provide credible assurance that the criminals behind such actions and these continuing threats will be identified and dealt with severely, as per law.

Congress Socialist Party's Separation from the Congress (1946–48)

Narendra Kumar Singh & Anand Prakash Singh

Right from the outset, the role of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within the Indian National Congress (INC) was a debatable one. However on the eve of independence the relationship between the two became incompatible on several issues. For this reason both parties decided to part ways. The present paper deals with rightist-socialist relations alongwith the socio-economic factors responsible for the separation of the CSP from the INC. The object

of the paper is chiefly to analyse the role of Jayaprakash Narayan regarding the break.

Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) was released from Agra jail on 10 April 1946. Immediately after this, he discussed the functioning of the party within the Congress with Acharya Narendra Dev and other leaders. Sardar Patel also desired to discuss the matter with JP. Nevertheless due to the busy schedule of JP, this was not possible.

[1] An Augusters' conference was organised at Bombay on 18–20 May 1946, in which a number of prominent leaders from different parts of India who played an active role in the Quit India movement, participated. In this conference, there were three main trends regarding the reorganisation of the CSP.[2]

- i) There was no need for a party separate from the Congress.
- ii) An Augusters Party should be organised.

iii) The Party may be reorganised and vigorously pushed.

The first trend had little support. The second had vociferous support, but it was realised that a jumble of individual could not make a political party with hardly any positive programme. Thus, inspite of sufficient support, this idea was dropped. The third trend found general acceptance and the responsibility for reorganisation of the party was given to leaders like JP, Narendra Dev, Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Aruna Asaf Ali.

Meanwhile, after being elected the Congress president in 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru offered JP and Ram Manohar Lohia the membership of the Working Committee (WC), but the CSP leaders placed three conditions for membership:

- (i) None of the Working Committee members will be a minister in the government.
- (ii) Congress members will be allowed enlightened criticism of the government.
- (iii) The Congress President shall not hold any post in the government.

Inspite of lengthy talks, Jawaharlal Nehru refused to accept the first two demands and accepted the third partially. JP and Lohia therefore refused the membership of the WC.[3]

Subsequently JP accepted the membership on the request of Nehru. JP later justified his change of stand by saying that within two months the circumstances had totally changed, and it was therefore necessary for each and every Congressman to fight the coming danger unitedly. He assured that if his WC membership created any hinderance in the revolutionary struggle, he would not hesitate to leave this membership.[4]

In fact the object of his acceptance of WC membership was to mould the opinion of Congress in favour of the socio-economic programmes of the CSP.[5]

After the Meerut Conference of the Congress in November 1946, Jayaprakash Narayan was very disappointed. In his letter to the new Congress President, J.B. Kripalani, he expressed his despair over the WC list.[6] JP reminded the president about their Meerut discussions in which Kripalani gave an assurance that the person commanding the confidence of the Socialists would be appointed the general secretary of the Congress. He was specially upset with the exclusion of Mridulaben and Ram Manohar Lohia from the WC. In these circumstances he resigned from the WC.[7] He also pressed for the acceptance of his resignation because he did not think that he was of any use for the type of work that was before the Committee in those days.[8]

On 28th February 1947, the Working Committee of the CSP decided to drop the prefix 'Congress' and opened its door for non-Congress members.[9] This change in the name of the Party was a turning point in the history of Indian socialist movement as well as its relations with the Congress. Now, JP was of the opinion that the Indian National Congress should be disbanded so that a new Party could emerge on a new socio-economic programme. [10] Thus the CSP marched one step further in the direction of separation from the Congress.

Meanwhile, Sardar Patel appealed to the Socialists to hold their hand for just one year more and then they could do what they thought best. But at the same time, he accused the Socialists of trying to

disrupt the Congress, of discrediting it in order to capture power. In response, JP addressing a meeting in Calicut, said that Sardar's advice was unnecessary, as Socialists had no intention of leaving the Congress till independence was achieved. He also said that Patel was trying to suppress the growth of the Socialist Party.[12] In his reply to JP, Patel argued that since his release he had tried his best to bring about a fusion between CSP and the Congress. Unfortunately he had failed to convert JP, although he had succeeded in convincing other important members about his views. He assured JP that he had done nothing either in thought or in action to injure the cause of CSP or to do any harm to any individual member. He regretted that at a time when there was a need to stand together, JP was 'consciously or unconsciously trying to divide our forces'. [13]

It was the assumption of the Socialists that after the formation of the Interim government, the Congress would be totally centred on running the government. Thus the common or united front character of the Congress was naturally going to weaken and a struggle for power within the Congress would grow in intensity. In these circumstances, said JP, "The Party shall endeavour to push the Congress towards socialism and to prevent its capture by the vested interests. If this endeavour succeeds, the Congress will rise to greater heights of influence, effectiveness and service. If it fails, the Congress must split." [14]

In his efforts to minimise their differences, Congress President J.B. Kripalani proposed to JP to discuss the points of difference, and if possible arrive at a solution which may bring about solidarity and

strength in the Congress organisation. [15] After this proposal, JP wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru in which JP accepted that he did not exactly know what to do in this matter since he personally felt very diffident towards Kripalani. However, he was prepared to do whatever Nehru advised.[16] In another letter to Kripalani, JP suggested that casual conversation with one or the other of the leaders was not fruitful and that it would be better for two or three top ranking Congress leaders to thrash out the matter with a few socialist representatives. He also referred to his discussion with Nehru in Delhi on this problem.[17] Kripalani regretted that his invitation was misjudged and was given little value, even though it was sent in his official capacity as Congress President. He also referred to the complaints from Congress workers in every province that they did not receive any cooperation from the Socialists and that the Socialists exploited every situation to harass and discredit them and the Congress ministries. He complained that as JP had found it more convenient to discuss this matter with Jawaharlal Nehru, so he had nothing more to say.[18]

On the question of differences, Sardar Patel wrote that no useful purpose would be served by raking up the past in which he may have much more to say against JP than JP may have against him (Patel). Actually it might have all been due to lack of contact or misunderstanding or other reasons. He clarified further that if he had done anything against JP and the CSP, it had always been done in self-defence. He defended himself by saying that "I have made earnest endeavours to make reconciliation and to secure cooperation from

you and your party, but everytime we have met with a rebuff. It is my sad experience that although often you agreed with our decision or our policy when you were with us, you disagreed afterwards on grounds of party discipline or party interest." [19] Patel felt that much of the indiscipline in the Congress was due to the existence of CSP in the Congress also of the party members working solely in its interest. He also referred to the naval rating incident in Bombay created by some CSP leaders with the cooperation of the Communists, as well as some of JP's charges against the Congress ministries.

Regarding Patel's reconciliation and cooperation move, JP responded that it was rather an astounding statement. He had never known of any serious attempt made to secure CSP's cooperation. He also stated that his cooperation had not been accepted even when offered at a critical time. Nevertheless, he pointed out that as Socialists were not a power group in the Congress, so their cooperation depended on political adjustment between the ideologies and programme of the High Command and their group. [20] He also believed that such an adjustment was not impossible though it depended more on Patel than on anyone in the Congress.

On the occasion of the Congress Working Committee meeting in Delhi, a series of talks took place between leaders of the Socialist Party and members of the Congress Working Committee. Mahatma Gandhi attempted to resolve the differences between Socialists and Congress. In the meeting, the Socialists demanded that during the transitional period, Congress should dissolve itself into a Liberal or

Labour Party. Accordingly Congress was advised to move in a socialist direction: "The transformation of the National Congress into Socialist Congress will help to galvanise the country into a new mood of creative adventure." [21]

The Congress was neither prepared to dissolve itself nor to accept the socialist programme and policies. Sardar Patel was not present in the discussion. He talked to Narendra Dev and Ram Manohar Lohia regarding the matter. On 14 June 1947, Sardar Patel reiterated in the AICC meeting that unity of the Congress was essential, but there was no place for different groups in the Congress.[22] Here what is important in understanding Patel's role in forcing the Socialists out of Congress is not that he had differences with them but that he had decided now that the Socialists either had to disband their organisation within the Congress or get out.[23]

In 1947 when Kripalani resigned from the presidentship, Gandhi suggested that either JP or Narendra Dev may be elected as the president of the Congress. As JP was closer to Nehru and played a historical role in the revolutionary movement of 1942, so he discussed the idea with him (Nehru). Strangely enough, Nehru said that many other senior members were present in the Congress. Then the name of Narendra Dev was proposed. This time Sardar Patel and Shankar Rao Dev opposed. They were of the opinion that until and unless Narendra Dev was associated with a minority Party within Congress, it would not be fair to make him the President of the Congress.[24] Thus even Gandhi's personal influence and efforts failed to resolve the issue.

The Mountbatten Plan of

India's partition was also a bone of contention between CSP and the Congress. The offensive role of Muslim League and its 'Direct Action' compelled Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel to accept the plan of partition of India, while Socialists like JP and other leaders were not prepared to accept the partition of India and were preparing for final and decisive struggle. In fact, their strategy depended on the assumption that the Congress would not accept partition of India at any cost and then final struggle would be inevitable.[25] Thus the differences between the Congress and Socialists broadened. Addressing a group of Socialists, JP declared that in the coming AICC session, if the Congress accepted their programme the Socialists would be there, but if not then they would have no place in it.[26] The resolution passed by the general council of the Socialist Party at Nagpur on 30–31 August 1947 declared that the Socialist Party and the Congress differed not only in aim but also in policies, action and in organisational forms. It said further that in the next meeting of the AICC, these three groups of differences would be discussed. The decision taken by the Congress on these vital issues would determine the Socialist Party's relations with the Congress.[27]

Meanwhile Congress General Secretary Shankar Rao Dev blamed the Socialists, especially JP, for non-cooperation with the Congress. He warned that if the socialists wanted to non-cooperate, they should leave Congress membership. He reiterated that the Socialist Party was openly criticising the Congress leadership and its administration as well as launching an election campaign against the Congress.

[28] In a circular issued to all the Provincial Congress Committees, Congress members were prohibited from attending meetings organised by the Socialists. It was directed that Congress members should not participate in the welcome meetings and functions of the Socialist leaders, as in such meetings Socialists propagated the policies and programmes of their party and always criticised Congress leadership.

In spite of all these controversies and differences, the Socialists were indecisive and followed a policy of wait and see. The Socialist Party weekly *Janata* advised the party: "The wiser course in these circumstances for the Socialist Party seems to be, for the time being at least, to stop thinking of separation from the Congress and for its leaders to assume actual responsibility for government wherever possible in association with Congress".[29] However, a year earlier, Aruna Asaf Ali had clearly been of the opinion that if the Socialists were unable to make the Congress move out of its rut, they must not remain rooted in it.[30] In January 1948, the National Executive of the Socialist Party decided not to have any representation on the Working Committee of the Congress.[31] Aruna Asaf Ali once again strongly advocated the Socialist Party's separation from the Congress. She said that for achieving socialist ends, Socialists would need to break with the Congress past and direct their steps single-mindedly towards a socialist future.[32]

In March 1948, Congress amended the party constitution according to which no member of any other party could be a member of the Congress Party. The sole

object of this amendment was to create a condition in which the parties working within or outside the Congress would either have to dissolve themselves or merge with the Congress or be compelled to break with the Congress. In these circumstances, there was no other option for the Socialist Party but to quit the Congress. The new Congress constitution, as well as the inner logic of development, ended the long period of organic association of the Socialists with the Congress.[33] After the Nasik decision, the Socialist Party directed the party members to withdraw from the Congress. The party members were to resign from the primary membership, elected Congress Committees, local bodies and the legislatures also.[34] Thus ended a historical chapter of CSP–Congress association and cooperation during the pre-independence era.

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(Sourced from: *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 63 (2002), pp. 819–826.*)

They Cannot Stop Us. We Will Live and Triumph.

Bertha Mojena Milián

The Trump administration's hostility toward our country seems to have no end. Yesterday (June 4, 2019), the US Treasury Department added to sanctions announced April 17, and the activation of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, the prohibition of "people to people" cultural and educational trips, plus other restrictions on travel and transportation services, remittances, banking, commerce, and telecommunications.

According to a press release issued by the department, private and corporate planes, cruise ships, sailboats, fishing boats, and similar vessels will be prohibited from traveling to Cuba, although an "exemption" is available for certain previously authorised group educational visits, for which at least one transaction related to the trip, such as the purchase of a ticket or reservation, was completed before June 5. Civil aircraft that operate under Air Carrier Certificates or other specifications of the Federal Aviation Administration will be authorised to travel to the island.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin stated that the restrictions are meant to put a brake on "the destabilising role of Cuba in Latin America," and that he is "worried"

about Cuban support to Venezuela and Nicaragua.

What should worry him is the example of Cuba before the world, a small island that for more than 60 years has resisted the attacks of the greatest empire history has known, and extends its solidarity to all peoples in need, sharing not what we have left over, but even what we lack, as Army General Raul Castro Ruz said.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla tweeted on Tuesday that differences must be resolved on the basis of dialogue and cooperation, adhering strictly to international law, and strongly denounced the new sanctions, saying, "They intend to strangle the economy and damage Cubans' standard of living, to wrest political concessions from us. They will fail once again."

President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez insisted that Cuba will not be intimidated or distracted by new threats or restrictions. "Work, creativity, effort, and resistance is our answer. They have not been able to asphyxiate us. They cannot stop us. We will live and we will triumph," he said.

(Courtesy: Granma English, Cuba.)

May Day 2003

Fidel Castro

Text of a speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the May Day rally held in Revolution Square on May 1, 2003 (Note from Editors: Speech has been edited by us for reasons of space.)

Distinguished guests, Dear fellow Cubans:

Our heroic people have struggled for 44 years from this small Caribbean island just a few miles away from the most formidable imperial power ever known to mankind. In so doing, they have written an unprecedented chapter in history. Never has the world witnessed such an unequal fight.

Some may have believed that the rise of the empire to the status of the sole superpower, with a military and technological might with no balancing pole anywhere in the world, would frighten or dishearten the Cuban people. Yet, today they have no choice but to watch in amazement the enhanced courage of this valiant people. On a day like today, this glorious international workers' day, which commemorates the death of the five martyrs of Chicago, I declare, on behalf of the one million Cubans gathered here, that we will face up to any threats, we will not yield to any pressures, and that we are prepared to defend our homeland and our Revolution with ideas and with weapons to our last drop of blood.

What is Cuba's sin? What honest person has any reason to attack her?

With their own blood and weapons seized from the enemy, the Cuban people overthrew a cruel

tyranny with 80,000 men under arms imposed by the US government.

Cuba was the first territory free from imperialist domination in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the only country in the hemisphere, throughout post-colonial history, where the torturers, murderers and war criminals that took the lives of tens of thousands of people were exemplarily punished.

All of the country's land was recovered and turned over to the peasants and agricultural workers. The natural resources, industries and basic services were placed in the hands of their only true owner: the Cuban nation.

In less than 72 hours, fighting ceaselessly, day and night, Cuba crushed the Bay of Pigs mercenary invasion organised by a US administration (in 1961), thereby preventing a direct military intervention by the US and a war of incalculable consequences. The Revolution already had the Rebel Army, over 400,000 weapons and hundreds of thousands of militia members. In 1962, Cuba confronted with honour, and without a single concession, the risk of being attacked with dozens of nuclear weapons.

It defeated the dirty war that spread throughout the entire country, at a cost in human lives even greater than that of the war of liberation. It stoically endured thousands of acts of sabotage and terrorist attacks organised by the US government. It thwarted hundreds of assassination plots against the leaders of the Revolution.

While under a rigorous blockade

and economic warfare that has lasted for almost half a century, Cuba was able to eradicate in just one year the illiteracy that has still not been overcome in the course of more than four decades by the rest of the countries of Latin America, or the United States itself.

It has brought free education to 100% of the country's children. It has the highest school retention rate—over 99% between kindergarten and ninth grade—of all of the nations in the hemisphere. Its elementary school, students rank first worldwide in the knowledge of their mother language and mathematics. The country also ranks first worldwide with the highest number of teachers per capita and the lowest number of students per classroom.

All children with physical or mental challenges are enrolled in special schools.

Computer education and the use of audio-visual methods now extend to all of the country's children, adolescents and youth, in both the cities and the countryside.

All citizens have the possibility of undertaking studies that will take them from kindergarten to a doctoral degree without spending a penny.

Today, the country has 30 university graduates, intellectuals and professional artists for every one there was before the Revolution. There are schools for the training of artists and art instructors throughout all of the country's provinces, where over 20,000 young people are currently studying and developing their talent and vocation. Tens of thousands more are doing the same

at vocational schools, and many of these then go on to undertake professional studies.

University campuses are progressively spreading to all of the country's municipalities. Never in any other part of the world has such a colossal educational and cultural revolution taken place as this. It will turn Cuba, by far, into the country with the highest degree of knowledge and culture in the world, faithful to Martí's profound conviction that "no freedom is possible without culture".

Infant mortality has been reduced from 60 per 1000 live births to a rate that fluctuates between 6 and 6.5, which is the lowest in the hemisphere, from the United States to Patagonia. Life expectancy has increased by 15 years.

Infectious and contagious diseases like polio, malaria, neonatal tetanus, diphtheria, measles, rubella, mumps, whooping cough and dengue have been eradicated; others like tetanus, meningococcal meningitis, hepatitis B, leprosy, hemophilus meningitis and tuberculosis are fully controlled. Today, in our country, people die of the same causes as in the most highly developed countries: cardiovascular diseases, cancer, accidents and others, but with a much lower incidence.

A profound revolution is underway to bring medical services closer to the population, in order to facilitate access to health care centers, save lives and alleviate suffering. In-depth research is being carried out to break the chain, mitigate or reduce to a minimum the problems that result from genetic, prenatal or childbirth-related causes.

Cuba is today the country with the highest number of doctors per capita in the world, with almost

twice as many as those that follow closer. Cubans have the best healthcare system in the world, and will continue to receive all services absolutely free of charge.

Social security covers 100% of the country's citizens.

In Cuba, 85% of the people own their homes and they pay no property taxes on them whatsoever. The remaining 15% pay a wholly symbolic rent, which is only 10% of their salary.

Illegal drug use involves a negligible percentage of the population, and is being resolutely combated. Lottery and other forms of gambling have been banned since the first years of the Revolution to ensure that no one pins their hopes of progress on luck.

There is no commercial advertising on Cuban television and radio or in our printed publications. Instead, these feature public service announcements concerning health, education, culture, physical education, sports, recreation, environmental protection, and the fight against drugs, accidents and other social problems. Our media educate, they do not poison or alienate. They do not worship or exalt the values of decadent consumer societies.

There is no cult of personality around any living revolutionary, in the form of statues, official photographs, or the names of streets or institutions. The leaders of this country are human beings, not gods.

In our country there are no paramilitary forces or death squads, nor has violence ever been used against the people; there are no extrajudicial executions or torture. The people have always massively supported the activities of the Revolution. This rally today is proof

of that.

Light years separate our society from what has prevailed until today in the rest of the world. We cultivate brotherhood and solidarity among individuals and peoples both in the country and abroad.

The new generations and the entire people are being educated about the need to protect the environment. The media are used to build environmental awareness.

The development of wholesome, non-professional sports has raised our people to the highest ranks worldwide in medals and honors.

Scientific research, at the service of our people and all humanity, has increased several-hundredfold. As a result of these efforts, important medications are saving lives in Cuba and other countries.

In no other people has the spirit of international solidarity become so deeply rooted.

Our country supported the Algerian patriots in their struggle against French colonialism, at the cost of damaging political and economic relations with such an important European country as France. We sent weapons and troops to defend Algeria from Moroccan expansionism, when the king of this country sought to take control of the iron mines of Gara Djebilet, near the city of Tindouf, in southwest Algeria.

At the request of the Arab nation of Syria, a full tank brigade stood guard between 1973 and 1975 alongside the Golan Heights, when this territory was unjustly seized from that country.

The leader of the Republic of Congo when it first achieved independence, Patrice Lumumba, who was harassed from abroad, received our political support. When

he was assassinated by the colonial powers in January of 1961, we lent assistance to his followers. Four years later, in 1965, Cuban blood was shed in the western region of Lake Tanganyika, where Che Guevara and more than 100 Cuban instructors supported the Congolese rebels who were fighting against white mercenaries in the service of the man supported by the West, that is, Mobutu, whose 40 billion dollars that he stole—nobody knows in which European banks they are kept.

The blood of Cuban instructors was shed while training and supporting the combatants of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, who fought under the command of Amilcar Cabral for the liberation of these former Portuguese colonies.

The same was true during the ten years that Cuba supported Agostinho Neto's MPLA in the struggle for the independence of Angola. After independence was achieved, and over the course of the next 15 years, hundreds of thousands of Cuban volunteers participated in defending Angola from the attacks of racist South African troops that in complicity with the United States, and using dirty war tactics, planted millions of mines, wiped out entire villages, and murdered more than half a million Angolan men, women and children.

In Cuito Cuanavale and on the Namibian border, to the southwest of Angola, Angolan and Namibian forces together with 40,000 Cuban troops dealt the final blow to the South African troops. This resulted in the immediate liberation of Namibia and speeded up the end of apartheid by perhaps 20 to 25 years. At that time, the South Africans had seven nuclear warheads that Israel

had supplied to them or helped them to produce, with the full knowledge and complicity of the US government.

Throughout the course of almost 15 years, Cuba had a place of honour in its solidarity with the heroic people of Vietnam, caught up in a barbaric and brutal war with the United States. That war killed four million Vietnamese, in addition to all those left wounded and mutilated, not to mention the fact that the country was inundated with chemical compounds that continue to cause incalculable damage even today. The pretext for the US invasion: Vietnam, a poor and underdeveloped country located 20,000 kilometers away, constituted a threat to the national security of the United States.

Cuban blood was shed together with that of citizens of numerous Latin American countries when Che Guevara was murdered on instructions from US agents in Bolivia, when he was wounded and being held prisoner after his weapon had been rendered useless by a shot received in battle.

The blood of Cuban construction workers, who were building an international airport vital for the economy of a tiny island fully dependent on tourism, was shed fighting in defense of Grenada, invaded by the United States under cynical pretexts. Cuban blood was shed in Nicaragua, when instructors from our Armed Forces were training the brave Nicaraguan soldiers confronting the dirty war organised and armed by the United States against the Sandinista revolution.

There are so many more examples. Over 2000 heroic Cuban internationalist combatants have given their lives fulfilling the sacred duty of supporting the liberation

struggles for the independence of other sister nations. However, there is not one single Cuban property in any of those countries. No other country in our era has exhibited such sincere and selfless solidarity.

Cuba has always preached by example. It has never given in. It has never sold out the cause of another people. It has never made concessions. It has never betrayed its principles. There must be some reason why, just 48 hours ago, it was reelected by acclamation in the United Nations Economic and Social Council to another three years in the Commission on Human Rights, of which it has now been a member for 15 straight years.

More than half a million Cubans have carried out internationalist missions as combatants, as teachers, as technicians or as doctors and health care workers. Tens of thousands of the latter have provided their services and saved millions of lives over the course of more than 40 years. There are currently 3000 specialists in Comprehensive General Medicine and other healthcare personnel working in the most isolated regions of 18 Third World countries. Through preventive and therapeutic methods they save hundreds of thousands of lives every year, and maintain or restore the health of millions of people, without charging a penny for their services.

Without the Cuban doctors offered to the United Nations, the crucial programs urgently needed to fight AIDS would be impossible to carry out, without which entire nations and even whole regions of sub-Saharan Africa face the risk of perishing.

The developed capitalist world has created abundant financial capital, but it has not in any way

created the human capital that the Third World desperately needs.

Cuba has developed techniques to teach reading and writing by radio, with accompanying texts now available in five languages—Haitian Creole, Portuguese, French, English and Spanish—that are already being used in numerous countries. A similar program to teach literacy by television in Spanish is nearing completion, of exceptionally high quality. These are programs that were developed in Cuba and are genuinely Cuban. We are not interested in patents and exclusive copyrights. We are willing to offer them to all of the countries of the Third World, where most of the world's illiterates are concentrated, without charging a penny. In five years, the 800 million illiterate people in the world could be reduced by 80%, at a minimal cost.

After the demise of the USSR and the socialist bloc, nobody would have bet a dime on the survival of the Cuban Revolution. The United States tightened the blockade. The Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts were adopted, the latter extra-territorial in nature. We abruptly lost our main markets and supplies sources. The population's average calorie and protein consumption was reduced by almost half. But our country withstood the pressures and even advanced considerably in the social field.

Today, it has largely recovered with regard to nutritional requirements and is rapidly progressing in other fields. Even in these conditions, the work undertaken and the consciousness built throughout the years succeeded in working miracles. Why have we endured? Because the Revolution has always had, as it still does and always will to an ever-greater degree, the support of the people,

an intelligent people, increasingly united, educated and combative.

...

[Despite this admirable record] in Miami and Washington they are now [once again] discussing where, how and when Cuba will be attacked or the problem of the Revolution will be solved.

For the moment, there is talk of economic measures that will further intensify the brutal blockade, but they still do not know which measures to choose, and how effective these measures would be. There are very few left for them to choose from. They have already used up almost all of them.

A shameless scoundrel with the poorly chosen first name Lincoln, and the last name Dfaz-Balart, an intimate friend and advisor of President Bush, has made this enigmatic statement to a Miami TV station: "I can't go into details, but we're trying to break this vicious cycle."

What methods are they considering to deal with this vicious cycle? Physically eliminating me with the sophisticated modern means they have developed, as Mr. Bush promised in Texas before the elections? Or attacking Cuba the way they attacked Iraq?

If it were the former, it does not worry me in the least. The ideas for which I have fought all my life will not die, and they will live on for a long time.

If the solution were to attack Cuba like Iraq, I would suffer greatly because of the cost in lives and the enormous destruction it would bring on Cuba. But, it might turn out to be the last of this Administration's fascist attacks, because the struggle would last a very long time.

The aggressors would not merely be facing an army, but rather

thousands of armies, that would constantly reproduce themselves and make the enemy pay such a high cost in casualties that it would far exceed the cost in lives of its sons and daughters that the American people would be willing to pay for the adventures and ideas of President Bush. Today, he enjoys majority support, but it is dropping, and tomorrow it could be reduced to zero.

The American people, the millions of highly cultivated individuals who reason and think and uphold basic ethical principles, are sooner or later going to show that you cannot fool all of the people, and perhaps not even part of the people, all of the time. One day they will put a straightjacket on those who need it before they manage to annihilate life on the planet.

On behalf of the one million people gathered here this May Day, I want to convey a message to the world and the American people:

We do not want the blood of Cubans and Americans to be shed in a war. We do not want countless number of lives of people who could be friends to be lost in an armed conflict. Never has a people had such sacred things to defend, or such profound convictions to fight for, to such a degree that they would rather be obliterated from the face of the Earth than abandon the noble and generous work for which so many generations of Cubans have paid the high cost of the lives of many of their finest sons and daughters.

We are sustained by the deepest conviction that ideas are worth more than weapons, no matter how sophisticated and powerful those weapons may be.

Let us say like Che Guevara when he bid us farewell:

Ever onward to victory!

Is Amit Shah Seeking to Push NRC Across India?

Throughout the 2019 election campaign, Bharatiya Janata Party president Amit Shah made it a point to announce that if his party is re-elected, it will ensure passage of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill. The Bill allows refugees belonging to virtually all religions except Islam to acquire citizenship in India.

At the same time, he coupled the message with the promise of having the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process implemented in all states. The NRC, until now, is a process monitored by the Supreme Court to identify undocumented immigrants in Assam and deport them to their respective countries. It has run into controversy as a number of legitimate citizens—among them Muslims born in India—were reportedly left out of the list.

Upon taking over the Ministry of Home Affairs, it appears Shah is all set to fulfil his promise of driving out *ghuspeethiyas*—or infiltrators, the word he uses for migrants—who he thinks are nothing more than “termites”.

On May 30, the Union home ministry quietly amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, a necessary first step to eventually expanding the scope of the NRC beyond Assam.

The amended order empowers state governments and even district magistrates of all states and Union Territories to set up tribunals to identify a “foreigner” who is living in India illegally.

Until now, only the Centre had the power to constitute such tribunals, which were essentially quasi-judicial bodies unique to Assam.

Before the amendment, undocumented immigrants in other states were tried before a local court under the Passport Act, 1920 or the Foreigners Act, 1946. If found guilty, they were imprisoned for three to eight months and detained in special centres thereafter, until their respective countries took them back.

With the amendment, state governments and district collectors/magistrates can now locally constitute a special tribunal anywhere in India to “detect” and take action against an “infiltrator”.

The order also laid out guidelines to “detect, detain, and deport foreign nationals staying illegally across the country”, reported *The Hindu*.

The NRC is a related but distinct process under which every person living in Assam was required to submit documents proving their Indian citizenship. Some 40 lakh people have been unable to satisfy the authorities and their fate will eventually be handled by Foreigners’ Tribunals.

The MHA had recently set up 1,000 tribunals in Assam to complement the work of finalising the NRC by July 31, as the Supreme Court had instructed the registrar general to do. The process involved drawing up a list of those who had entered Assam from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971 without proper authorisation—a cut-off date agreed upon by all parties in the Assam Accord, 1985.

When the registrar general submitted a draft list last year, nearly 40 lakh people were termed as illegal, leading to a huge controversy. This had prompted the apex court to intervene and set a new deadline for the body. Around 36 lakh of

those excluded in the first list have reapplied to assert their citizenship. The Hindu reported.

Officials said that an individual who still does not find her name in the final list can file a fresh application to the tribunal. The amended order also allows district magistrates to refer such individuals to tribunals.

Criticisms

The BJP’s hardline Hindutva approach both at the Centre and in Assam has instilled fear in parts of the population that measures like the NRC and Citizenship Bill, if implemented across India, will be used to deny minorities their rights.

Campaigners against the NRC and Citizenship Bill believe that such an amendment that empowers even district authorities to “detect” foreigners may be interpreted by the courts as “violative of the basic tenets of the Indian Constitution and Citizenship Act itself.”

They argue that the NRC exercise in other states will subvert the principles of natural justice. A person who is branded an undocumented immigrant by the state authorities will have to carry the burden of proving herself a legitimate citizen, rather than the other way around. Unlike regular criminal courts, “the person under question will have to prove both the authenticity of their citizenship and the authenticity of the documents to build his/her case,” notes a report in SabrangIndia.

The report further notes that the amended order restricts appeals for such persons solely to the tribunals under specific terms and conditions, and that may increase the “possibility of bias or an erroneous judgement”.

Centre's clarification

However, the Centre has now clarified that the amendment was done to facilitate the foreigners tribunals to decide on appeals made by people "not satisfied with the outcome of claims and objections filed against the NRC". The MHA said that the May 30 order is applicable only to Assam for "all practical purposes" as the NRC is going on only in that state.

Assam Tribune reported that the official spokesperson of MHA said that "since the foreigners tribunals under this order have been established only in Assam and in no other state of the country, this amendment in effect is going to be relevant only to Assam".

The report said that MHA sources claimed that major amendments to the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 was done in 2013 and the May 30 order only followed it up to empower state governments and district magistrates. They said that there is "nothing Like the 2013 amendments, the latest amendment is also applicable to the whole country."

"Therefore, there is nothing new in this regard in the latest amendment of May 2019," the report noted.

Courtesy: **The Wire**

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Letter to Editor

Whither Nehru's Dreams after Seven Decades of Indian Democracy

Harasankar Adhikari

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his address to Aligarh Muslim University on 24th January, 1948, hoped, "*I wish to say that, in spite of everything, I have a firm faith in India's future. . . . Although many of my old dreams have been shattered by recent events, yet the basic objective still holds and I see no reason to change it. That objective is to build a free India of high ideals and noble endeavours where there is equality of opportunity for all.*"

What has happened to his dreams after seven decades of his lecture? India's democratic culture has been institutionalised through a fully functional electoral system. This culture has strongly established political democracy. It has ensured political and civil rights, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and so forth. But it does not ensure free and fair vote because people of India witness violence, torture and murder during election time. Further, this political democracy fails to guarantee economic well-being, ending of caste discrimination and gender injustice, and secularism. It is evident that everyday people (especially in rural areas) face terrible hardships of poverty, malnutrition and disease.

It is evident that political democracy of India has become impotent to meet its promises—rights, justice, freedom, equality, and human dignity. India's electoral democracy has been transformed into a universal adult franchise which is limited to so-called political freedom. But people remain unequal and 'unfree' in their daily lives.

The speech of Nehru in the Constituent Assembly in 1947 while moving the 'The Resolution of Aims and Objectives in the Constituent Assembly' stated, "*The first task of this assembly is to free India through a new constitution, to feed the starving people, and to clothe the naked masses, and to give every Indian the fullest opportunity to develop himself according to his capacity.*" This thus called for extending the promises of formal democracy into the economic, social, cultural and domestic sphere.

But where is the fullest opportunity for people to develop themselves according to their inherent capacity seven decades after Nehru expressed this hope? The educated youth of this country are deeply mired in the crises of unemployment. No effort is being made to provide them decent jobs. They are forced to work in temporary and low-paid jobs in the service sectors, like for example working in the sales department of shopping malls or becoming food delivery boys of Swiggy or Zomato.

Political parties of India are trying to make further false promises of providing doles to the suffering of India, in the name of direct cash transfers to their bank accounts. When will they think of fulfilling the dreams of Nehru, the promises made by him to the citizens of the country? Have they forgotten them, or are they deliberately ignoring them?

Total Civil Disobedience and Strike Begins in Sudan

Pavan Kulkarni

Millions of people in Sudan have joined a general strike called by Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), shutting down the centres of cities across the country despite a wave of arrests and intimidation. The SPA, which led the protests that overthrew former president Omar al-Bashir in April, has been demanding that the Transitional Military Council that succeeded him hand over power to civilian forces. The civil disobedience campaign aimed at forcing the ruling military junta to accept civilian rule began on Sunday, June 9, after the military and the notorious paramilitary force, the Rapid Security Forces (RSF), forcibly dispersed the sit-ins organised by the SPA outside the army headquarters in Khartoum and other army posts across the country, killing over a hundred, injuring more than 700 and raping many men and women.

Several people have been killed by the RSF since the civil disobedience began. The RSF has been patrolling the streets of the capital and other cities of Sudan on pick-up trucks mounted with machine guns, terrorising the civilians. Despite the repression, the civil disobedience has continued. For the past few days, banks, airports, public transport etc. have been completely paralysed. Most of the shops remain shuttered and the business district in central Khartoum is deserted.

In order to deny the military junta the access to finances and paralyse the state apparatus, the SPA has also called on all Sudanese, including the diaspora staying abroad, to avoid

making transactions through banks.

The Central Bank of Sudan, whose employees were terrorised by militiamen for undertaking strike action on May 28 and 29, released an official statement saying that the bank will not be participating in the current strike, called as a part of the civil disobedience action. However, most employees reportedly did not report to work.

Attempts of the military to force the striking staff of Port Sudan to work failed and as all operations there were brought to a halt. A number of workers in aviation, banking and electricity sector have been detained and the SPA said they fear the move was in an attempt to force them to work. Unconfirmed reports estimate the total number of arrests over the last few days to be several hundred.

According to a statement by the SPA, heavily armed paramilitaries from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have “completely shut down” eight hospitals. The militia men attacked the doctors who were treating the protesters injured in last Monday’s massacre and forced many patients out and beat many to death.

Preparations for civil disobedience has been made in advance

One day prior to the start of the civil disobedience, the SPA put out a statement announcing that the preparations were complete. Committees have been formed in all neighbourhoods, with different people tasked with different responsibilities.

These include “ensuring the

presence of food and drinking sources for the residents of the neighborhood, especially the elderly, the children and the needy”, “relocation of emergency patients to hospitals in coordination with the sub-medical committees” and spreading information to houses in the neighbourhood to raise awareness about the political situation and explain the goals of the civil disobedience.

With the internet blockade still in place, all the coordination and awareness raising work is being carried out mostly through SMS, and also through hand-written notes circulated by committees formed in the neighbourhoods.

The SPA has also called for protesters to erect barricades on all major roads and bridges. However, unlike the barricades that were erected around the sit-in demonstrations that were dispersed, these barricades are not to be guarded.

In order to avoid confrontation with the RSF militia, the SPA has given a call to “barricade and withdraw”. Should the barricades be demolished by the militia, the protesters have been advised not to intervene but to withdraw to safety quickly, and then rebuild after they leave.

“They dismantled the barricade, we built it again. They dismantled again, and we rebuilt it. It was a game of cat and mouse,” one protester was reported to have said, recounting his experience on the streets, which protesters are attempting to reclaim again.

In the city of Omdurman, a mass

rally took place on Friday night, followed by smaller marches on Saturday. Rallies in the city of Bahri (known also as Khartoum North), which lies to the north of the capital city in Khartoum state, reportedly came under attack prior to the start of the civil disobedience.

Update: On June 13, the media reported that the SPA has called off the civil disobedience movement after the Transitional Military Council (TMC), in its meeting with Ethiopian special envoy Mohamoud Dirir, agreed to release political prisoners. This was one of the confidence building measures demanded by the opposition following the massacre of more than 100 protestors, before it resumed talks with the TMC.

(Courtesy: People's Dispatch, an international media organisation with the mission of publicising voices from people's movements and organisations across the globe.)

Books by Surendra Mohan

1. **Vikas Ka Rasta: Nai Arthik Neetiyon ka vishleshan..** Price 600 rupees.
2. **Samajwad, Dharma Nirapekshata aur Samajik Nyaya** Reissued as second edition; Price 500 rupees
- Published by Rajkamal Prakashan, 2a Netaji Subhash Road, New Delhi 11002
3. **Vartaman Rajneeti ki Jwalant Chunautiyan.** Price 400 rupees.
4. **Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia ki Neetiyan:** (This booklet was published late last year.) Price 25 rupees.

Published by Anamika Publishers and Distributors, Ansari Road, New Delhi 110002

Terror Accounts For 0.007% Of Indian Deaths, Ill-Health 90%

Swagata Yadavar

“One has to be alive to be a patriot,” former Indian health secretary K Sujatha Rao wrote on Twitter on May 13, 2019, referring to election debates that focussed on issues of “nationalism and terror and not health”.

The data back Rao’s assertion of misplaced priorities.

In 2017, terrorism claimed the lives of 766 Indians, or 0.007% of all deaths, while health reasons claimed 6.6 million Indians, or 90% of all deaths.

8,000 times more deaths from ill-health than terror

There were 9.9 million deaths in India in 2017, with a death rate of 717.79 deaths per 100,000 people, according to the 2018 Global Burden of Disease (GBD), a global estimate of morbidity and mortality published by the University of Washington.

Communicable, maternal, neonatal and nutritious diseases caused 26.6% of all deaths in India, and non-communicable diseases caused 63.4% of all deaths, while injuries accounted for 9.8%.

Deaths by conflict and terrorism fall under the “interpersonal violence” category, accounting for 0.007% of all deaths, or 766, according to GBD data.

Terrorism claimed even fewer lives than the above number, according to another database: there were 178 terror incidents reported nationwide in 2017, killing 77 and injuring 295, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal.

Deaths due to diabetes

(254,500), suicides (210,800), infectious diseases (2 million) and non-communicable diseases (6.2 million) put together are 8,000 times the deaths caused by terrorism (766).

One reason for the large number of deaths in India due to disease is India’s low public health spending. India’s public health spending is among the world’s lowest. With a fifth of the world’s population, India’s public expenditure was 1.02% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015.

While India’s health budget is rising—in 2018 it was double of what it was in 2010—it is still inadequate, considering that India is home to a third of the world’s stunted children, has the highest number of tuberculosis patients and reports among the world’s highest out-of-pocket expenditure, an indicator of public healthcare failures.

The National Health Policy of 2017 talked about increasing public-health spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2025, but India has not yet met the 2010 target of 2% of GDP.

Poor investment in health and education directly impacts the country’s productivity and economic growth. Indians work for six-and-a-half years at peak productivity, compared to 20 years in China, 16 in Brazil and 13 in Sri Lanka, ranking 158th out of 195 countries in an international ranking of human capital.

(Yadavar is a principal correspondent with IndiaSpind.)



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Democracy Can Die in Daylight Too
Krishna Prasad

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Vandana Shiva

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Uday Dandavate

**Have You Heard of the CIA’s
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Remembering Patrice Lumumba
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**Microplastic Pollution
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What’s the Score: 100 Children Dead and Counting, Sir

Samar

“How many wickets”, asked Mangal Pandey, Health Minister of Bihar during a press conference to know the current status of India–Pakistan clash in the ongoing Cricket World Cup. It is just that he asked the question in the middle of a meeting of health department to tackle the outbreak of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) in the state which has already killed over 100 children in just one hospital—Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital (SKMCH), Muzaffarpur. The Union Health Minister of India Dr. Harsh Vardhan, his junior, Minister of State (MoS), Health Ashwini Kumar Choubey and health department officials were also in the meeting. The apathy, the disdain for the lives of the children leaves nothing more to say. Or perhaps it does.

Mr. Pandey was not the only Minister worried more about the cricket score while children died on his watch. MoS Choubey had pulled out a feat of his own before this meeting. He was caught sleeping in a press conference addressed by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, though he later tried to escape the criticism by claiming that he was ‘meditating’ and not sleeping.

The behaviour of the two ministers sum the state of public health in India where the authorities wake up only after such tragedies, that too if they make it to media scrutiny and public outrage. The outrage was there this time. People across India could see horribly inadequate number of beds in the Intensive Care Units forcing 3, at times 4, kids to share them. They could see that the number of doctors was far from required. They could see doctors telling on camera, and thus on record, that they do not have enough medicines to treat AES.

They know that only thing which can avert such tragedies is an urgent and immediate overhaul of the public health system and institutions in India, as the poor can afford only them. Yet, they try to hoodwink the people with knee jerk, cosmetic remedies, promise overall overhaul of the system to stop such tragedies from recurring. Once the situation comes under control, they go back to business as usual waiting for another crisis.

Think of it, this is not the first outbreak of AES in the area. AES, along with Japanese Encephalitis, is a recurrent killer in the region.

It has claimed lives of over 6,000 children in the Baba Raghav Das Medical College and Hospital in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur. The story remains the same in Muzaffarpur as well—AES killed 379 children in SKMCH alone in 2014. It had caused a similar outrage then too. The then, and also current, Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan had rushed to Muzaffarpur then too—just like he did now. He had then announced a plethora of measures—a 100-bed super specialty hospital, with a 10-bed facility for treatment of children. He had also promised to build a virology laboratory in Muzaffarpur, which is both the hotbed of AES as well as has the only state-run hospital in the area, even if inadequately equipped, to which people from neighbouring districts like Sitamarhi and Motigari also rush in case of emergencies.

Cut to 2019, a full 5 years after those announcements. Returning as Union Health Minister in the reelected government, Dr Harsh Vardhan rushed to the SKMCH and repeated all the announcements down to the virology laboratory while his junior, MoS Health Mr. Choubey slept away to glory or meditated—whatever one wants to believe. Not a single journalist in the presser asked him why the same promises made in 2014 remained unfulfilled until the second bout of the outbreak.

The reason behind that is not hard to guess though. The 2014 outbreak of AES killing 379 children had led to a massive uproar, and consequently, some action had been undertaken by the government, both at the state and union level. The Bihar government went into consultations, particularly with UNICEF, and came up with

a standard operating procedure (SOP) in 2015. The SOP included household surveys by the auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), accredited social health activists (ASHA) and anganwadi employees to check if any child has symptoms of Japanese encephalitis and AES. The efforts paid up. Death toll started going down. As against a toll of 424 in 2012, 222 in 2013 and 379 in 2014, the next four years—2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018—saw a considerable fall with a toll of 90, 103, 54 and 33, respectively.

Of course, losing even 33 young lives is losing too many. But in a country where the lives of the poor come dirt cheap, the dip was enough to chase the issue out of national gaze. Then 2019 happened. And the gaze returned. So did the ministers, even if repeating promises, sleeping, meditating, and asking about scores.

Can anything get worse than this? Of course, it can. So after the ministers came 'electronic media'. The prime time anchors entered the Intensive Care Units without gowns and gloves and almost shoved their microphones in the mouths of the overburdened doctors and nurses: Why there are not enough beds? Why you are not attending this kid (the doctor was attending another)? Why do you not have the necessary equipment?

But they did not care to ask any of these questions to the authorities duty-bound to provide these facilities. They told them the score, of the India–Pakistan cricket match, when asked.

So what's the score now? 130 children dead, and counting, Sir, until the next.

(Samar is Programme Coordinator – Right to Food Programme Asian

Legal Resource Centre / Asian Human Rights Commission, Hong Kong.)

Press Statement, June 19, 2019

Brain Fever Deaths In Bihar's Muzaffarpur

[Institutions associated with prominent freedom fighters Abbas Tyabji and Mahavir Tyagi—the Abbas Tyabji Educational and Charitable Trust and The Mahavir Tyagi Foundation for Political and Economic Decency—have issued the following statement.]

The encephalitis scourge has been affecting east Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (India) for decades.

The death roll this year of suspected encephalitis cases in Bihar's Muzaffarpur has already crossed 100. This is at the gates of Champaran, the site of Mahatma Gandhi's first major intervention after returning from South Africa.

Gandhiji had invariably intervened in public health issues both in India and in South Africa and his work at the time of Plague in both countries is well known.

In this 150th birth anniversary year of Mahatma Gandhi, we call upon conscientious individuals and socially sensitive organisations, particularly Gandhi-related organisations and organisations working for medical inclusion, to draw national attention to this continuing catastrophe and to confer with medical personnel and immunologists on ways to control and wipe out this scourge both by way of all possible relief and further focused research.

Democracy Can Die in Daylight Too

Krishna Prasad

Modesty is not a virtue of the media in the pixel age, in which preening is a 24x7 pastime. There is neither a demand for it from consumers, nor a supply of it from the practitioners. Equilibrium has been achieved in the marketplace of the mind. Even so, while print, electronic and digital news purveyors use the benefit of hindsight to retrofit Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "stunning" victory into a grand narrative arc, it should not escape the attention of the discerning that an otherwise boastful section of the media is uncharacteristically, modestly, not acknowledging its own not insignificant part in paving the way for India's precipitous lurch to the right.

Elephant in the room

Whilst any number of 'ex post facto' rationalisations may be adduced to explain the Bharatiya Janata Party's logic-defying triumph, it is impossible to ignore the elephant in the room: a large and influential part of the news media which blithely abdicated its role as the eyes and ears of the people—and turned into an undisguised, unthinking and unquestioning mouthpiece of the reigning ideology. That the same boosters are now bloviating about India's future as a secular, liberal democracy and offering gratuitous advice to the Opposition is, at best, a self-fulfilling prophecy. At worst, it is a parody.

Notwithstanding Mr. Modi's advertised disdain for journalists, making the media forget their core tasks—to witness, to verify, to

investigate, and to make sense, in the words of the British media scholar George Brock—was always a vital weapon in the manufacture of consent for the 'Gujarat Model'. Despite early failures as Chief Minister, Mr. Modi deftly achieved this goal. Established media houses were tamed by patronising their competitors. Some pesky editors were reined in or eased out by intimidating owners. Advertisements were turned off and on to let the bottom line send signals to managers.

Result: by 2014, without being explicitly coercive, Mr. Modi was able to manage the headlines, craft respectability and plug himself into the consciousness of the capitalist classes as the poor, incorruptible, reformist Hindutva icon—the son of the soil who was a victim of the liberal English media.

During the 2017 Assembly election campaign in Gujarat, a BJP TV commercial unwittingly reminded voters of how the Modi machine viewed the media. Two young men are discussing Mr. Modi in a barber shop. One of them calls him a "dictator" and says he has harassed them a lot. They are interrupted by a third person who is awaiting his turn and is listening in on the conversation. "You look like reporters," says the man who identifies himself as 'Vikas'. In other words, journalism—asking, criticising, digging, unearthing—is an obstacle in the grand project.

Inasmuch as this is revealing of a cultivated anti-media mindset—cultivated, because Mr. Modi, the 'pracharak', would often wait outside

newspaper offices in Ahmedabad in the 1990s, well past midnight, to have a cup of tea with useful reporters on the political beat—it is the ease with which he, the 'pradhan sevak', was able to negotiate a 'with-me-or-against-me' arrangement across the landscape that staggers the mind, and serves as a sobering reminder of the limits of the free press. "Democracy dies in darkness" is the Washington Post motto. Here, it would appear, it died in broad daylight.

From North and South America (Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro) to West and East Asia (Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Rodrigo Duterte), the playbook of the 21st century populist-nationalist politician contains the same to-do list: (i) turn the public against the media by berating them as an "enemy of the people"; (ii) delegitimise the media by ascribing motives, calling them news traders, "presstitutes"; (iii) choke the media by limiting access; distorting the discourse with fake news, alt-right media; (iv) intimidate the media with draconian laws; by trolling, doxxing, threatening journalists; and (v) bypass conventional media using one-way radio addresses, made-for-TV events and social media.

As the results of the 2019 election show, the best student in the class—the "first Prime Minister in 70 years to know where the camera was", in the words of one political scientist—was able to alternately emasculate and weaponise media, and turn it into a force multiplier at the ballot box. The searing commentary in the

foreign media of what is in store shines the mirror on the below-par inquiry by some of our own. And the decision of the Congress, Samajwadi Party and Janata Dal (Secular) to keep their panelists out of partisan TV debates puts the stamp on the perfidy bordering on complicity.

‘Wot won it’

When the Conservative Party unexpectedly came to power in Britain in 1992, Rupert Murdoch’s mass-selling tabloid *The Sun* proclaimed on its front page, “It’s *The Sun Wot Won It*”, to lay claim to its contribution. It is nobody’s case that the BJP won the 2019 election because of the media. India is larger, its democracy more layered, and the media mosaic vastly heterogeneous for such a glib conclusion. But a closer examination of the last five years will reveal the insidious role some in the media played in conditioning minds, building myths, deflecting attention, normalising the abnormal and poisoning the pool.

Precisely how this was achieved by a provincial leader, a self-declared “outsider” in Lutyens’ Delhi, is difficult to put a finger on. Certainly, home-grown tactics—bogus FIRs, criminal cases, arrests, IT raids, monitoring—were improved upon. Antagonism became the bedrock of the relationship. There was no media interface in the Prime Minister’s Office, just a PRO. The Prime Minister’s plane was off-bounds for hacks. There were no press meets. Journalists’ deaths were not counted. Targeted tweets crowned the new courtiers. In ways subtle and brutal, the message was conveyed and received that hagiography had to replace scrutiny.

In retrospect, the move to allow the Finance Minister to also handle

the Information and Broadcasting portfolio after Mr. Modi formed his Cabinet in 2014 will probably go down as a masterstroke in taming the circus, top-down. Dodgy corporates and media houses lived in dread of the taxman. Media licences and clearances were difficult to come by. Using carrot and stick, the circuits of news flow were rewired, the tramlines laid out on who could be attacked and who couldn’t be touched. Still to recover from the economic downturn that began in 2007–08, a media aching for ‘achhe din’ fell in line.

Self-censorship, co-option, and a free ride followed. From Aadhaar to Electronic Voting Machines, and from Doklam to Pulwama with Rafale in between, the biggest scandals lay buried. From LPG to GDP, from missing planes to missing jobs data, the grandest claims lay unexamined. The fake, the frivolous and the frothy—anthem, flag, beef, love jihad, JNU, urban naxals, azaan—got more air time than subaltern protests of farmers, weavers and workers. And agenda-setting studio warriors flayed minority ghosts each night—‘Hindus in danger’, ‘illegal immigrants’—fostering a siege mentality that reeked of victimhood.

In the post-truth world, where social media takes propaganda into the pockets of voters without filter, there is nothing to suggest the election verdict would have been the other way round had mainstream media been less dormant. But when a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court says the media should not forget that its primary responsibility is to be a watchdog, not a guard dog for those in authority, or when a former Chief Election Commissioner warns that “the fourth estate has become the fifth column

of democracy”, it is useful to wonder if they are seeing the cracks in the pillar with greater clarity.

No end date?

When the media’s darkest days — the censorship under Indira Gandhi’s 21 months of Emergency— are invoked, L.K. Advani’s quote that the press crawled when asked to bend is airily recalled. But at least the media of the time was adhering to a formal order which had a start date and an end date. In the 21st century, it didn’t take a presidential order for the ‘feral beasts’ to suspend their instincts, to look the other way, to stoke majoritarian fires, to fearlessly question not the ruling party but the Opposition, and usher in Modi 2.0.

(Krishna Prasad is former Editor-in-Chief, Outlook, and former member, Press Council of India.)

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Crimes Against Nature and Society Are Not “Satyagraha”

Vandana Shiva

After a series of 7 public hearings on Bt Brinjal, on February 9 2010, the then minister of state for Environment of the Govt of India announced an indefinite moratorium on introducing Bt brinjal—the first genetically modified **food crop** that would have been introduced for mass production in India.

In June 2019, Monsanto lobbyists announced that farmers will illegally plant Bt Brinjal as a “Satyagraha”. This is outright criminal action. As Kishore Tiwari, Chair of the Maharashtra Govt commission on agrarian distress has clearly stated, farmers acting on behest of Monsanto are criminals and will be treated as such.

Article 15 of the Biosafety laws requires govt to act when the rules are violated. Further, the Environment Protection Act 1986 requires that anyone violating the law faces an imprisonment of 5 years.

The reason we have national and international Biosafety laws is because GMOs cause harm to Biodiversity. Bt crops like Bt Cotton and Bt Brinjal have a gene for producing a toxin inserted in the genome of the plant, thus producing the toxin in every cell all the time. It was known in the 1990s and has been scientifically confirmed now that Bt in plants is different from the naturally occurring Bt in the soil.

New studies are showing that Monsanto took a safe natural pest control agent, Bt, and made it a “Supertoxin” by genetically engineering it into plants. The scientific fraud begins with the claim

that Bt toxin in crops affects only the bollworm species and controls it.

This is doubly false. While natural Bt affects only the caterpillar family, the “high dose toxin” or “super toxin” in GMO Bt crops affects a wide range of species. Other species are also affected. Further, the bollworm has evolved resistance to Bt as the Indian experience with Bt shows.

Jonathan R. Latham, in an article “Have Monsanto and the biotech industry turned natural Bt pesticides into GMO ‘Super toxins?’” points out:

According to biotech industry lore, the Bt pesticides introduced into many GMO food crops are natural proteins whose toxic activity extends only to narrow groups of insect species. Therefore, these pesticides can all be safely eaten, e.g. by humans.

This is not the interpretation we arrived at after our analysis of the documents accompanying the commercial approval of 23 typical Bt-containing GMO crops, however.

In our publication, authored along with Madeleine Love and Angelika Hilbeck, of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), we show that commercial GMO Bt toxins differ greatly from their natural precursors. These differences are important. They typically cause GMO Bt proteins to be more toxic. Worse, they also cause them to be active against many more species than natural forms of Bt toxins.

Our research has shown that Bt Cotton is affecting soil organisms

and destroying the soil food web. Since Bt is a toxin which the plant produces in every cell it is affecting biodiversity, soil health and pollinators.

A study published in a peer reviewed journal (Jagdish C. Tarafdar, Indira Rathore and Vandana Shiva, “Effect of bt-transgenic cotton on soil biological health”, Applied Biological Research, 2012) shows that in the Bt Cotton growing areas of Vidarbha, beneficial soil organisms have declined, undermining soil health and soil fertility. The result revealed a significant decline in actinobacteria (17%), bacterial count (14%) as well as acid phosphatases (27%), phytase (18%), nitrogenase (23%) and dehydrogenase (12%) activities in Bt cotton fields as compared with non-Bt cotton fields.

The study was repeated in 2015, and the soil microorganisms had further declined due to Bt toxin. The decline ranges between 6 and 77% of different parameters, which indicate the severe adverse effect of Bt Cotton on soil biological health. A decrease in bacterial population between 51–77% was noticed under Bt Cotton growing areas as compared to non-Bt cotton soils of different districts.

Several studies also show that Bt cotton has failed to control the bollworm and has instead led to an increase in resistant pests (see, for instance: P.C. Kesavan and M.S. Swaminathan, “Modern technologies for sustainable food and nutrition security”, Current Science, 25 November 2018)

Herbicide resistant Roundup

up Ready Crops have increased the use of herbicides like Roundup which has been established to be a carcinogen. Roundup also kills biodiversity of plants and pollinators dependent on them. It has also led to emergence of superweeds. Roundup Ready Bt Cotton is being illegally spread in India with no action from the government against the perpetrators of this crime.

Bt Brinjal will spread the failure and tragedy we have already witnessed in Bt Cotton. Worse, since Bt Brinjal is a food crop, there will be harm to public health. No independent research to prove the safety of Bt Brinjal exists. There are no long-term studies of more than 90 days or human feeding studies.

Bt Brinjal also contains antibiotic resistant genes and poses serious public health concerns with the possibility of 'horizontal gene transfer' of antibiotic resistance. Antibiotic resistance is already a major public health problem.

There are tried, tested, and successful alternatives for controlling pests that do not harm public health or environment.

India is the Centre of Origin/Diversity of Brinjal with more than 4500 varieties. The government cannot allow a gang of criminals sponsored by criminal corporations to violate India's Biodiversity Act to contaminate and pollute this rich diversity.

The higher common good and larger public good is what our Biosafety and Environmental laws are supposed to protect.

Deliberately acting against laws that protect the common good for the greed of a Poison Cartel of three global gene giants which already control 60% of the world's seed supply through such illegal actions,

is participation in their crimes against nature and humanity .

Satyagraha is based on higher consciousness, to promote ahimsa and stop brute law based on violence.

Thoreau engaged in civil disobedience against the poll tax which supported slavery. Gandhi undertook Satyagraha against apartheid in South Africa, against the forced cultivation of indigo in Champaran in 1917, and against the imposition of the Salt Laws in 1930. Following in Gandhi's footsteps we have undertaken Seed Satyagraha since 1987 to prevent the Poison Cartel from controlling our seeds, our agriculture, our food. India has Art 3j in our patent law which prohibits patents on plants, animals and seeds, since they are not human inventions.

During Gandhi's 150 anniversary, we will not allow criminal actions

undertaken by greedy corporate interests wherein they are seeking to equate the imposition of Seed Slavery with Gandhi's Satyagraha. *Monsanto is not Gandhi. Crimes against nature and society are not Satyagraha.* We will uphold the integrity of Satyagraha—the force of truth—and not allow the idea and moral force of Satyagraha to be degraded and misused by those engaging in crimes against nature and people.

We count on the Government of India to strictly implement the Bt Brinjal ban, to uphold India's Biosafety and Environmental law, and Gandhi's legacy.

(Vandana Shiva is an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, and alter-globalisation author, based in Delhi.)

From Swaraj to Swastika

Uday Dandavate

The victory of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a victory of the ideology that impedes the establishment of a true social democracy. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the author of India's constitution, wrote, "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognises liberty, equality, and fraternity as the principles of life." For those of us who want India to become a modern society based on humanitarian, ecological and secular values, the challenge is to regain people's trust in the values that establish a social democracy.

The faltering dream of Swaraj

During the recent Parliamentary

elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), systematically and aggressively promoted the idea of Hindu Nationalism, which undermines the immense potential of India's diversity.

In seeking freedom from the British, India rejected slavery to establish its own vision of participatory democracy (self-rule) as elaborated in Gandhi's book *Hind Swaraj*. Mahatma Gandhi believed that "Swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification, and growing self-reliance."

Though India achieved political

independence more than seventy years ago, in 1947, Swaraj has not been achieved for all sections of society. Feudalism, economic disparities and social inequalities continue to get in the way of creating equal opportunity for social mobility and prosperity for all.

In recent times, the growth of the RSS and the spread of its idea of Hindu Nationalism puts the underprivileged sections at a disadvantage and undermines the dream of Swaraj. The top-down authoritarian culture of the RSS and other organisations in its ideological fraternity fundamentally impedes the creation of participatory democracy. Each time Indian masses have opted for a strong and autocratic leader, it has derailed the cause of establishing a participatory democracy. The declaration of Emergency in the 1970s is a testament that the concentration of power in a single individual or a coterie leads to the suppression of dissent and the alienation of the masses from the power structure. Power in the hands of an authoritarian leader inevitably leads to nepotism, violation of human rights and corruption.

The progressive forces need to reenergise, and reaffirm our belief in a secular and participatory democracy. The electoral battle is lost, but the real war is ahead of us—we must continue to uphold and advance the dream of an inclusive society in the imagination of the masses. Hindu Nationalism is not a sustainable platform for achieving social justice, economic progress or peace with neighboring countries.

A legacy dismantled

An average Indian is religious (and superstitious) at heart and fiercely patriotic. The patriotism of the older generation was shaped by

the sacrifices they made fighting for liberty and freedom from the British. The post-independence generations were fortunate to enjoy the fruits of the struggles and sacrifices of their parents. Their notion of patriotism has been shaped by the India–Pakistan conflict and the fight against cross-border terrorism.

The Congress party, which was in power for the longest period after India became independent from the British, exploited the patriotic sentiment of the nation and the party's role in the freedom struggle to its advantage for several decades. Meanwhile, the RSS focused on promoting 'Hindu Nationalism'. The Ram Janmabhumi movement initiated by Shri L.K. Advani leading up to the demolition of the Babri Mosque was a systematic social engineering exercise to neutralise the impact of the social justice movement. The Sangh Parivar understood that it could unite Hindu voters only by creating fear of a common enemy—the Muslims of India. The RSS has been admirably successful in this; the supporters of Hindu Rashtra have managed to convince the majority Hindu population to support Hindu Nationalism as an assertion of Indian identity.

To spread its propaganda among the Hindu masses, the RSS began organising a devout cadre of activists that is trained in "righteous militancy" to reassert the honour and self-respect of Hindu Society. The following extract from the RSS mission statement serves as an alert:

- There was also need to bring all sadhus sannyasins and orthodox mathadhipatis on a common platform, so that their combined influence could be channelised for the common good of the entire Hindu society. The VHP was founded in 1964, to fill this

need. The VHP is committed to undo the historical insult to the last nuts and bolts and it is this determination of the VHP that has instilled a spirit of righteous militancy in the Hindu society.

- The aim is to activate the dormant Hindu society, to make it come out of its self-oblivion and realise its past mistakes, to instill in it a firm determination to set them right, and finally to make it bestir itself to reassert its honor and self-respect so that no power on earth dares challenge it in the days to come.

The following extract from the mission statement makes it clear that notwithstanding the Prime Minister's frequent proclamations of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas", his alma mater is hell bent on homogenising the multicultural Indian society under the umbrella of Hindutva.

- The world is looking for a viable and universally acceptable life-vision. It is Hinduism alone which is in a position to provide such a vision.
- A lasting solution to the economic crisis can come only from cultural rejuvenation and re-assertion of Hindu values.

(Extracted from the RSS website: <http://rss.org/Encyc/2012/10/22/rss-vision-and-mission.html>, updated on June 12, 2019.)

Today India has stepped away from the legacy of the freedom struggle. The proponents of a modern India, driven either by the Gandhian philosophy of inclusive, grassroots-level democracy, or by the Western ideals of liberal, secular and socialist democracy, were defeated by the same forces that ridiculed and assassinated Gandhi, and derided secularism and liberal thinking. The acrimony in the social media of the past several months has left no doubt

that in the prevailing conditions, a significant section of the Hindus of India have been won over to the idea of asserting their Hindu identity. A poisonous cocktail created from the mixing of religion and politics is leading India to dismantle the legacy of the freedom struggle.

Ominous Signs

The recent election campaign generated acrimonious, hateful, and abusive conversations on social media. Ideas that are far removed from the ideal of unity in diversity surfaced in these conversations. An atmosphere of xenophobia blinded people to the long-term consequences of their participation in this hateful discourse.

Political scientist Dr. Lawrence Britt wrote an article in which he identifies fourteen characteristics of fascism (*Free Inquiry, Spring 2003, page 20*):

1. **Powerful and Continuing Nationalism:** Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.
2. **Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights:** Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of "need". The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.
3. **Identification of Enemies/ Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause:** The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial, ethnic or religious minorities; liberals; communists; socialists, terrorists, etc.
4. **The supremacy of the military:** Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glorified.
5. **Rampant Sexism:** The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Opposition to abortion is high, as is homophobia and anti-gay legislation and national policy.
6. **Controlled Mass Media:** The media is directly or indirectly controlled by government regulation; censorship, especially in wartime, is very common.
7. **Obsession with National Security:** Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.
8. **Religion and Government are Intertwined:** Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion.
9. **Corporate Power is Protected:** The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the fascist government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/government relationship and power elite.
10. **Labour Power is Suppressed:** Because the organising power of labour is the only real threat to a fascist government, labor unions are either entirely eliminated or are severely suppressed.
11. **Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts:** Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts is openly attacked, and governments often refuse to fund the arts.
12. **Obsession with Crime and Punishment:** Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism.
13. **Rampant Cronyism and Corruption:** Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.
14. **Fraudulent Elections:** Sometimes elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections." Most of these signs and characteristics are already noticeable in the current politics of the Sangh Parivar. "Eternal Vigilance" is required to preserve the liberties

which our forefathers fought for.

Absence of an alternative

In the current Indian political atmosphere, humanitarian, ecological, and secular values have disappeared from the political discourse. The progressive parties, which previously represented the hopes and desires of the population, have drifted away from their ideals, and lost the hearts of many of their would-be supporters.

People are dismayed by the general state of politics and have lost hope for an alternative. In their dismay, they have bought into the narrative promoted by the Sangh Parivar that though the BJP is not perfect, the Congress party is not the alternative. The Congress party did not have the credibility to challenge the BJP. On issues that should have been damaging to the BJP, the Congress was also vulnerable. Unable to defend its complicity in the mass killings of Muslims in Gujarat, BJP countered with the issue of the massacre of Sikhs under the watch of Rajiv Gandhi; the Rafael deal was questionable, but Rahul Gandhi was taunted with the counter-argument that his father was “Bhrashtachari No. 1” (corrupt No. 1). The Modi government’s bonhomie with a select group of business houses and its failure to deliver on promises from the 2014 election was eclipsed by the war hysteria provoked before the election.

Reclaiming the dream

To reclaim the dream of Swaraj, the fight against Hindu Nationalism has to continue. We must replace hatred in people’s minds with compassion, and create a new national ethos that is more empathetic and inclusive. We must counter the mission of the RSS with the mission of a modern, secular,

liberal, compassionate and creative India, led by people who deserve respect. We must educate people about why separation of religion and politics is essential in a participatory democracy.

Dan Arel, an award-winning journalist and author, references a study conducted by the University of Chicago which found that children raised in non-religious households are kinder and more altruistic than those raised with religion. They observed 1170 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years in six countries (Canada, China, Jordan, Turkey, USA and South Africa), and inferred: “Across all countries, parents in religious households reported that their children expressed more empathy and sensitivity for justice in everyday life than non-religious parents. However, religiousness was inversely predictive of children’s altruism and positively correlated with their punitive tendencies. Together these results reveal the similarity across countries in how religion negatively influences children’s altruism, challenging the view that religiosity facilitates prosocial behavior.”

The purpose of citing this study is not to challenge people’s religious beliefs, but point out that practicing religion is not necessary for character building nor for cultivating kinder and altruistic traits in our children.

We must inculcate in children the values we cherish. A section of the younger generation seems to have lost interest in secularism. Much of this loss of interest is due to loss of credibility of the leaders who championed the secular cause. The RSS and BJP campaign magnified the contradictions between the rhetoric and lifestyle of the leaders who preached secularism, to turn voters against their politics.

There is a dire need to create

contemporary symbols and rituals for a secular society that will inspire the youth. The younger generation worldwide is recognising that it is possible to be spiritual without being religious, that one does not need religion to be moral and just.

There is hope

The movement for total revolution led by JP and the Lok Pal movement created hope for Social Democrats. These movements inspired by Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj were compromised by power mongering.

My hope for the future stems from the fact that as much as India is fiercely religious and nationalistic, at heart it is also compassionate. I see an opportunity for those who want to experiment with a new future based on inclusive ideologies. We should tap into India’s compassionate soul and rebuild a new politics. The path to building the modern India of our dreams has become harder, but not impossible.

The transformation of society can happen when citizens start thinking creatively about building tools and institutions to strengthen democracy. For example, Ushahidi, a non-profit technology company was first developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post-election violence in 2008. Since then, thousands have used its crowdsourcing tools to raise their voice. It has empowered marginalised people raise their voice. At the same time it has also provided organisations and people’s representatives a communication channel that helps them listen and respond to their constituents.

Closer to home, “I Paid a Bribe (IPAB) is an online initiative started by Janaagraha is the largest online crowd-sourced anti-corruption platform in the world today. IPAB

uses a crowd-sourcing model to collect bribe reports, and to build a repository of corruption-related data across government departments. Most importantly, it empowers citizens, governments, and advocacy organisations to tackle retail corruption. As of June 2017, IPAB has partnered with 30 other countries to create replica IPAB sites and begin an international Crowdsourcing Against Corruption Coalition.” (source:<http://www.janaagraha.org/i-paid-a-bribe/>).

janaagraha.org/i-paid-a-bribe/).

These examples demonstrate how systemic transformation of the society is possible through innovative tools for participation of citizens in democracy. Co-creating a vision of participatory democracy will initiate the building of institutions that over time can bring alive the dream of Swaraj. This is a cathartic moment in the nation’s psychology. The results of this election sends a message that India has chosen the

Swastika over Swaraj. However, there is hope for a turnaround. Let the din on social media not confuse us. Let the outcomes of elections not deter us. Let us make India a social democracy dedicated to the cause of Swaraj.

(Uday Dandavate is the founder and CEO of SonicRim, a global design research company engaged in studying people, cultures, and change around the world.)

Have You Heard of the CIA’s Iran Mission Center?

Vijay Prashad

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was adamant—just hours after it happened—that the explosions on two Norwegian and Japanese oil tankers were the responsibility of Iran. Iran did this, he said, and Iran would have to pay the price. The United States government offered no evidence for this claim, apart from a grainy video that showed little that seemed conclusive. Pompeo took no questions.

It is important to know that the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was in Tehran at that time. Abe, who has been trying to maintain the Iran nuclear deal, made no belligerent comments, nor did he storm out of the country. The head of the Japanese shipping company said that there was no evidence that this event had been conducted by Iran. In fact, he disputed the claim that a limpet mine had been attached to his ship. He said that “flying objects” had struck the ship.

The Norwegian shipping company did not make any kind of statement about the events either, certainly not anything that blamed

Iran for the incident. The Norwegian government remained silent as well—no threats of any kind from Oslo. The shipping company said an investigation would be conducted in due course.

The crew from both the vessels had been rescued by US and Iranian boats and taken to safety.

Chief of Staff of Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said that his military will not try to close the Strait of Hormuz by deceit. If they want to close the strait, he said, it will be an open military operation. He fully denies that Iran hit those two tankers.

No US ship was assaulted. These incidents took place in international waters—in the Strait of Hormuz, off the coasts of Iran and Oman. Not on US territory, nor on a US military base or on US government property. Yet, it was the US government that made the claims and made the threats. This has become an ugly habit.

It has also become impossible for the region, where there remains an electric sense of foreboding. Will

Trump be mad enough to launch missiles? Will the United States of America want to open wider the doors of hell in West Asia, doors that the United States opened wide with its illegal war on Iraq?

Iran Mission Center

In 2017, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) created a special unit—the Iran Mission Center—to focus attention on the US plans against Iran. The initiative for this unit came from CIA director John Brennan, who left his post as the Trump administration came into office. Brennan believed that the CIA needed to focus attention on what the United States sees as problem areas—North Korea and Iran, for instance. This predated the Trump administration.

Brennan’s successor—Mike Pompeo, who was CIA director for just over a year (until he was appointed US Secretary of State)—continued this policy. The CIA’s Iran-related activity had been conducted in the Iran Operations Division (Persia House). This was

a section with Iran specialists who built up knowledge about political and economic developments inside Iran and in the Iranian diaspora.

It bothered the hawks in Washington—as one official told me—that Persia House was filled with Iran specialists who had no special focus on regime change in Iran. Some of them, due to their long concentration on Iran, had developed sensitivity to the country. Trump’s people wanted a much more focused and belligerent group that would provide the kind of intelligence that tickled the fancy of his National Security Adviser John Bolton.

To head the Iran Mission Center, the CIA appointed Michael D’Andrea. D’Andrea was central to the post-9/11 interrogation program, and he ran the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center. Assassinations and torture were central to his approach.

It was D’Andrea who expanded the CIA’s drone strike program, in particular the signature strike. The signature strike is a particularly controversial instrument. The CIA was given the allowance to kill anyone who fit a certain profile—a man of a certain age, for instance, with a phone that had been used to call someone on a list. The dark arts of the CIA are precisely those of D’Andrea.

What is germane to his post at the Iran Mission Center is that D’Andrea is close to the Gulf Arabs, a former CIA analyst told me. The Gulf Arabs have been pushing hard for action against Iran, a view shared by D’Andrea and parts of his team. For his hard-nosed attitude toward Iran, D’Andrea is known—ironically—as “Ayatollah Mike.”

D’Andrea and people like Bolton are part of an ecosystem of men who have a visceral hatred for Iran and who are close to the

worldview of the Saudi royal family. These are men who are reckless with violence, willing to do anything if it means provoking a war against Iran. Nothing should be put past them.

D’Andrea and the hawks edged out several Iran experts from the Iran Mission Center, people like Margaret Stromecki—who had been head of analysis. Others who want to offer an alternative to the Pompeo–Bolton view of things either have also moved on or remain silent. There is no space in the Trump administration, a former official told me, for dissent on the Iran policy.

Saudi Arabia’s War

D’Andrea’s twin outside the White House is Thomas Kaplan, the billionaire who set up two groups that are blindingly for regime change in Iran. The two groups are United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) and Counter Extremism Project. There is nothing subtle here. These groups—and Kaplan himself—promote an agenda of great disparagement of Muslims in general and of Iran in particular.

Kaplan blamed Iran for the creation of ISIS, for it was Iran—Kaplan said—that “used a terrible Sunni movement” to expand its reach from “Persia to the Mediterranean.” Such absurdity followed from a fundamental misreading of Shia concepts such as *taqiya*, which means prudence and not—as Kaplan and others argue—deceit. Kaplan, bizarrely, shares more with ISIS than Iran does with that group—since both Kaplan and ISIS are driven by their hatred of those who follow the Shia traditions of Islam.

It is fitting that Kaplan’s anti-Iran groups bring together the CIA and money. The head of UANI is Mark Wallace, who is the chief executive of Kaplan’s Tigris Financial Group,

a financial firm with investments—which it admits—would benefit from “instability in the Middle East.” Working with UANI and the Counter Extremism Project is Norman Roule, a former national intelligence manager for Iran in the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Roule has offered his support to the efforts of the Arabia Foundation, run by Ali Shihabi—a man with close links to the Saudi monarchy. The Arabia Foundation was set up to do more effective public relations work for the Saudis than the Saudi diplomats are capable of doing. Shihabi is the son of one of Saudi Arabia’s most well-regarded diplomats, Samir al-Shihabi, who played an important role as Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Pakistan during the war that created al-Qaeda.

These men—Kaplan and Bolton, D’Andrea and Shihabi—are eager to use the full force of the US military to further the dangerous goals of the Gulf Arab royals (of both Saudi Arabia and of the UAE). When Pompeo walked before cameras, he carried their water for them. These are men on a mission. They want war against Iran.

Evidence, reason. None of this is important to them. They will not stop until the US bombers deposit their deadly payload on Tehran and Qom, Isfahan and Shiraz. They will do anything to make that our terrible reality.

(Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist.)

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Remembering Patrice Lumumba

Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja

Patrice Lumumba, the first legally elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was assassinated on 17 January 1961. This heinous crime was a culmination of two inter-related assassination plots by American and Belgian governments, which used Congolese accomplices and a Belgian execution squad to carry out the deed.

Ludo De Witte, the Belgian author of the best book on this crime, qualifies it as "the most important assassination of the 20th century". The assassination's historical importance lies in a multitude of factors, the most pertinent being the global context in which it took place, its impact on Congolese politics since then and Lumumba's overall legacy as a nationalist leader.

For 126 years, the US and Belgium have played key roles in shaping Congo's destiny. In April 1884, seven months before the Berlin Congress, the US became the first country in the world to recognise the claims of King Leopold II of the Belgians to the territories of the Congo Basin.

When the atrocities related to brutal economic exploitation in Leopold's Congo Free State resulted in millions of fatalities, the US joined other world powers to force Belgium to take over the country as a regular colony. And it was during the colonial period that the US acquired a strategic stake in the enormous natural wealth of the Congo, following its use of the uranium from Congolese mines to manufacture the first

atomic weapons, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.

With the outbreak of the Cold War, it was inevitable that the US and its western allies would not be prepared to let Africans have effective control over strategic raw materials, lest these fall in the hands of their enemies in the Soviet camp. It is in this regard that Patrice Lumumba's determination to achieve genuine independence and to have full control over Congo's resources in order to utilise them to improve the living conditions of our people was perceived as a threat to Western interests. To fight him, the US and Belgium used all the tools and resources at their disposal, including the United Nations secretariat, under Dag Hammarskjöld and Ralph Bunche, to buy the support of Lumumba's Congolese rivals, and hired killers.

In Congo, Lumumba's assassination is rightly viewed as the country's original sin. Coming less than seven months after independence (on 30 June, 1960), it was a stumbling block to the ideals of national unity, economic independence and pan-African solidarity that Lumumba had championed, as well as a shattering blow to the hopes of millions of Congolese for freedom and material prosperity.

The assassination took place at a time when the country had fallen under four separate governments: the central government in Kinshasa (then Léopoldville); a rival central government by Lumumba's followers in Kisangani (then Stanleyville);

and the secessionist regimes in the mineral-rich provinces of Katanga and South Kasai. Since Lumumba's physical elimination had removed what the West saw as the major threat to their interests in the Congo, internationally-led efforts were undertaken to restore the authority of the moderate and pro-Western regime in Kinshasa over the entire country. These resulted in ending the Lumumbist regime in Kisangani in August 1961, the secession of South Kasai in September 1962, and the Katanga secession in January 1963.

No sooner did this unification process end than a radical social movement for a "second independence" arose to challenge the neocolonial state and its pro-Western leadership. This mass movement of peasants, workers, the urban unemployed, students and lower civil servants found an eager leadership among Lumumba's lieutenants, most of whom had regrouped to establish a National Liberation Council (CNL) in October 1963 in Brazzaville, across the Congo river from Kinshasa. The strengths and weaknesses of this movement may serve as a way of gauging the overall legacy of Patrice Lumumba for Congo and Africa as a whole.

The most positive aspect of this legacy was manifest in the selfless devotion of Pierre Mulele to radical change for purposes of meeting the deepest aspirations of the Congolese people for democracy and social progress. On the other hand, the CNL leadership, which included Christophe Gbenye and Laurent-Désiré Kabila, was more interested

in power and its attendant privileges than in the people's welfare. This is Lumumbism in words rather than in deeds. As president three decades later, Laurent Kabila did little to move from words to deeds.

More importantly, the greatest legacy that Lumumba left for

Congo is the ideal of national unity. Recently, a Congolese radio station asked me whether the independence of South Sudan should be a matter of concern with respect to national unity in the Congo. I responded that since Patrice Lumumba has died for Congo's unity, our people

will remain utterly steadfast in their defence of our national unity.

(Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja is professor of African and Afro-American studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)

Farmers Protest in Mandsaur on Second Anniversary of Firing

On June 6, 2019, the second anniversary of the Mandsaur firing, in which six farmers were reportedly killed after the police opened fire, thousands of farmers from across the nation, under the banner of the All India Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (AIKSS), a platform of 208 farmers' organisations, gathered in Takrawad village, Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh (MP) to pay tribute to the martyrs. The farmers are celebrating 'Shahid Divas' (Martyrs Day) under the chairmanship of Balaram Patidar, uncle of one of the martyrs.

After paying tributes, the farmer organisations demanded that the government must erect a memorial for the sacrifice of the farmers and acknowledge their courageous act in the history of the farmers movement. They also demanded that the false cases that have been lodged against the farmers after the 2017 Mandsaur protest be withdrawn. Also, the alleged murderers, including the police personnel who opened fire on the farmers be arrested. They also reiterated their long-standing demand of getting a fair price for their produce.

The protest was attended by multiple farmer organisations and their leaders, including Comrade Premsingh Gehlawat, National Vice President of the All India Kisan Mahasabha; Comrade Ishwari Prasad, National Secretary All India

Kisan Mahasabha; Shri Rajendra Purohit, MP State President, Shri Rajesh Vairagi, State secretary, and Shri Dilip Patidar, Mandsaur district President, Kisan Sangharsh Samiti.

The leaders present at the protest were angry at the MP Chief Minister, Kamal Nath, who just paid tribute to the martyrs via twitter. The farmer leaders have called this move as "insufficient and insensitive."

Former MP and farmers' leader from Maharashtra, Raju Shetti, said "Assurances to farmers demand is not enough anymore. If the Swabhimani Shantakari Sangathan in Maharashtra can force the government to revise the prices of sugarcane and milk, it surely can do justice to the farmers of Madhya Pradesh." He further added that if their demands are not accepted, the farmers will organise their demonstration outside the CM's residence.

Madhuresh Kumar, National Convener of National Alliance of People's Movements said, "Our struggle is against atrocities, exploitation and injustice, whether it is in Narmada, Mandsaur or Tuticorin. Our aim is to change the present system."

MP state president of the All India Kisan Sabha, Mr. Jaswinder Singh, said "We are struggling to stop the exploitation of the farmers and workers. When the farmers buy

and sell agricultural produce, they are all farmers, but caste and money assumes a dominant role during elections and thus their electoral power is divided."

Expressing the fears of the farming community after the landslide victory of the BJP, Shailendra Singh from Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said, "it is not the opposition that has lost in the current elections, instead the country's unemployed, farmers and labourers have been at huge loss and the capitalists have assumed the seats of power."

Warning that the Congress government in the state might lose power if they continue to ignore the demands of the farmers, Kisan Sangharsh Samiti's Executive President, and former MLA Dr. Sunilam, said "the MP Congress government is counting its last breaths, the oxygen tube is in the hands of Amit Shah and Modi, they can make the government fall whenever they want to. In such a situation, the Congress Government should immediately take to fulfilling the farmers' demands, who have a considerable contribution to the formation of their government."

What happened in Mandsaur two years ago?

On June 6, 2017 farmers had gathered in Mandsaur, a drought-

ravaged region, to demand fair prices for their produce as 2017 was the second year of a bumper onion crop with no buyers, forcing the farmers to sell their produce at Rs 2 to 3 per kg. They were also demanding loan waivers.

The protest gradually turned violent and the police as well as the jawans from the Central Reserve Police Force started firing on the protestors. This led to the death of five on the spot and one succumbed to the injuries the next day.

After intense protests, the then BJP state government appointed a commission under the chairmanship of retired High Court Justice J.K. Jain that was tasked with investigating the deadly firing. The commission concluded that the police and the CRPF were not to blame for the incident as they were forced to open fire and thus were given a clean chit!

Subsequently, with elections approaching, the then BJP CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan, in a bid to win over farmers' sympathies, launched the Bhavanter Bhugtan Yojna, which promised to pay farmers the difference between the average sale price and the government mandated minimum support price (MSP). However, farmers alleged that the scheme only benefited the big farmers with bargaining power. This was a major factor behind BJP's defeat in the assembly elections.

Immediately after coming to power, MP CM Kamal Nath cleared a proposal for waiving farm loans, as promised. The entire farming community was euphoric and started applying for the waivers. However, the excitement was short lived!

Soon after the scheme kicked in, there were reports of scams by the

banks with some farmers alleging that their names were included in the list of defaulters even when they hadn't taken a loan or the loan amount was higher than the original amount. There have also been allegations that not a single farmer has benefited from this waiver as yet. This created immense resentment among the farmers and they started losing faith in the Congress.

Now what has angered the

farmers more is Kamal Nath's tweet "Today is the second anniversary of Mandsaur firing. Tribute to six farmers killed in this barbarous firing." He also added, "Our government is determined to punish the accused of this firing, to give justice to the victims and to withdraw the false cases registered against the innocent farmers (during protests)."

Courtesy: Sabrangindia

Microplastic Pollution 'Absolutely Everywhere'

Damian Carrington

Bolstering global demands to #BreakFreeFromPlastic and end the world's worsening pollution crisis, a new study from the United Kingdom found microplastic contamination in the UK's lake and rivers, in groundwater in the US and along the Yangtze river in China and the coast of Spain.

Humans are known to consume the tiny plastic particles via food and water, but the possible health effects on people and ecosystems have yet to be determined. One study, in Singapore, has found that microplastics can harbour harmful microbes.

The new analysis in the UK found microplastic pollution in all 10 lakes, rivers and reservoirs sampled. More than 1,000 small pieces of plastic per litre were found in the River Tame, near Manchester, which was revealed last year as the most contaminated place yet tested worldwide. Even in relatively remote places such as the Falls of Dochart and Loch Lomond in Scotland, two or three pieces per litre were found.

"It was startling. I wasn't expecting to find as much as we

did," said Christian Dunn at Bangor University, Wales, who led the work. "It is quite depressing they were there in some of our country's most iconic locations. I'm sure Wordsworth would not be happy to discover his beloved Ullswater in the Lake District was polluted with plastic.

"Microplastics are being found absolutely everywhere [but] we do not know the dangers they could be posing. It's no use looking back in 20 years time and saying: 'If only we'd realised just how bad it was.' We need to be monitoring our waters now and we need to think, as a country and a world, how we can be reducing our reliance on plastic."

The River Thames in London was found to have about 80 microplastic particles per litre, as was the River Cegin in North Wales. The Blackwater River in Essex had 15. Ullswater has 30 and the Llyn Cefni reservoir on Anglesey 40.

Microplastics have been shown to harm marine life when mistaken for food and were found inside every marine mammal studied in a recent UK survey. They were

revealed in 2017 to be in tap water around the world and in October to be consumed by people in Europe, Japan and Russia.

“Microplastic has been found in our rivers, our highest mountains and our deepest oceans,” said Julian Kirby, a plastics campaigner at Friends of the Earth who helped collect water samples for the new UK study. He urged MPs to back legislation “to drastically reduce the flow of plastic pollution that’s blighting our environment”.

Research by the National University of Singapore found more than 400 types of bacteria on 275 pieces of microplastic collected from local beaches. They included bugs that cause gastroenteritis and wound infections in humans, as well

as those linked to the bleaching of coral reefs.

Defined as smaller than 5mm in size, microplastics have also been found underground in limestone aquifers in Illinois, US, at a level of 15 particles per litre. This type of groundwater source provides about a quarter of the world’s drinking water.

Other recent studies have found microplastics in bottom-living creatures and sediments taken from the North Sea and the Barents Sea. High concentrations were also found in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and along the Mediterranean coast of Spain.

Microplastics are shed by synthetic clothing, vehicle tyres

and the spillage of plastic pellets used by manufacturers. The physical breakdown of plastic litter also creates them. Rain washes them into rivers and the sea, but they can also be blown by the wind and end up in fields when treated sewage waste is used as fertiliser.

Kirsten Thompson from the University of Exeter, who is working with Greenpeace on a survey of microplastics in the UK’s major rivers, said: “We hope our research will help uncover exactly where this plastic is coming from and what impact it may be having.”

(Damian Carrington is the Guardian's Environment editor.)

WWII Could Not Have Happened Without US Help in Rearming Germany

Jay Janson

Recently, the 75th Anniversary of the invasion of Normandy was commemorated. But here are some little known facts about World War II.

The sixty or seventy million men, women and children didn’t die because of Adolph Hitler, they perished because the wealthy in the US and Western Europe empowered Adolph Hitler to make war.

The Treaty of Versailles that ended the First World War forced reduction of the strength of the German army from 4,500,000 in 1918 to 100,000. Its navy was not to exceed 15,000 men, including manning for the fleet, coast defenses, signal stations, administration, and other land services. Heavy weapons

armored vehicles, submarines and capital ships were forbidden, as were aircraft of any kind. Compliance with these restrictions was monitored until 1927 by the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control.

1918 to 1929 was a already a time of low economic growth and mass unemployment. The Wall Street Crash during the autumn of 1929 had grave consequences for Germany. German unemployment brought suffering to 20 million people. All over Germany there were people desperate for money needed to feed, clothe and house their families. Many of the homeless were camping out in the parks of Berlin.

There is simply no way an impoverished and utterly demilitarised Nazi Germany, with no

air force, a tiny navy, no armoured vehicles, no heavy weapons and a small army, could have on its own, built its armed forces up to the most powerful military in the world during the first six years of Hitler’s rule without the colossal and crucial investments in, and joint venturing by, top US corporations in low wage Nazi Germany—in outright violation of the Versailles Treaty prohibition of German rearmament. There is no way Hitler could have begun a world war and a multi-nation Holocaust when he did without the enormous financial and technical help he received from the United States of America. England and France also cooperated, especially in agreeing to allow the abandonment of the prohibitions on

German rearmament. Western media defended the building up of Nazi Germany's military as a 'bulwark' against the Soviet Union.

Hitler had emphasised Germany's need for 'Lebensraum' ('living space'), insisting Germany's 19th century motto '*Drang Nach Osten*' ('push to the East,' a slogan designating German expansion into Slavic lands), must become a reality. All this was strikingly proclaimed by Hitler in his book *Mein Kampf*, which by 1939 had sold 5.2 million copies in eleven languages. [*Britannica*]

Hitler's uncompromising lethal condemnation of communism and the very existence of Wall Street's archenemy, the socialist Soviet Union, must have impressed the US and European wealthy, whose 'rule' was threatened by socialist fervor and riots at home, fuelled by the ongoing Great Depression that had rendered millions unemployed. Newsreels of massive and violent riots in many US cities can be seen on YouTube at 'Riots Across America – The Great Depression.'

Below is an excerpt from British American scholar Anthony B. Sutton's *Wall Street and the Rise of Hitler* (Anthony Sutton was research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution from 1968 to 1973):

The contribution made by American capitalism to German war preparations before 1940 can only be described as phenomenal. It was certainly crucial to German military capabilities. For instance, in 1934 Germany produced domestically only 300,000 tons of natural petroleum products and less than 800,000 tons of synthetic gasoline. Yet, ten years later in World War II, after transfer of the Standard

Oil of New Jersey hydrogenation patents and technology to I. G. Farben, Germany produced about 6 1/2 million tons of oil—of which 85 percent was synthetic oil using the Standard Oil hydrogenation process. . . .

Moreover, American assistance to Nazi war efforts extended into other areas. The two largest tank producers in Hitler's Germany were Opel, a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors (controlled by the J.P. Morgan firm), and the Ford A. G. subsidiary of the Ford Motor Company of Detroit. The Nazis granted tax-exempt status to Opel in 1936, to enable General Motors to expand its production facilities. General Motors obligingly reinvested the resulting profits into German industry. Henry Ford was decorated by the Nazis for his services to Nazism. Alcoa and Dow Chemical worked closely with Nazi industry with numerous transfers of their domestic US technology. Bendix Aviation, in which the J.P. Morgan-controlled General Motors firm had a major stock interest, supplied Siemens & Halske A. G. in Germany with data on automatic pilots and aircraft instruments. . . .

In brief, American companies associated with the Morgan-Rockefeller international investment bankers . . . were intimately related to the growth of Nazi industry. It is important to note . . . that General Motors, Ford, General Electric, DuPont and the handful of US companies intimately involved with the development of Nazi Germany were—except for the Ford Motor Company—controlled by the Wall Street elite—the J.P. Morgan firm, the Rockefeller Chase Bank and to a lesser extent the Warburg Manhattan Bank.

Beginning in 1935, GM built a factory in Berlin for the purpose of manufacturing "Blitz" trucks for the Wehrmacht. Ford began building similar trucks around the same time, but GM was the number one producer of the vehicles that were vital for the quick conquests of Poland, France, and much of the Soviet Union. Albert Speer, the minister of armaments and war production, claimed that the rubber GM supplied was the key to the ability of the Germans to wage war the way they did. [Michael Dobbs, "Ford and GM Scrutinised for Alleged Nazi Collaboration", *Washington Post*, November 30, 1998.]

In July 1938, before the outbreak of war, the German consul at Cleveland gave Ford, on his 75th birthday, the award of the Grand Cross of the German Eagle, the highest medal Nazi Germany could bestow on a foreigner. General Motors and Ford controlled 70 percent of the German car market at the outbreak of war in 1939 and rapidly retooled themselves to become suppliers of war materiel to the German army. American managers of both GM and Ford went along with the conversion of their German plants to military production at a time when US government documents show they were still resisting calls by the Roosevelt administration to step up military production in their plants at home.[*Ibid.*] In 1998, it came out that the Third Reich was providing Ford's factory in Cologne with 1,200 Russian slaves.[Simon English, "Ford 'used slave labour' in Nazi German plants", *The Telegraph*, November 3, 2003.]

In 1941, Alcoa had a monopoly on aluminum in addition to owning

a massive amount of America's electricity production and other minerals. It sent so much of its aluminum product over to Germany that when the US involvement in the war began, there was a massive aluminum production shortage in America. Alcoa essentially sold the Axis powers much of the material to build their war machines. [Glen Yeadon and John Hawkins, *The Nazi Hydra in America: Suppressed History of a Century*, Progressive Press, 2008.]

During the early 1930s, Fritz Thyssen ran a business that he used to help finance Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Brown Brothers Harriman was a subsidiary company that he used as a base of American operations. Prescott Bush, father of Ex-President George Bush and grandfather of Ex-President George W. Bush, was on the board of directors for BBH and his business dealings continued until his company's assets were seized by the federal government in 1942 under the Trading with the Enemy Act. [Edwin Black, *Nazi Nexus: America's Corporate Connections to Hitler's Holocaust*, Dialog Press, 2009.]

Dow Chemical was one of the companies that provided an insane amount of material to the Nazis, including not only raw materials but also American technological innovations in regards to oil refinery.

The Chase Manhattan Bank's form of colluding with the Reich was particularly heinous. It functioned as the bank for foreign transactions for fascist Vichy France, and because Carlos Niedermann, Chase's representative in Paris, had very good personal relations with the Nazis, he agreed to their request that the bank seize the assets of at least

one hundred Parisian Jews.

How Allied multinationals supplied Nazi Germany even during World War II is detailed in *Trading With the Enemy: An Expose of The Nazi-American Money-Plot 1933–1949* by Charles Higham, Delacorte Press, New York, 1983. Charles Higham is the son of a former UK MP and Cabinet member. Here is an excerpt from the cover blurb:

Behind the patriotic propaganda that encouraged the working class to slaughter each other, war means business as usual for international capital. Higham starts with an account of the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland—a Nazi-controlled bank presided over by an American, Thomas H. McKittrick, even in 1944. While Americans were dying in the war, McKittrick sat down with his German, Japanese, Italian, British and American executive staff to discuss the gold bars that had been sent to the Bank earlier that year by the Nazi government for use by its leaders after the war. This was gold that had been looted from the banks of Austria, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia or melted down from teeth fillings, eyeglass frames, and wedding rings of millions of murdered Jews.

But that is only one of the cases detailed in this book. We have Standard Oil shipping enemy fuel through Switzerland for the Nazi occupation forces in France; Ford trucks transporting German troops; I.T.T. helping supply the rocket bombs that marauded much of London ; and I.T.T. building the Focke-Wulfs that dropped those bombs. Long and shocking is the list of diplomats and businessmen alike who had their own ways of profiting from the war.

After the war, I.T.T. and General Motors both received millions of dollars in compensation for the damage to their factories in Germany from Allied bombing.

Standard Oil shipped enemy fuel through Switzerland for the Nazi occupation forces in France. On September 22, 1947, Judge Charles Clark delivered the final word on the subject. He said, "Standard Oil can be considered an enemy national in view of its relationships with I.G. Farben—after the United States and Germany had become active enemies." The appeal was denied. ["The Treason Of Rockefeller Standard Oil During World War II", *The American Chronicle*, February 4, 2012.]

The bottom line is that, while British and US soldiers were dying at the hands of the Nazi war machine, and Jews were being exterminated in tens of thousands, British and US companies which had invested in post-WW I Germany continued to sympathise and trade with the Nazi regime. The bombs that levelled so many British cities and killed so many women and children may well have been manufactured in Germany, but it was largely British and US money that provided Hitler with the parts, and the fuel to dispatch them to allied targets. [Rodney Atkinson, *Europe's Full Circle*, Compuprint Publishing, 1996.] Both at the Normandy landing and in Russia, many Nazi tanks had GM motors and downed German planes were found to have GE engines.

That the Second World War was a 'good war,' a fight against a madman who had brought it about, has been a major and fundamental deception spread by Wall Street owned media and movies. So pervasively universal is the

deception that even the outcry of the German Counsel for the Defense while summing up his deposition at the Nuremberg trial, which can be heard in the blockbuster American movie *Judgement at Nuremberg*, has been largely ignored, “Where is the responsibility of those American industrialists, who helped Hitler to rebuild his armaments and profited by that rebuilding?!! Are we not to find the American industrialists guilty?”

Edwin Black, in his book *IBM and the Holocaust* raises the important question as to whether Hitler’s extermination of the Jews would have taken place on such a huge scale without the harvest of deadly information recorded by the Hollerith machines, on IBM punch cards. In 1933, International Business Machines began providing Germany with punchcard machines that functioned as precursors to modern computers and databases. Documents have since been uncovered that show that as late as 1941, IBM was working in tandem with the Reich to liquidate Jews in Holland. IBM employees were training SS personnel how to use their machines to record the movement, sorting, and mass execution of people, at times right in the headquarters of death camps. [Jack Beatty, “Hitler’s Willing Business Partners”, *The Atlantic*, April, 2001.]

The rearming of Germany made possible Hitler’s invasions of twenty-two countries and brought world war to Asia, for Japan would not have dared to attack and declare war on the United States of America without it being able to count on an alliance with an awesomely rearmed Nazi Germany, along with Italy, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania, all

of whom declared war on the USA immediately after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. The Second World War and the Holocaust, which made America the biggest power in the world, is estimated to have taken the lives of 60 to 70 million men, women and children. Within this total were 28 million citizens of the Soviet Union, which had been the target goal for the rearming of Germany by a consensus of the wealthiest American and European capitalists. A further plus for Wall Street was that half the cities of its archenemy, the USSR, lay in ruins.

Finian Cunningham’s has written an excellent article detailing the great deception manufactured by the media about WW II. He writes

European fascism headed up by Nazi Germany, along with Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal, was not some aberrant force that sprang from nowhere during the 1920s–1930s. The movement was a deliberate cultivation by the rulers of Anglo-American capitalism. European fascism may have been labeled “national socialism” but its root ideology was very much one opposed to overturning the fundamental capitalist order. It was an authoritarian drive to safeguard the capitalist order, which viewed genuine worker-based socialism as an enemy to be ruthlessly crushed.

This is what made European fascism so appealing to the Western capitalist ruling class in those times. In particular, Nazi Germany was viewed by the Western elite as a bulwark against possible socialist revolution inspired by the Russian revolution of 1917.

It is no coincidence that American capital investment in Nazi Germany between 1929–1940

far outpaced that in any other European country . . . The industrial rearmament of Germany (despite the strictures of the Versailles Treaty signed at the end of World War One, which were ignored) was indeed facilitated by the American and British capitalist ruling classes. When Hitler annexed Austria and the Czech Sudetenland in 1938, it was ignored. This was not out of complacent appeasement, as widely believed, but rather out of a far more active, albeit secretive, policy of collusion. British Conservative leader Neville Chamberlain and his ruling cohort were intent on giving Nazi Germany a “free hand” for eastward expansionism.

The real target for the Western sponsors of the Nazi war machine was an attack on the Soviet Union in order to destroy, in their view, the source of international revolutionary socialism. In the 1930s, the very existence of capitalism was teetering on the edge amid the Great Depression, massive poverty and seething popular discontent in the US, Britain and other Western countries. The entire Western capitalist order was under imminent threat from its own masses. This is the historical context for the Western-backed rise of European fascism.

Look at some of the undisputed figures from the Second World War. . . . Some 14 million Red Army soldiers died in the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany, compared with less than 400,000 military each from the US and Britain. These figures tell us where the Nazi German war effort was primarily directed towards—the Soviet Union, as the Western imperialist rulers had hoped in their initial sponsoring of Nazi and other European fascist regimes during

the 1930s. [Finian Cunningham, "World War II Continues... Against Russia", PressTV, May 13, 2014.]

Why did Soviet leaders and writers, even when the West was spreading lies about the Soviet Union during the Cold War, not hold the West responsible for WW II by having rearmed Germany, with the declared intention of the destruction of the USSR? This has been a mystery to this peoples historian. All the investments and joint venturing of US (and European) corporations in building up Hitler's Wehrmacht to the world's number one military in only six years are documented in both business records and tax records of US, Germany and other nations and are in great part available on the Internet with quite comprehensive statistics, a modest amount of which are presented in this essay.

The only plausible answer for this is the shame for the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. However, given the fact that the Western powers were openly arming Nazi Germany so to make it a "bulwark against communist Soviet Union," and had refused all entreaties of the Soviets to form a protective alliance in the face of Hitler's ever increasing power and belligerence, Stalin's signing of a non-aggression pact with Germany was probably a last resort defense of Russia.

In his book, Mission to Moscow, (later made into a film too), Joseph Davies, the US ambassador to Russia from 1936 to 1938, chronicles the desperation of the Russians in 1937 for not being able to get England and France to agree to a defensive alliance. They were fully aware that the rearming of Germany was directed at the Soviet Union. By the surprise non-aggression pact with

Nazi Germany, Stalin derailed for the moment the West's plan to have Hitler invade the USSR. This gained the Soviet Union the time to build the tanks that would later defeat the Nazi invasion.

Recently, in 2014, the Russian President Vladimir Putin in a comment on the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact in 2014 put the blame for the Nazi-USSR pact on the 1938 Munich Agreement, in which France and Britain appeased Adolf Hitler by acquiescing to his occupation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland.

The arming of Nazi Germany for an attack on the Soviet Union was a continuance of the colonial powers policy of total destruction of the Soviet Russia since it's inception. In 1917, after suffering more deaths than the other empires in a colonial powered First World War, the Russians had overthrown their Tsar and their capitalists, and had declared a socialist government. Almost immediately, fourteen armies of twelve capitalist nations, many of them former WW I allies of Russia, invaded Russia in a bid to overthrow the revolutionary regime. The US sent two armies, one to Murmansk, the other to Vladivostok. Their attempt failed, but the war took the lives of millions.


The Western corporate arming of Hitler was in all probability the continuation of the destructive efforts of the US and other colonial powers since 1919 to strangulate the Soviet Union. (Churchill had declared that Bolshevism must be "strangled in its cradle.")

That the Second World War Was A 'Good War,' 'Good' Triumphant Over 'Evil,' has been a Gargantuan Deception, Ominously Conditioning

All of Humanity to Tolerate Profitable Genocide Ad Infinitum!

(Jay Janson is an archival research peoples historian activist, musician and writer, presently residing in New York.)

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To Sanjiv Bhatt, a Man Who Displayed the Highest Courage

Harsh Mander

Dear Sanjiv,

I don't know whether you will get to read this letter, and if so when. Possibly your indomitable life partner Shweta Bhatt will carry a copy to you when she goes next to meet you in prison. But she has, at this moment, so much to fight and cope with, she may well forget the trivial matter of this letter.

If you do get this letter ultimately, I grieve as I imagine you reading it in the loneliness of your severe prison barrack somewhere in the district of Jamnagar. I have seen the inside of many prisons in India's districts during my years in the civil service. I can therefore imagine how hard it would be for you, each day merging with the monotony of the next, sleeping maybe on a hard floor, using a smelly common toilet, with little protection from the hot summer sun, and from flies and mosquitoes.

You have already spent the last nine months in prison. But however arduous this would have been, you would still have had held on to the hope that some court—the district sessions court, or at least India's highest courts, in Ahmedabad or Delhi—would secure justice for you.

Instead, the order of the Jamnagar

district sessions court sentencing you to 30 years in prison would have come as a very hard blow. However, I know that you are a very brave and determined fighter. You will continue to fight for justice, to struggle unflinchingly to prove your innocence, to one day walk free.

I want you to know, in your solitary moments in the isolation of your stifling and gruelling prison cell, that there are a great many people in India, and around the world, who are with you, in solidarity, as you fight your life's hardest battle. We believe in your innocence, and know that you are being victimised only because you had the singular courage to testify against the most powerful man in the country, because you sought to establish his guilt in one of the most cruel and brutal massacres that independent India has seen, in 2002.

That what you are undergoing is transparently the consequences of the extreme hubris of both him and the second most powerful man in the country today, and of the brazen abuse of state power for petty revenge against a courageous and undaunted whistle-blower. I cannot recall any comparable case of a

whistle-blower in India—of a senior official who dared to raise his voice against the person occupying highest office—who was punished in the way that you have been, sentenced to spend the next three decades of your life in jail.

The fact that you could be punished in this way holds a mirror first to the craven collapse of the integrity and independence of India's institutions of criminal justice—investigating agencies, the courts and official human rights agencies. That you were let down in the end by your brothers and sisters in khaki uniform must hurt enormously, as would their silence after your life-sentence.

The absence of any significant outrage in the media reflects the extent to which it is willing to watch the open and wanton misuse of state power without indignation or protest.

The collapse of state institutions, even of constitutional bodies like the Union Public Services Commission (UPSC) have also been on disgraceful display in your case. I had written in Scroll.in about my disappointment at the pusillanimous silence of the UPSC (set up under Article 315 of the Constitution to safeguard the independence of the civil services) when in 2015 you were dismissed from service, with the concurrence of the UPSC, for the relatively minor misdemeanour of a few days of unauthorised leave of absence.

Dismissal is the gravest administrative punishment that an officer can be dealt with, reserved in the rarest of cases only for the most serious offences by public officials. Yet the UPSC passed orders dismissing you from service, without even giving you the chance

to defend yourself. As I had observed then, I have known IAS officers who proceeded on unauthorised absence sometimes for years, taking employment overseas or with private companies, but most escape any punishment, let alone dismissal, for years.

Even if it is accepted that your leave was unauthorised, something that you contested, 'a rap on the knuckles with a written warning or letter of displeasure, and leave without pay for the period of absence, would seem a reasonable and proportionate penalty for the alleged misdemeanour,' as I had written then.

The mystery of why the highest powers of the land were so determined that you be dismissed from service is easily resolved by the way that you had used those days of 'unauthorised leave'. You had daringly, as a serving police officer of the Gujarat cadre of the Indian Police Service, testified against the country's prime minister, Narendra Modi, charging him with criminal complicity in mass murder.

You had done this before the Special Investigation Team of the Supreme Court, and Raju Ramachandran, the amicus curiae of the Supreme Court (and later filed this as a written statement on an affidavit to the Supreme Court). The Special Investigation Team of the Supreme Court and the amicus curiae were investigating charges by Zakia Jafri, widow of the former MP Ehsan Jafri. Ehsan Jafri was brutally killed with around 70 other people at the Gulbarg Society of Ahmedabad, in 2002. His widow Zakia Jafri had claimed that the then chief minister, Narendra Modi, was the first accused for a "deliberate and intentional failure" to protect life and property,

and failure to fulfil his constitutional duty.

Your dismissal from service was as shocking as it was unprecedented. But we thought then that they had done their worst by you. We did not anticipate that much worse was to follow, and that the powers that be would not rest until their revenge was complete by ensuring that you spend the rest of your life in jail.

Your punishment is a reflection of how formidable and threatening you are as a witness in one of independent India's most important cases of criminal command accountability for communal massacre. Of how dangerous was the evidence which you brought forth. Of how important it was to give a message not just to you but to anyone else in the country who dares to cross swords with the most powerful in the land: if this can be the fate of a senior police officer, then what can happen to an ordinary citizen?

There were other police officers who were present in the highly disputed meeting presided over by Modi late on the night of February 27, 2002. But they all claim that they do not remember being at the meeting, or that they do not remember that Modi gave the instructions which you claim he did, or that you were not even present at the meeting. But your driver and a BBC correspondent who was present with you when you set off to attend this meeting confirm that you did attend this meeting.

You knew well that your claim about what chief minister Modi had instructed senior officers to do after this meeting was utterly explosive.

You still chose to speak out. To say and do what you did called upon you to summon the highest courage. You said to the SIT and the Supreme

Court that Modi had “expressed the view that the emotions were running very high amongst the Hindus and it was imperative that they be allowed to vent their anger”. This rage of Hindus—which Modi said in his public statements at that time was a justified reaction—was because 58 people, including women and children returning from Ayodhya where they had gone to contribute to the building of a Ram temple, had burned alive in a train compartment in Godhra.

You also charged that chief minister Modi “impressed upon the gathering that for too long the Gujarat Police had been following the principle of balancing the actions of Hindus and Muslims while dealing with the communal riots in Gujarat. This time the situation warranted that the Muslims be taught a lesson to ensure that such incidents do not recur.” Your accusations, if accepted, would have resulted in serious criminal charges against Modi, and would also have come in the way of his rise to the country’s highest political office.

Your colleagues in the SIT—fellow police officers—rejected outright your allegations, dubbing you an unreliable witness and claiming that you were not even present at the meeting. Raju Ramachandran, the Supreme Court’s amicus curiae, significantly did not agree with the conclusions of the SIT dismissing your charges out of hand. Ramachandran was convinced that the question of whether you were indeed present in the meeting needed to be tested in court because the SIT itself held the evidence of those present in the meeting unreliable, and therefore there was insufficient evidence to outright discount your claims. He felt that your word should

have been tested in a court of law. Had his advice been accepted, the history of India may have been different, as also your own destiny.

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the officer heading the SIT was later to be rewarded—when Modi was prime minister—with the unusual and prestigious posting of a police officer as an ambassador after his retirement. You, on the other hand, face nearly a lifetime in prison.

There was reason enough for India’s most powerful men today to hold a deep grudge against you. But India’s institutions should not have been so feeble to allow what appears to me to be an act of petty vengeance and misuse of state power to unfold the way it has.

When I speak out today in your support, there are some who challenge me, asking how I can defend you when a court has found you guilty of custodial torture leading to the death of a man in custody.

In all my years in the civil service and outside it, I have been a resolute opponent of custodial violence and extra-judicial killings. However—as a report in the *Times of India* confirms, based on data from the National Crime Records Bureau—180 custodial deaths took place in Gujarat between 2001 and 2016, but not a single police personnel has been punished for any of these deaths. I cannot then be convinced that the action against you is fair in any way.

Had all or many of these custodial deaths been investigated and many police officers been punished for these murders, I would have supported the action that has been taken against you as just. But not when only you and another officer have been punished for the

death of a man nine days after being released from custody 30 years ago.

It will not in any way reduce your trials and suffering inside prison to know that there are many people in India who admire you for your sterling courage in raising the gravest criminal charges against one of the most powerful leaders that independent India has seen, and one known not to forgive. I know, as you do, and as Shweta and your children know, that the battle for justice which lies ahead of you will be very protracted, uncertain, replete with many disappointments and heartbreaks.

But I know also that you have the strength and the resilience to hold out, to endure, to continue to fight, to stay firm with what you believe to be true and just. And I know that one day, one day surely, you will walk free. With Shweta and your children, and with large numbers of our countrywomen and men, I wait for that day.

(Harsh Mander is a social worker and writer.)

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The Crisis of Nationalism

K Satchidanandan

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red colours of the West

and the whirlwind of hatred.

The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its drunken delirium of greed

is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.

Rabindranath Tagore,
The Sunset of the Century

The forebodings voiced more than a century ago by the composer of our national anthem are being realised today. Nationalism in our country increasingly reflects the insular, exclusivist, oligarchic, pro-corporate, upper caste, masculinist and jingoist character of our right-wing government. It is a nationalism of rapacious greed, of chauvinistic hatred of minorities and vulnerable sections of society. Its culture of violence and suppression of human freedom and basic rights throttles the very idea of India propounded by our Constitution— as a sovereign, secular, socialist and democratic republic. This nationalism has eviscerated, one by one, all the three estates of democratic polity, legislative, executive and judicial; as also the media, reckoned to be the fourth estate with its key role in creating and controlling public opinion. We move ever closer to the old Nazi ideal with its exclusivist definition of the nation, the creation of an “other” held responsible for all national ills, the worship of an artificially constructed tradition. This idea treats people as a monolith, denying them

diversity of perspective as well as agency of any kind. It claims to represent “the people” but promotes rank discrimination, articulating it violently with a distorted history, the glorification of death as martyrdom and the simultaneous legitimization of killing those who do not subscribe to such views. This is a nationalism suspicious of artists and intellectuals, which suppresses all opposition, and faults democracy as an inconvenience in the path of “development”. What it styles as development reflects the interests of a miniscule minority of the affluent and the powerful. Together, these concepts of nationalism and development prompt violence against labour and the environment, the dilution of existing laws and protections, the surveillance of every citizen using all available technologies, the equation of peace, negotiation and compromise with surrender. Myths and archetypes are harnessed for propaganda, legends and epics presented as objective history. The ruling class assumes the part of a self-evidently superior people and claims descent from the earliest inhabitants of the country. Its fear of difference and diversity and its contempt for all sorts of cultural and intellectual pluralism are legitimated at every turn. Everything appears as black and white, leaving no area to subtleties, nuances and alternative readings. What’s more, the rulers portray themselves as victims while being in power, so that all dissent gets cast as the work of conspirators and seditionists. This way, it becomes possible for the government to

strike populist and anti-elite poses even as the State is colonised in pursuit of upper class objectives. These are precisely the symptoms of what Umberto Eco calls “ur-Fascism” (universal Fascism) in his *Five Moral Pieces*, and they also bear a close resemblance to the definitions and explanations of authoritarian populism by modern political thinkers and social psychologists like Wilhelm Reich, Jan-Werner Muller, Hannah Arendt, Talcott Parsons, Timothy Snyder and others.

When Rabindranath Tagore was writing his essays on Nationalism— first put together in the second decade of the twentieth century (*Nationalism*, New York, 1917)—he might not have imagined that by the end of the twentieth century several thinkers across the world were going to echo his critique of the nationalist ideology, mostly without having read him. Though one may find the rudiments of such a critique in thinkers and conscientious objectors like Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley or Jean-Paul Sartre, Nationalism entered modern theoretical discourse in a major way only with Benedict Anderson’s acknowledged classic *Imagined Communities* (1983), that was soon followed by a series of treatises on the subject by Ernest Gellner (*Nations and Nationalism*, 1983), Miroslav Hroch (*Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 1985), Anthony Smith (*The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 1986), Partha Chatterjee (*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 1986) and Eric Hobsbawm (*Nations and Nationalism since 1788*, 1990),

not to mention innumerable articles in journals and writings in languages other than English.

Benedict Anderson's book had defined the nation as an imagined community. It is "imagined" because its members can, even without knowing most of their fellow-members, conjure up the image of their communion. In Ernest Gellner's words, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist." (*Thought and Change*, London, 1964, p.169). To him, as in Tagore, the nation is a more rigid fabrication than something simply imagined into being. The nation, Anderson would say, is limited as it has finite boundaries demarcating it from other nations; it is sovereign as nations like to imagine themselves to be free, the sovereign state being the gauge and emblem of this freedom; and it is a community as it glosses over its inequalities and is conceived as a deep and horizontal comradeship for which you can kill or die. The roots of the nation are cultural and the idea of the nation is close to the religious community and the dynastic realm as most nations have their own epics/sacred texts and "national" literatures, constitutions, hierarchised bureaucracies, anonymous linkages, national anthems that substitute prayers, national censuses, celebrations, parades and charades, martyrs, genealogies and selective chronicles that prescribe what to remember and what to forget. Alongside this exist national newspapers and a whole print-capitalist system and corporate media that helps propagate ideas across the nation. Then, there are defined borders, maps considered sacred with any deviation treated as treason, calendars, memorials,

museums and a whole paraphernalia of national emblems like flags, birds and animals, why, even national zoos, parks and gardens. Add to this a law against "sedition" that can be used at will to label anyone a terrorist or a traitor—and their control over the populace is complete.

In "Nationalism in the West", the first in a series of lectures Tagore delivered in Japan in 1916, he states his position without much ambiguity: "Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human history." He also defines the nation in clear terms: "A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of the people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organised for a mechanical purpose." Tagore recognises the problem of races as the most menacing of the issues faced by India, making our history a continual social adjustment. Social regulation of differences with a spiritual recognition of unity has been the twin strategy for her to cope with her ethnic multiplicity. Tagore is sharply critical of the rigidity of social stratification in India and the crippling minds that results from insular world views and the perpetuation of hierarchies.

One metaphor that Tagore employs in his delineation of nationalism seems especially relevant to the Indian situation today: the nation as a monster full of watching eyes. No one can escape the suffocation of its tightening grip. People live in a perpetual distrust. Today the state does not need prisons as it can turn the whole country into a prison. From the Aadhar card to keeping a watch over social media, the authoritarian nationalism in practice today exempts no area of the citizen's life from its knowledge and

oversight. It follows you everywhere, knows everything you do, from what you eat to what you say, read, view or even think. A useful concept here is Antonio Gramsci's "articulation of consent", whereby the ideological machinery of the State manufactures a voluntary-appearing agreement to its schemes, using education, the State-run press and the whole Goebbelsian State propaganda machine. To quote Tagore, people are "hypnotised into believing that they are free" and they begin to think that bartering the higher aspirations of life for profit and power has been their free choice; the State perfects their instincts of self-aggrandisement and makes them believe this is good. Look at the way the poor people queued up obediently to exchange their currency when the old currency was declared invalid one midnight, recharging the national coffers in the interests of crony capitalism and a ruling party that serves the corporates rather than the common people. Or the way they did so to get Aadhar cards made, so that the authorities might gain fuller control over their lives and movements. Or the way they listen raptly, at times under compulsion, to the hollow rhetoric of the "tea-seller" full of promises he never means to keep. Or the way people devour the fake news churned out every moment by the "news-breakers" (now proved "news-brokers") who are paid to make and unmake people and events. Or the way manufactured WhatsApp messages circulate and "go viral", justifying every atrocity perpetrated by gaurakshaks against the minorities who are dubbed "haramzade" and "beef-eaters", or by the "sanatanis" against rationalists, Gandhians, journalists, questioners and true spiritualists—from Govind Pansare and Narendra Dabholkar to Gauri

Lankesh and M.M. Kalburgi—or by the upper castes against slaving dalits who are lynched regularly, and the starving adivasis from Uttar Pradesh to Kerala; or the frequent threats to drive to Pakistan or silence independent artists, journalists and writers from Girish Karnad and Perumal Murugan to Nandita Das, Mallika Sarabhai, Anand Patwardhan, Ravish Kumar, Naseeruddin Shah, Aamir Khan, Shahrukh Khan, Kamal, MT Vasudevan Nair, to name just a few. Or the way concocted stories are willingly swallowed, whether about incidents like the inhuman rape and murder in Kathua or the killing of Junaid or the disappearance of Najeeb. Or the meek acceptance of changes of leadership and objectives in institutions from FTII, ICHR, ICPR, ICSSR, NBT and Teen Murti to IITs and universities like JNU, DU, BHU and HCU; or the discriminatory attitude to refugees including the homeless Rohingya Muslims. These unprecedented assaults fail to generate any proportionate reaction or resistance from the affected sections, or from watchdog bodies, or society at large. Every step to murder democracy is praised by appointed trolls as a progressive measure for the country's "development". And the reach of the free-thinking intellectuals and of the few oppositional and truth-speaking journals, mostly online, is extremely limited. This is neither to deny agency to the common people nor ignore the fast-growing pockets of resistance but only to demonstrate how the mechanism to generate "consent" and shape "common sense" far outsmarts the counter-machinery representing the interests of the people and attempting to speak truth to power.

Tagore points to the need to

fight insular and hate-mongering organisations, resisting the markets and cannons with the ideal of ethical freedom, the sacredness of law, the liberty of conscience, thought, expression and action, the higher obligations of public good above narrower considerations, values that had helped create civilisation but which now face the crisis of commercialism, careerism and competition. The main problem in India, he says in his talk in the US ("Nationalism in India") in 1917, is the hierarchisation of her society on the basis of race/caste and a blind faith in the authority of traditions. In an attempt to provide an order to society, India denied many the opportunity of movement and expansion. We are also trained to think this system of discrimination is eternal. Tagore points out that Indians cannot build a political miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery: a truth that B.R. Ambedkar, who advocated the annihilation of caste, realised more than any other Indian leader. In a response to the letters carried by *The Modern Review* of Calcutta in May, 1921, Tagore points to the need to liberate man from the organisations of "national egoism" which he later in the article qualifies as "racial egoism". He considers true India an ideal and not "a mere geographical map". "The idea of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others, and which inevitably leads to ceaseless conflicts." ("Tagore's Reflections on Non-cooperation and Cooperation", *The Mahatma and the Poet*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Delhi, 1997.)

Let us recall what Eric Hobsbawm said: nations do not exist before nationalism. They are an invention

of the nationalist imagination. The colligation of nationalism with the abstract structure of the state, as Hannah Arendt perceptively states, was a happening with a limited history and a limited future; sadly this twinning has worked against the principle of redistributive justice. So we need to train our imagination to take the nation out of nation-state. Mere nationalism that ignores redistributive justice can lead us astray.

Tagore's refusal—as was true of Tolstoy, Thoreau and Gandhi—to use rigid intellectual frames and theoretical jargon may be seen as a form of revolt against the violence often implied by adherence to technicalities. Tagore's writings clearly indicate that he would not have accepted the jingoist, insular and violent Hindu nationalism, whose growth began with the colonial orientalist idea of a unified Hinduism proposed by Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai and others who established the Hindu Mahasabha in 1914, the extremist turn it then took under V.D. Savarkar and with the establishment of the RSS in 1925 by K.B. Hedgevar. The RSS branched and developed this phenomenon like a national cancer, with the founding of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in 1951, and of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980. Its gradual ascendancy to power in the following years came about through its divisive strategies, aggressive propaganda and violent methods. Gandhi too had declared in his newspaper *Young India*: "Patriotism for me is the same as humanity" (1921), "it is the narrowness, selfishness and exclusiveness which is the bane of modern nations, which is evil" (1925) and again, "through

the realisation of freedom of India, I hope to realise and carry on the mission of brotherhood of men” (1929). It can also be inferred from Tagore’s novels like *Gora* and *Ghaire-Baire* that he foresaw the rise of Hindu Nationalism as a violent middle class phenomenon, declaring Muslims as its other.

One may well distinguish secular mainstream nationalism from the identitarianism of *Hindutva*, for they are not coterminous. But it would be dangerous to ignore the continuities between them, especially on the question of national identity, which also spills over to a Hindu diaspora desperately in search of a lost identity. Today, this “Indian” identity has become a trademark and an advertising strategy in the global corporate market. Whereas colonialism and race theory had incited the zero-sum game of conflicting identities earlier, today it is neo-liberal strategies that have normalised competition as the very structuring principle of existence. Anyone following the media can affirm this: success, not happiness, is the keyword and money seems to have become the central quest in life for the already rich as well as the aspiring middle classes in general. The paradox of our times is that nations have lost their sovereignty not to burgeoning international collaboration but to globalised capitalism. It has brought every nation to heel, subservient to its interests of profit through exploitation. This is the real theatre of action, but its instigators make believe that the conflict lies elsewhere, between communities vying for scarce resources, opportunities and power.

The only way to confront this unholy alliance between corporate capitalism and aggressive

majoritarian communalism is to develop a genuine democratic counter-nationalism based on the principles of equity and justice. This will involve an objective study of history, faith in genuine democracy, the defence of all independent public institutions, and ceaseless criticism of authoritarian tendencies whatever their source. It will mean setting a premium on professional ethics by all, from doctors, scientists and historians to legislators and jurors, developing a democratic critique of the media and of oppressive social institutions like caste and patriarchy, as well as caution against paramilitary organisations that become the breeding ground of fascism. The emphasis must be on facts rather than empty rhetoric, on getting out of comfort-zones and addressing the unfamiliar, upholding religious amity, supporting civil society and human

rights organisations, and utilising democratic institutions, platforms and legal rights from the right to vote to the right to information. Intrinsic to this is resistance to any form of suppression of rights or the misuse of constitutional provisions, such as in an unjustified declaration of national emergency. A democratic counter-nationalism must defend the principle of federalism by opposing any attempt at over-centralisation. Being genuinely patriotic must be understood as opposition to all that is negative in our heritage, everything that impedes speaking and working for the underprivileged. Doing all this while steering clear of an exclusivist and insular nationalist ideology is paramount.

(K. Satchidanandan is a widely translated Malayalam poet and a bilingual writer, translator and editor.)

How RSS Betrayed the Anti-Emergency Struggle

Shamsul Islam

National Emergency was imposed on the country by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on June 25-26, 1975, and it lasted for 19 months. This period is considered as “dark times” for Indian democratic polity. Indira Gandhi claimed that Jaiprakash Narayan’s call to the armed forces to disobey the ‘illegal’ orders of Congress rulers had created a situation of anarchy and there was danger to the existence of Indian Republic, so there was no alternative but to impose Emergency under article 352 of the Constitution.

RSS claims that it opposed

Emergency promulgated by Indira Gandhi heroically and suffered immensely for this resistance. But there are dozens of contemporary narratives which dispute and decry this claim of the RSS. We will be referring here to such two narratives by a veteran thinker and journalist of India, Prabhash Joshi and T.V. Rajeswar, former Intelligence Bureau [IB] chief who was the deputy chief of IB when Emergency was imposed. Interestingly, Shiv Sena, the *Hindutva* co-traveler of the RSS, openly supported the Emergency.

The narrative by Prabhash Joshi appeared in the article, “And Not Even a Dog Barked” published in the English weekly Tehelka on the 25th anniversary of the Emergency. According to him even during the Emergency “there was always a lurking sense of suspicion, a distance, a discreet lack of trust” about the RSS joining the anti-Emergency struggle. He went on to say that “Balasaheb Deoras, then RSS chief, wrote a letter to Indira Gandhi pledging to help implement the notorious 20-point programme of Sanjay Gandhi. This is the real character of the RSS. . . . You can decipher a line of action, a pattern. Even during the Emergency, many among the RSS and Jana Sangh who came out of the jails, gave mafinamas (apologies). They were the first to apologise. Only their leaders remained in jail: Atal Behari Vajpayee, LK Advani, even Arun Jaitley. But the RSS did not fight the Emergency. So why is the BJP trying to appropriate that memory?”

Prabhash Joshi’s conclusion was: “They are not a fighting force and they are never keen to fight. They are basically a compromising lot. They are never genuinely against the government . . .”

TV Rajeswar, who served as Governor of Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim after his retirement from service, in his book, *India: The Crucial Years* [Harper Collins] corroborates the above account that the RSS was supportive of the emergency. In an interview with Karan Thapar, Rajeswar discloses that Deoras “quietly established a link with the PM’s house and expressed strong support for several steps taken to enforce order and discipline in the country. Deoras was keen to meet Mrs. Gandhi and

Sanjay. But Mrs. Gandhi refused.”[1]

In the same interview, Rajeswar also shared the fact that even after Emergency the “organisation (RSS) had specifically conveyed its support to the Congress in the post-emergency elections.” It will be interesting to note that according to Subramanian Swamy also says that most of the senior leaders of RSS had betrayed the struggle against the Emergency.[2]

The contemporary documents in the RSS archives prove the narratives of Prabhash Joshi and Rajeswar to be truthful. The 3rd Supremo of RSS, Madhukar Dattatraya Deoras wrote the first letter to Indira Gandhi within two months of the imposition of Emergency. It was the time when state terror was running amok. In letter dated, August 22, 1975 he began with the following praise of Indira:

“I heard your address to the nation which you delivered on August 15, 1975 from Red Fort on radio in jail [Yervada jail] with attention. Your address was timely and balanced so I decided to write to you”.[3]

Indira Gandhi did not respond to it. So Deoras wrote another letter to her on November 10, 1975. He began his letter with congratulating her on being cleared by the Supreme Court of disqualification ordered by the Allahabad High Court, “All the five Justices of the Supreme Court have declared your election constitutional, heartiest greetings for it.” It is to be noted that the opposition was firmly of the opinion that this judgment had been ‘managed’ by the Congress. In the course of the letter he declared that “RSS has been named in context of Jaiprakash Narayan’s movement. The government has also connected RSS with Gujarat movement and

Bihar movement without any reason . . . Sangh has no relation with these movements . . .”[4]

Since Indira Gandhi did not respond to this letter also, RSS chief got hold of Vinoba Bhave who supported the Emergency religiously and was a favourite of Indira Gandhi. In a letter dated January 12, 1976, he begged that the Acharya should suggest the way of getting the ban on RSS removed.[5] Since Vinoba Bhave too did not respond to his letter, Deoras in another undated letter wrote in desperation,

“According to press reports respected PM [Indira Gandhi] is going to meet you at Pavnar Ashram on January 24. At that time there will be discussion about the present condition of the country. I beg you to try to remove the wrong assumptions of PM about RSS so that ban on RSS is lifted and RSS members are released from jails. We are looking forward for the times when RSS and its members are able to contribute to the plans of progress which are being run in all the fields under the leadership of PM.”[6]

Despite this betrayal of the anti-Emergency struggle, thousands of RSS cadres continue to get monthly pension for persecution during Emergency. The BJP ruled states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra decided to award a monthly pension of Rs 10,000 to those who were jailed during the Emergency period for more than a month and Rs 5,000 to those who were jailed for less than a month. This rule took care of the financial interest of those RSS cadres who might have submitted mercy letters completing only one or two months’ jail term.

Interestingly, in the case of anti-British freedom struggle, there is not

a single RSS cadre who has claimed the freedom fighter pension.

Editor's note: Prabhash Joshi also writes in the above mentioned article: "Who were the main actors during the Emergency? The socialists, young and old. They fought it, went to jail, faced torture. George Fernandes was a protagonist of rebellion: the dynamite case is a clear example. JP clearly said that this struggle is like revisiting the 1942 movement: when the freedom struggle's leaders were arrested, the people of India rose in revolt; in dozen places people even established their own government. The socialists fought the Emergency, the RSS did not."

- [1] "RSS backed Indira Gandhi's Emergency: Ex-IB chief", September 21, 2015, <https://www.indiatoday.in>.
- [2] Kira Stery, "Double Game of Senior RSS Leaders during Emergency", April 9, 2017, <https://medium.com>.
- [3] Madhukar Dattatraya Deoras, Hindu Sangathan aur Sattavaadi Rajneeti, Jagriti Prakashan, Noida, 1997, p. 270.
- [4] Ibid., pp. 272-73.
- [5] Ibid., 275-77.
- [6] Ibid., p. 278.

(Shamsul Islam is a retired Professor of University of Delhi.)

The Unemployment Crisis: Reasons and Solutions

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We Parched the Country to Quench the City, and Chennai Still Cries for Help

Nityanand Jayaraman

Thirty-four year old G. Manimaran is resentful when anyone brings up the topic of Chennai's water crisis. In his analyses, water is not the problem, the city of Chennai is. Manimaran's village, Padalam in Kanchipuram district, is 75 km from Chennai and located on the banks of the Palar, a river once famed for its deep sandy bed and rich groundwater resources.

Real estate tycoons mined the sand to fuel Chennai's real estate boom, lowering groundwater levels in the region. Bottling units, cola companies and alcohol distilleries mined the water to supply rural and urban consumers. "We live so close to Palar, but even I have a water problem. The water in my tap is orange in colour, like Mirinda, and I am forced to pay 10 rupees for 20 litres of drinking water," Manimaran says.

Chennai's growth has come at the cost of water and the spaces that nurture water. Between 1980 and 2010, the built-up area in Chennai grew from 47 sq. km to 402 sq. km, even as wetlands declined from 186 to 71.5 sq. km, according to one study by Care Earth, an NGO in the city.

All for growth

The city ran out of water more than a century ago. In 1876, the British took over a small aeri (lake) in an agricultural town called Puzhal, now at the northwestern edge of the metropolis. From its original 500 million cubic feet (mcf), its capacity was increased in steps to 3,300 mcf.

This tank, since renamed the Red Hills reservoir, was the first of many centralised water projects.

As technology advanced, local efforts to maintain local landscapes and the subsurface as an infrastructure for water declined—as did the people's dependence on local water and relationship to the land. Chennai swings from a flood one year to a water crisis the next without realising that the manner in which the city has abused water to grow is at the heart of both problems. Capitalising on the people's disconnect with nature, governments and private profiteers used disasters and crises as opportunities to usher in socially oppressive, big-budget and hare-brained projects like desalination and interlinking of rivers.

Like Padalam, Sulerikattukuppam, a fishing hamlet an hour's drive from Chennai, is another "solution-impacted" community. Until 2011, the villagers had sweet water flowing out of their shallow hand-pumps. But that changed when officials began constructing a 100 million litres/day (MLD) seawater desalination plant to supply water to the IT corridor in the city's south.

Workers levelled the dunes that sustained the subsurface water. To lay the foundation, they were instructed to run massive pumps 24 × 7 for months to pull out the freshwater that flowed from the surrounding sands into the deep foundation pits. Structures built into the sea for plant construction

triggered sea erosion, which rapidly ate away the beach and brought the sea dangerously close to the fisherfolk's homes.

Water from the hand-pumps turned saline, and the hyper-saline rejects that the water factory dumped into the sea drove the fish away. Now, the fishermen have no fish and no water. They rely on expensive bottled water. Meanwhile, the desalinated water bypasses the village and rushes to quench the thirst of an IT corridor built on Chennai's precious Pallikaranai marshlands.

Unmindful of the damage rendered by the existing desalination plants, the Tamil Nadu government plans to set up two more: a 150-MLD plant with funds from Germany's KfW and a 400 MLD plant with Japanese support. The latter is expected to usher in Japanese investments in the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC).

As it happens, CBIC will pave over the Ennore wetlands in the city's north and run right through the groundwater-rich agrarian sprawl of the Araniyar-Kosasthalaiyar Basin in Thiruvallur district. It will also degrade the infrastructures of natural water and replace them with dystopian industrial waste-scapes.

Killing a river

A UN report, by the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, released in May 2019 warned that depletion of biodiversity and water resources and degradation of marine and terrestrial habitats have brought the planet to the brink of ecological collapse.

Humanity is left with no wiggle room. Any intervention—whether in the name of development, poverty

alleviation or national security—will hasten our rendezvous with doomsday unless it is designed to improve our natural environment. All future interventions must meaningfully increase the availability of natural surface and ground water, enhance biodiversity, enrich local economies and fortify the land's ability to withstand the horrible, and inevitable, climate shocks.

The disease of viewing water in isolation as a single-dimensional resource, and its availability or scarcity as a solution or problem, has a short history. From around 500 CE up until the British crown sank its teeth into the Tamil countryside, the region's early settlers had carved out more than 6,000 ponds and elegantly engineered the irrigation tanks we call the aeri. Born in a rain-dependent agrarian culture, these multi-use waterbodies were designed to enhance biodiversity and increase availability of natural water.

The palmyra-fringed tank bunds were a microhabitat for plants and animals. The wetland was the basis for multiple economies and cultures. Potters, fishers, hunters, farmers, weavers, toddy tappers, reed-workers and gatherers found succour in these wetland complexes. Irrigation channels and canals linking streams or rivers to engineered wetlands were seldom lined, allowing life to thrive and water to percolate and reappear as springs and streams further downstream. Water was more than just H₂O.

Modernity changed that. Civil engineers replaced artisanal engineers who had been educated by their local cultures, ecologies and geographies.

In 1941, the then mayor S. Satyamurti deftly negotiated the construction of a massive drinking

water reservoir in Poondi, 50 km from Chennai. In 1942, the government built a dam at a fork in the Kosasthalaiyar River, at the point where the Cooum river split off as a distributary. The entire flow of the Kosasthalaiyar was diverted to Poondi and from there to Chennai.

Between 1941 and 1951, Chennai's population increased to 1.4 million with a decadal growth of 82% – but this came at a cost.

The Cooum now runs dry for the first 40 km of its course. The river bed here resembles a healthy scrub jungle replete with stands of tall, slow-growing palmyra. The flow begins at Thiruverkadu, where the Cooum enters Chennai city. Hereon it is a river of sewage. "The Cooum did not die; it was killed," says Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, amateur historian and chronicler of Chennai's heritage.

If Chennai wishes to have a future, it must shrink in size and population. That must be done not by forcing people out. Instead, the government should create land-friendly economic opportunities for people willing to migrate out to Tamil Nadu's vast hinterland. It is futile to try and engineer one's way out of ecological collapse. Local landscapes must be healed. Water must be harvested where it falls.

Chennai's defining element is water: the seas, the rains and the rainlessness. Our problem is not merely about demand and supply of water but a broken relationship with water and land. Unless Chennai repairs its relationship with nature, the city is doomed to drown in a watery grave or turn into a waterless desert.

(Nityanand Jayaraman is a Chennai-based writer and social activist.)

\$21 Trillion Hoard Hidden from Taxman by Global Elite

Heather Stewart

A global super-rich elite has exploited gaps in cross-border tax rules to hide an extraordinary \$21 trillion of wealth offshore—as much as the American and Japanese GDPs put together—according to research commissioned by the campaign group Tax Justice Network.

James Henry, former chief economist at consultancy McKinsey and an expert on tax havens, has compiled the most detailed estimates yet of the size of the offshore economy in a new report, *The Price of Offshore Revisited*, released exclusively to the Observer.

He shows that at least \$21tn—perhaps up to \$32tn—has leaked out of scores of countries into secretive jurisdictions such as Switzerland and the Cayman Islands with the help of private banks, which vie to attract the assets of so-called high net-worth individuals. Their wealth is, as Henry puts it, “protected by a highly paid, industrious bevy of professional enablers in the private banking, legal, accounting and investment industries taking advantage of the increasingly borderless, frictionless

global economy”. According to Henry’s research, the top 10 private banks, which include UBS and Credit Suisse in Switzerland, as well as the US investment bank Goldman Sachs, managed more than \$7tn in 2010, a sharp rise from \$3tn five years earlier.

The detailed analysis in the report, compiled using data from a range of sources, including the Bank of International Settlements and the International Monetary Fund, also highlights the impact on the balance sheets of 139 developing countries of money held in tax havens by private elites, putting wealth beyond the reach of local tax authorities. It estimates that since the 1970s, the richest citizens of these 139 countries had amassed \$7.3 to \$9.3 trillion of “unrecorded offshore wealth” by 2010. This means that for many developing countries the cumulative value of the capital that has flowed out of their economies since the 1970s would be more than enough to pay off their debts to the rest of the world.

“The problem here is that the

assets of these countries are held by a small number of wealthy individuals while the debts are shouldered by the ordinary people of these countries through their governments,” the report says.

The sheer size of the cash pile sitting out of reach of tax authorities is so great that it suggests standard measures of inequality radically underestimate the true gap between rich and poor. According to Henry’s calculations, \$10tn of assets is owned by only 92,000 people, or 0.001% of the world’s population—a tiny class of the mega-rich who have more in common with each other than those at the bottom of the income scale in their own societies.

Assuming the \$21tn mountain of assets earned an average 3% a year for its owners, and governments were able to tax that income at 30%, it would generate a bumper \$280bn in revenues—more than rich countries spend on aid to the developing world each year.

(Heather Stewart is joint political editor of the Guardian.)

The Hybrid War Against Iran

Vijay Prashad

US President Donald Trump sat in the White House and contemplated a war against Iran. His army had been sending surveillance aircraft along the Iranian coastline, teasing Iranian radar, which tracked these manned and unmanned planes as they skirted the 12 nautical mile

limit of Iranian sovereignty. Last week, the United States had two planes alongside Iran’s coast—an unmanned Global Hawk drone and a manned P-8 spy plane.

Iranian air command radioed the US forces to say that both the drone and the spy plane had come inside

Iranian territory. The P-8 shifted course to leave Iranian airspace, while the Global Hawk continued. Iranian officials say that it was because the Global Hawk remained in Iranian airspace that it was shot down last Thursday morning at 4 a.m.

Trump and his team threatened to retaliate. They wanted to shoot at Iranian radar and anti-aircraft facilities. At the 11th hour, Trump said, he decided not to fire at Iranian targets. The Pentagon had warned him that this would threaten US troops in the area. It was to protect these troops that Trump did not launch a strike.

Sanctions

Trump might not have sent in a suite of missiles to hit Iran last week, but the United States has—of course—already opened up a certain kind of war against Iran. A few days before the drone was shot down, the head of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council—Ali Shamkhani—gave a talk in Ufa, Russia, on security matters. In his talk, Shamkhani said that the United States had squashed the sovereignty of a number of countries. The US Treasury Department, he said, had become a kind of financial CentCom (Central Command). Shamkhani said that the policies pursued by the United States should be considered to be “economic terrorism.”

US unilateral sanctions are at the heart of this “economic terrorism.” The United States is able to use sanctions as an effective instrument against other countries because it has such enormous power over the world financial and monetary system. The US dollar is the main reserve currency and the main currency of international trade. Reliance upon the US dollar and on US financial systems means that most countries are unwilling to stand up against US pressure.

Sanctions have meant that Iran—reliant upon the export of oil and natural gas—has seen its external

revenues collapse. The domination by the United States over the world financial system—including the international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) has meant that Iran has not been able to raise credit on the international market. Difficulty in importing medicines and food has produced grave challenges for the Iranian people.

Hybrid War

Since the Western media continues to set the terms of international understanding, Washington’s interpretation of events around Iran predominates. Iran has never attacked the United States, but the US has in fact intervened several times in Iran. In 1953, the US—with the UK—overthrew the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadeq and over the course of the next two decades provided full support to the unpopular government of the Shah of Iran. When the Gulf Arabs pushed Saddam Hussein to attack Iran in 1980, it was the US—and Western Europe—that provided Iraq with arms and money for a bloody eight-year war. All of this context is lost to the Western media, which hyperventilate about fantasy stories such as Hezbollah in Venezuela or Iranian control over the Houthis. It is always Iran that is the aggressor, even when it has been Iran at the receiving end of US aggression.

Iran is seen as the cause of the problem; the idea that Iran is a rogue or terrorist state is hard to shake off. This is part of the information war that Iran faces, unable—even with a sophisticated foreign minister (Javad Zarif)—to argue its case that it has not been belligerent, but it has been

at the receiving end of threats and sanctions from Washington.

Between 2010 and 2012, four Iranian nuclear scientists were killed. These scientists—Masoud Alimohammadi, Darioush Rezaeinejad, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan and Majid Shahriari—were killed either by Israeli intelligence, the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) or US intelligence, or some combination of all of them. These scientists were killed inside Iran, in broad daylight. It sent a chill through the scientific community. A US and Israeli created computer worm—Stuxnet—hit Iranian computer systems in 2010, creating damage to Iran’s computers that held part of its nuclear work. It was announced that more such attacks were possible. These took place before the nuclear deal was agreed upon in 2015. But the stench of such attacks remains.

It is this combination of attacks—the sanctions, the information war, the sabotage—that comprises the “hybrid war” against Iran. This hybrid war continues, with the threats of war as part of the arsenal wielded by Washington against Iran. Even Trump’s statement that he withdrew the order to bomb Iran just minutes before the attack began is part of this information war; it is an attempt to terrify Iranians into the belief that the US is dangerous enough to drop bombs at any time. The hybrid war tightens the noose around Iran.

Group Against Sanctions

It is not easy to untangle the reliance of the world economy to the US dollar and to US financial systems. Even talk of multilateralism is premature. It is one thing to call for it and another to recognise that it

will take at least a decade to create the institutions and instruments for multilateralism. Confidence in the Chinese yuan, for instance, will need to be built. So will confidence in alternative systems to transfer money and to reconcile trades. The European Union said openly that it wanted an alternative mechanism to pay Iran for oil, one that would not run through US sanctions. But such an instrument could not be created. It will take time.

Meanwhile, on the political plane, about 25 countries have come together to create a platform against sanctions. These countries, says Iran's senior parliamentarian Mohammad Ali Pourmokhtar, will stand together against the "inhuman" US sanctions regime. It is not clear what this group will be able to do, but it is certainly the case that they will conduct a political campaign against the kind of harsh sanctions that are currently on Venezuela, Cuba and Iran.

It is significant that China and Russia will be involved with this club. In Tehran, Russia's Ambassador Levan Dzagharyan said that China, Iran and Russia will form a trilateral group to fight against the US unilateral war on Iran.

The group of 25 will struggle against sanctions and the group of three will try to prevent a US war—but whether they can prevail is a serious question. The United States—under Trump—is utterly unreliable, its military arsenal ready to be unleashed, its hybrid war already unfurled. These are dangerous times.

(Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist.)

Permafrost Collapses 70 Years Early

Robert Hunziker

Fasten your seat belt! Global warming is on a rampage.

As a consequence, many ecosystems may be on the verge of total collapse. In fact, recent activity in the hinterlands surely looks that way. Over time, the backlash for civilized society, where people live in comfort, could be severe, meaning extreme discomfort.

But still, nobody knows when or how bad it'll get. As it happens, an ongoing climate catastrophe, like the show-stopping catastrophic collapse of permafrost in the Canadian High Arctic (more on this later) is hard evidence that climate scientists have been way too conservative for far too long. Evidently, they never expected climate change to hit with the force of a lightning bolt.

Still, in all fairness, climate scientists have been warning about the dangers of global warming for decades. Now, it's happening, in spades. It should be noted that America's politicians are guilty of ignoring warnings by their own scientists. Those warnings officially started 31 years ago when Dr. James Hansen, then head of NASA Institute for Space Studies, testified before the Senate ("Global Warming Has Begun, Expert Tells Senate," *NY Times*, June 24, 1988).

The NYT article of 31 years ago went on to say: "If the current pace of the buildup of these gases continues, the effect is likely to be a warming of 3 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit from the year 2025 to 2050, according to these projections. This rise in temperature is not expected to be uniform around the globe but to be greater in the higher latitudes." Hmm, that's where the permafrost

is located.

Global warming is prominent throughout the North. Ergo, climate news doesn't get much worse (well, actually, it could, and will) than the collapse of permafrost in the Canadian High Arctic's extreme coldest region:

"Observed maximum thaw depths at our sites are already exceeding those projected to occur by 2090." (Source: Louise M. Farquharson et. al, "Climate Change Drives Widespread and Rapid Thermokarst Development in Very Cold Permafrost in the Canadian High Arctic", *Geophysical Research Letters*, June 10, 2019.)

That's chilling!

The aforementioned study, from 2003–2016, found permafrost melt up to 240% more than previous years. In geological terms, that's like winning the Indy 500 (the world's oldest major automobile race), hands down. That permafrost had been frozen solid for "thousands of years." Accordingly, scientists predicted the permafrost "wouldn't melt for another 70 years." Yet, the landscape has already collapsed by up to three feet.

Not only is permafrost collapsing, it's reported that houses are "sinking into the earth" in parts of Alaska, Canada and Russia. Alaska's 92-mile road for Alaska's Denali National Park is moving off center by the forces of slip-sliding land.

Bad news often times begets more bad news. Here's the bold-faced truth about the global warming dilemma: the world is not braced for a turbo-charged climate and collapsing ecosystems and burn

off of agriculture in mid latitudes. Remarkably, even though “global warming” is one of the most recognised terms in the world today, nobody is prepared for the onset.

Scandalously, America’s role in the crisis is akin to (actually a carbon copy of) the extreme arrogant smugness of General George Custer’s leadership directly, headfirst into one of the world’s most celebrated mass slaughters.

For additional evidence of out of control crazy, zany global warming, a photo of sled dogs traipsing thru water up to their stomachs on Greenland’s icy surface recently went viral, as Steffen Olsen, a climate scientist at the Danish Meteorological Institute, led his team to retrieve equipment at a weather station but the normal icy freeze-up wasn’t normal any longer.

William Colgan, a senior researcher at the institute, commented: “It’s very unusual to have this much melt so early in the season... it takes very rare conditions but they’re becoming increasingly common” (Source: *BBC News*). Rare climate conditions that “increasingly become common” define dangerous, disruptive climate change.

Bottom line, the top 25% of the Northern Hemisphere, where permafrost is ubiquitous, is coming apart at the seams, and climate scientists are behind the eight ball while America’s politicians deny the legitimacy of science and openly spit on the underlying thesis of anthropogenic global warming. What can be done about that? After all, America’s political system is on trial before a world community that fully embraced Paris ’15 to restrain global warming as it watches ecosystems in America’s Alaska collapse and emit more carbon into the atmosphere (based upon two-

years of airborne measurements) than all US commercial CO2 emissions biannually, which of course merely serves as supporting evidence for the absolutely shocking “drop-to-your-knees news” about the “70-yr too early permafrost collapse.”

These instances of collapsing permafrost are deafening bell-ringers and exactly the type of awful news that presages Runaway Global Warming (RGW).

In point of fact, Farquharson’s “70-yr too early permafrost collapse” makes the onset of RGW look like a dead-ringer, but when? Still, nobody really knows for sure how horrible it will be for society at large, but it’s 100% guaranteed to upend capitalism’s rampant growth machine. Functioning ecosystems and roughshod capitalism that willy-nilly consumes ecosystems, punctuated by the advent of plutocracy, don’t jive very well. Maybe a change is in order.

There’s no getting around the fact that ecosystems are collapsing. The evidence is too palpable to ignore. It’s serious; it’s deadly, and it could be too late to do much

to stop it, other than a last-ditch WWII Marshall Plan Worldwide Consortium dedicated to converting the world to renewable energy, and forcing removal of CO2 from the atmosphere, yet, those solutions take years and years of planning, setup, construction, and billions upon billions of funding. It’s not happening.

Meanwhile, carbon that has been trapped in and under permafrost over eons readies to escape to turbo-charge an already oversaturated turbo-charged climate. It’s literally happening right now. The waiting room is already full. Farquharson’s study proves it, and Alaska’s permafrost carbon emissions that compete with US commercial CO2 emissions prove it, as sled dogs wade through it.

It’s postulated that Runaway Global Warming, which could wipe out huge swaths of civilized society, starts in the North, where few people live. Egad! They’re already seeing it.

(Robert Hunziker is a freelance writer and environmental journalist based in USA.)

The Global Rise of Fascism: Capitalism End Game?

Gilbert Mercier

It is everywhere. In a few years, it has metastasized like a cancer, on all continents. Its fervent proponents and ill-informed supporters call it populism or nationalism. In the Italy, Germany, or Spain of the 1930s, however, this ideology of exclusion and fear, defined by a hatred of the other, together with a tyrannical executive power, was called by its proper name: fascism. Mussolini in

Italy, Hitler in Germany and Franco in Spain were the bloodthirsty tenors of capitalism’s symphony orchestra, singing the deadly opera quietly conducted by the military-industrial complex. When the fascism-induced collective psychosis was put to an end in 1945 by Russia and the Western allies, between 68 and 80 million people had been slaughtered worldwide.

MAGA is America Uber Alles

The disease, expressed by the term *Deutschland Uber Alles* (Germany above all else), was also contagious. It has been repackaged under the thinly concealed Make America—or Italy, Austria, Hungary, Brazil, or Israel—Great Again. The doctrine of one country above all else is, in reality, the best way to justify the tyranny of the State against its own population. Constant threats, external or internal, mostly fabricated and hugely amplified by subservient media, keep societies on edge and make people tolerate or, even worse, embrace an omnipresent security apparatus, either military or police. Fascist regimes always blur the line between military and police. Why not, indeed, be able to deploy your military against your own citizens if you have brainwashed them with the notion of lurking internal enemies? After all, fear and paranoia are the most powerful vectors of the global Orwellian empire we live in.

The nexus of fascism and capitalism

The neofascists have draped themselves in the flag of populism and nationalism and therefore have disingenuously convinced their supporters that they are the champions of a fight against globalism, elitism, and the corruption of the neoliberal political system. They are, however, fierce proponents of dog-eat-dog capitalism and its abject systematic exploitation of labor. Fascists enthusiastically support the global military–industrial complex as well as capitalism’s senseless exploitation of resources through mining and deforestation. For fascists, just as for capitalists, wealth must be concentrated in fewer hands, and

money may circulate across borders without constraint while ordinary people may not.

There is indeed nothing new under the sun. If industrialists today profit from wars on both sides of conflicts, giant US companies such as Ford and General Motors did the same in the build up to and even during World War II. Historian Bradford Snell wrote, more than 20 years ago, that “the Nazis could not have invaded Poland and Russia without GM.” The cozy relationship of Ford and GM with the Nazi regime went back to the early 1930s. Henry Ford himself was a Nazi supporter, and Hitler was a fan of the automaker. The two companies, Ford and GM, credited themselves with being “the arsenal of democracy” by transforming their production lines for US military purposes, but they were also, openly at least until 1942, the arsenal of fascism.

The same apparent schizophrenia is at play today. Just like Ford and GM were complicit with the Nazis, global capitalism, driven by the merchants of death of the military–industrial complex, is profiting from war crimes by, for example, selling a massive amount of weapons to the Islamo-fascist regime of Saudi Arabia, which is currently committing crimes against humanity by killing thousands of civilians and starving the entire population of Yemen. These war crimes are committed with weapons made in the USA, the UK and France, in the respective order of the volumes sold to the Saudis. France has a liberal and pseudo human rights champion as its leader in the person of Macron. Nevertheless the booming French military–industrial complex sells 7 billion Euros worth of weapons per year. India, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt

are the top buyers of death made in France: a criminal industry that employs more than 200,000 people.

Fascists have built mental walls of hatred

The likes of Trump, Salvini, Kurz, Orban and Bolsonaro were elected largely on the false premise and racist notion of culture wars and clash of civilisations: the mythical threat that, in an already multi-ethnic world, immigrants, the outsiders often with darker skins or another religion, represent an existential peril for host countries. The neofascists have risen by building mental walls of hatred in fortress Europe and fortress America. The worldwide proliferation of neofascism constitutes a new form of ideological globalisation, and global capitalism is banking on it. During World War II the fascist axis powers were Germany, Italy, and Japan. Now they are the US, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Brazil and India to some extent. All of it has the curious blessings of the mighty little State of Israel and the large money bags called the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

Geopolitical conundrum

The global rise of fascism will change a landscape already on shaky ground. Trump’s National Security adviser, John Bolton, has already set the agenda and put in the neofascist crosshair Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, which he called the “troika of tyranny.” Naturally, Bolton counts on the new fascist regional helpers of US imperialism, Colombia and Brazil, to enforce a revived full-blown Monroe Doctrine. In Europe, neofascists have risen to power in Hungary and the coalition governments of Italy and Austria.

Their ideological comrades in Germany, Poland, France, Sweden and the Netherlands have not risen to power, but their political clout is quickly growing. This rise of the neofascists, combined with the UK's Brexit, is jeopardising the European Union. In these developments, Steve Bannon of the US is playing the part of a fascism ideologue and black-clad eminence grise.

The Russians, for their part, have developed a dangerously cozy relationship with today's European fascists, as if the history of World War II has not taught them anything about fascism. The pact of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the USSR, signed in August 1939, not only allowed Hitler to unleash his killing spree on the West, but also did not prevent the German army from launching an attack two years later on the USSR. Stalin's strategic mistake resulted eventually in the deaths of 27 million Soviet citizens. In the current context, it seems that a potential dismantlement of the EU is one of the only geopolitical goals that Russia and the US can agree on. As an example, the Russians as well as the US' Bannon like and promote Italy's powerful Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, a rising star of European neofascism and a euro-skeptic whose motto is: "Make Europe Great Again!"

Gott Mit Uns (God with us)

"*Gott Mit Uns*," in raised letters around an eagle and swastika, was the inscription that adorned the German army's belt buckles during World War II. If there is a God, his power certainly did not much help the soldiers of the Third Reich! That being said, there is definitely a religious track in the rise of global

fascism. In the US and in Brazil, the vote of the evangelical Christians was a primary factor in the elections of Trump and Bolsonaro. "Born-again" Christian fundamentalists in the US are mainly concentrated in the formerly Confederate Southern states of the Civil War. These evangelical fundamentalist communities largely reject evolution, secularism, and the reality that climate change is man-made. Many in these communities believe that the US should be a Christian state. These Christian fundamentalists are the most reliable voting block for Trump, just as they were for George W. Bush. Well-funded far-Right fundamentalist think tanks like The Heritage Foundation have been pulling the strings in the background since the early 1970s.

Brazil's Bolsonaro was raised a Catholic, but he became, in what could be viewed as a cynical political calculus, a "born-again" evangelical. The evangelical voting block arguably gave him the edge on his opponent during the country's October 2018 presidential election. Meanwhile, in what they see as fortress Europe, the European fascists have embraced their so-called Christian heritage, and they fuel anti-Islam sentiments, blurring the line between racism and religious intolerance. In Israel, under what can be called PM Netanyahu's Judeo-fascism, Palestinians are dehumanised and persecuted, as the Jews were in Europe's pogroms. In Saudi Arabia, the Islamo-fascist Mohamed bin-Salman does the same by painting Iran's Shiites as heretics and terrorists. In India, PM Modi, who is considered by many Indian Muslims to be a Hindu-fascist, is also using religion to

create conflicts and justify massive military spending. In brief, religious fundamentalists of all stripes are today the neofascists' best assets to manipulate people and turn them, often violently, against each other.

Fascism's unbearable ecological footprint

In the mould of Trump in the US and Bolsonaro in Brazil, neofascists are by-and-large climate change deniers, or "skeptics," as they prefer. After all, the Lord or Allah knows best and holds the key to their destinies. For the rest of us, who do not expect God to have an extra planet Earth in his back pocket, the rise of global fascism offers a grimmer prospect for humanity's survival. Under the jackboots of the global fascism stormtroopers, the little that is left of our shattered ecosystem will meet its final solution. Bolsonaro could engineer a tabula rasa in the Amazon, which is considered the lung of the earth, due to its capacity to absorb CO₂. The super-rich who control global capitalism will give carte blanche to their fascist surrogates to grow and use a massive military-police apparatus to repress the billions of climate change refugees and victims of ecological collapse. Despite their assumptions and planning, discretely run by the Pentagon based on climate change becoming a national security issue, climate change will be capitalism's end game. All the gold and diamonds in the world will not stop the storms or shield the atmosphere from the deadly rays of a blazing sun.

(Gilbert Mercier is a very well known French journalist, and the founder and editor-in-chief of News Junkie Post.)

Remembering Che Guevara

James D. Cockcroft

(We are publishing this article in memory of Che Guevara, who was born on June 14.)

In light of a recent upsurge in denunciations of Che and the Cuban Revolution, it is important to separate fact from fiction.

Here are five important points to take into account, all in historical context, drawn from countless reliable sources.

First, there is a burgeoning school of professional Cuba bashers, including some self-proclaimed leftists, who in effect seek the overthrow of the Cuban Revolution.

Apparently expecting perfection, they tend to only see the failures of the Cuban Revolution and its historical leaders. In so doing, they distort the truth beyond recognition and base their arguments on such outright lies as describing Che as “an ardent Stalinist” wedded to “authoritarian ways,” or saying the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) are used for “spying on and controlling people”.

In reality, however, the CDRs were and continue to be key institutions of the evolving and by no means perfect participatory socialist democracy the young revolutionaries set about trying to establish in 1959 in the face of continuous US aggression abetted by diehard supporters of the overthrown Batista dictatorship. This offensive has continued till today, 60 years later, by maintenance of the economic blockade, control over Guantánamo, acts of terrorism, military threat, a sophisticated cultural offensive and financing “dissidents”, CIA agents and NGOs inside Cuba, not

to mention the mendacious slanders spewed forth by the mass media of disinformation, including through the social media.

Second, Che understood the centrality of ethics in politics, the centrality of subjective factors in revolution, leading to the rapid transformation of Cuban society into a giant school of reclaiming Cuban culture and ethical values.

Hence, the literacy and “voluntary labour” campaigns, the advances in education and medicine, and the large scale involvement of people in movements for agrarian reform, housing reform, and so on. These movements and campaigns converted idealistic goals largely based on the thoughts of Martí, Mella, Guiteras and other revolutionaries in Cuban history into on-the-ground realities that have continued to evolve, making possible what one could have never imagined even in one’s wildest dreams.

Third, rejecting the use of capitalist methods to fight capitalism, Che and Fidel used the methods of socialist praxis to transform what began as a national liberation struggle into a socialist revolution that would transform institutions and social and human relations through an organised and conscious “praxis” that—despite errors recognised publicly by both of them and their successors—continues till today.

Fourth, Che had repeatedly warned about the dangers of not seeing the deficiencies of “existing socialism” and of mechanically

copying Soviet manuals and methods. He had spoken about this often, and this is also explicitly stated in his writings preserved in Cuba and available around the world. He observed that the “intransigent dogmatism of the Stalin era has been succeeded by an inconsistent pragmatism . . . returning to capitalism.” He saw the actions and programmes of the Cuban Revolution as “clashing with what one reads in the (Soviet) textbooks” and contributed insightful socialist critiques of both capitalist and socialist societies and their theories.

Fifth, Che, like Fidel, was profoundly committed to the cause of peace, but unfortunately had to take up arms to move the world closer to that ephemeral goal. To make a world without war possible, Che gave his life, even as Fidel did. We can learn much from their examples.

(James Cockcroft is Internet professor for the State University of New York, a poet, three-time Fulbright Scholar, and a veteran activist.)

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