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Babri Demolition: Need for Reconciliation with Justice

Ram Puniyani

In a recent judgment, the Supreme Court in a 2-1 majority verdict refused to refer the Dr. Faruqui verdict to a Constitution bench. This said verdict had stated that the mosque is not an essential part of Islamic practice. In the recent judgment, the dissenter judge felt that the matter needs to be referred to the seven judge Constitution bench. There was a feeling that “mosque not being a part of essential Islamic practice” might have had an impact on the 2010 Allahabad Court verdict which had divided the Babri mosque land into three parts, and be given to the Sunni Waqf Board, Nirmohi Akhara, and the party representing ‘Ram Lalla Virajman’. The argument in favor of the Faruqui case was that Namaz can be offered in an open place as well, so the mosque is not an essential part of Islamic practice. On the other side the argument was: there are so many mosques worldwide, why are these mosques there if a mosque is not a part of Islamic practice? Surely this point did deserve a deeper consideration as it has larger implications for society.

Now the path is paved for the hearing of the land dispute related to the Ayodhya case. Though the

Allahabad High Court had divided the land into three parts, the basis of that was not land records but the faith of large number of Hindus—that Lord Ram was born there. How do we solve land disputes—through land records or through the faith of the people? This faith has been an outcome of the political campaign for Ram temple orchestrated by the RSS combine, led initially by VHP and later by BJP. Can this faith determine the direction of our judicial system?

As regards the claim of Ram temple having been destroyed in Ayodhya over five centuries ago, this is very doubtful. One recalls that at the time when the Ram temple was supposed to have been demolished, one of the biggest devotees of Lord Ram, Goswami Tulsi Das, was living in Ayodhya. He has not recorded it in any of his writings. On the contrary Tulsi Das, in one of his couplets, writes that he can very well live in a mosque. The faith that Lord Ram was born in the said Ram temple and that it was demolished and Babri Masjid constructed in its place has been constructed over a period of time, and this has intensified during the last few decades.

One of the great documentary film makers of our times, Anand Patwardhan, in his classic documentary *Ram Ke Naam* (In the Name of Ram) shows many Pujaris (Priests) of many Ram temples in Ayodhya claiming that Lord Ram was born in their particular temple. This clearly proves that the claim that Lord Ram was born in the place where Babri Masjid had stood is a myth that is being deliberately propagated by the RSS combine for its vested interests.

There are other problems too that are related to this dispute. One is the crime of installing Ram Lalla idols inside the mosque, which is very well recorded. We know that efforts to remove the idols immediately were thwarted by the district magistrate of the region, K.K. Nayyar, who after his retirement joined the BJP predecessor Bhartiya Jansangh. The second crime, the one of demolition of the mosque in broad day light, despite the undertaking given by the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh to the Supreme Court, is very well known. The Liberhan Commission which went into the issue tells us that it was a conspiracy. BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati who were on the stage from where Kar Sevaks were being incited were rewarded for their crime as they later became ministers in the Central Government. Whatever happened to the dictum 'punish the guilty'?

The nation was witness to journalists being beaten and their cameras being broken when they were recording the act of crime. Surely, the crime of demolition must be punished. Secondly, the land dispute needs to be resolved on the basis of land records. The land has been in possession of the

Sunni Waqf Board for centuries. In 1885, the Court did not permit Hindus to construct a temple on a raised platform (chabutara) near the mosque. Even now the land records should be clear on the issue.

There are attempts by some people for a 'peaceful' 'out of Court settlement' of the issue. This initiative fully articulates the wishes of the RSS combine. They are asking Muslims to forgo their claim on the land and allow the temple to come up there. In lieu of that they are being promised that they will be given land to build the mosque somewhere else. There are also threats that when the BJP gets a suitable majority in Parliament, the temple will be constructed there through a legislation of the Parliament.

Reconciliation is a process wherein both parties are listened to, and with some 'give and take' on both sides, the issue is undertaken for resolution. This formula that the Muslims give up the land for temple construction is a very highhanded attempt to browbeat them into a total submission. What we need is an honest attempt to punish the guilty and abide by the law to solve the problem. There can't be peace without justice. The crime of Babri demolition is being valorised as 'Hindu Shaurya Divas' (Hindu Bravery Day) by the RSS combine. As such, it a shame on our democracy! It is an outcome of divisive communal politics, and is pushing our society into the dark abyss of stagnation and diversion. Our core issues are actually bread-butter, shelter and employment. The RSS combine has built its social and political strength around emotive issues like Ram Temple and Holy Cow at the cost of the genuine

issues of society. We do need to built hospitals and schools; we do take measures to generate employment. In place of debating on this, the coming up of the Ayodhya issue just when elections to several states and the Centre are due, is so unfortunate. Rather than discussing the core issues of society, the question of Temple and Mosque will take the centrestage during the elections! How can we as a nation bring back the people's agenda to the centrestage should be the central concern for all those committed to marching towards a society that has justice, equality, democracy and secularism as its central focus.

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Bhagat Singh on Netaji Bose and Nehru

Apoorvanand

September 28 is the birthday of Bhagat Singh—a day to remember him and his legacy. Even 84 years after his death, he remains an eternal youth icon. Indeed, there are often complaints that the overarching presence of Gandhi and Nehru has deprived Bhagat Singh and revolutionaries like him their due place in Indian history. The complainers cite Subhash Chandra Bose as the other example.

Bhagat Singh and Bose, we are reminded, were revolutionaries who took the violent path to fight against the British. The two are seen as uncompromising fighters, whereas Gandhi and Nehru are portrayed as manipulators who negotiated their way to power. It is believed seriously by many that had India achieved freedom through the means used by Bhagat Singh and Bose, the Indian story would have been different.

In popular Indian perception, Bhagat Singh and Bose were made of the same metal, while Bose and Nehru were the two poles of pre-Independence Indian politics. Nehru was the one who supposedly led a comfortable life, whereas Bose was the one who renounced the glorious Indian Civil Service and later his position in the Congress to launch a more authentic nationalist battle against the British. The same with Bhagat Singh. He courted and chose death over life. Nehru outlived them both, using cunning to enjoy power. It was he who kept Bose away from India: so scared was he that he even asked his spy agencies to keep the whole of Bose family under watch.

But how did Bhagat Singh see

the two—Bose and Nehru? What could have been his trajectory had he lived longer? Would he have joined Bose when the latter broke away from Gandhi and Nehru and went on to found Azad Hind Fauj and collaborated with Tojo and Hitler against the British? Who was his ideal between the two?

'An emotional Bengali'

In 1928, Bhagat Singh, a young man of 21, published an article in the journal *Kirati*, titled *Naye netaon ke alag-alag vichar* (Different thoughts of new leaders). In this, he compared the worldviews of Bose and Nehru. Bhagat Singh wrote the article to help the youth of Punjab choose their political path at a time when there was dejection all around over the failure of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the division among Indians was reflected in the Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Which way should they go?

Bhagat Singh was not a Congressman, nor was he a member of the Communist Party of India. The young man had not spared even Lala Lajpat Rai, the revered leader of the freedom struggle, for his communal views. So, how did he look at the two nationalist leaders? In the article, Bhagat Singh pronounces Bose as an emotional Bengali, a devotee of the ancient culture of India, and regards Nehru to be an internationalist. In his view, Bose is a soft-hearted romantic and Nehru a revolutionary. After reading the speeches of the two leaders at the Amritsar and Maharashtra Congress sessions, Bhagat Singh says that

although both of them are supporters of Poorna Swaraj, they are worlds apart in their thoughts.

He refers to a public meeting in Bombay in which Bose was the speaker and Nehru the chair. Bose's speech, including the remark that India has a special message for the world, is described as a crazy rant in the Kirati article. It remarks that Bose finds the origin of everything, including Panchayati Raj and Socialism, in ancient India and notes that Bose believes that the old times were great. Bhagat Singh finds the nationalism of Bose narrow and self-obsessed.

He then moves to Nehru's presidential speech. Nehru contradicts Bose and says that all nations feel that they have some special and unique message for the world. "I do not find anything special in my nation. Subhash Babu believes in such things." What is the difference between the two? Bose wants freedom from the British because they belong to the West and we are from the East. Nehru wants freedom because, according to him, we can change our social system by establishing self-rule. For social transformation, we need complete independence and self-rule.

Bhagat Singh says that for Bose, international politics matters only to the extent that it addresses the question of India's defence and its development. On the other hand, Nehru has come out of the narrow confines of nationalism and into the open fields of internationalism. After comparing the two leaders' thoughts, Bhagat Singh asks: "Now that we

know their views, we must make our choice.” Bose, according to him, has nothing to give to the youth to quench their intellectual thrust. He has nothing for their mind.

Shunning militant nationalism

It is remarkable that Bhagat Singh was not impressed by the nationalist rhetoric of Bose and finds Nehru intellectually more challenging and satisfying. The youth of Punjab need intellectual nourishment badly and they can get it only from Nehru: “Panjabi youth should go with him [Nehru] to understand the real meaning of revolution... The youth should firm up their thought so that in the times

of dejection and defeat they do not get deviated.”

This article of Bhagat Singh is ignored even by the Left. A few years ago, I was asked by my friend Kavita Srivastava, a well-known human rights activist, to write a leaflet on the occasion of the martyrdom day of Bhagat Singh. I had quoted heavily from this article to give a glimpse of the intellectual make-up of Bhagat Singh. I found to my shock that the organisers of the event who were to use this leaflet had deleted these portions. Srivastava explained that Leftist friends of the forum refused to believe that these were Bhagat Singh’s thoughts. When told about

the source, they said, well, this article was not significant enough.

The clarity with which Bhagat Singh could see the danger of the narrow and militant nationalism of Bose is amazing. But this is what sets him apart from other revolutionaries. Three years after the publication of this article, Bhagat Singh was hanged. Nearly 12 years after this, Bose was to flee India to shake hands with some of the biggest war criminals. Bhagat Singh’s fears about Bose were confirmed. He was not there to see them come true. How is it that we refuse to see them even today?

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The Mahatma and the Earth: Gandhi’s Ecological Vision

Vandana Shiva

The Earth has enough for everyone’s needs but not for a few people’s greed. Gandhi distilled his ecological wisdom in this famous saying.

Gandhi recognised that ecological sustainability and socio-economic justice are two sides of the same coin because we live in an interconnected world. And he brought his philosophy of compassion and nonviolence to bear on our relationship with the earth.

Whenever we engage in production and consumption patterns that are non-sustainable, we are engaging in violence and triggering further violence. Nonsustainability leads to taking others share of their ecological space, and shrinking ecological space for nature’s renewal and other’s rights. A violent economic model based on greed therefore leads to violent conflicts in society, and even conflicts between humans and other animals. Most

significantly, violent economies need violent governance where governments pass laws and make policies to prevent people from using their resources sustainably and equitably for their basic needs, in order to ensure that the earth’s resources can be monopolised by violent economies of the greed of a few.

While times have changed, the patterns of colonisation stay the same, based on violence, destruction of people’s freedoms and economies, taking what is not yours, collecting unjust rents, creating constructs of divide and rule, and supremacy.

On the other hand, the patterns of liberation and freedom are perennial. And these contours of freedom were comprehensively shaped by Gandhi.

Over the past four and a half decades of serving the earth, ecology movements, and building movements against Corporate Globalisation, greed and the rule of Big Money,

I have taken inspiration from 3 principles that Gandhi distilled from the struggles and practice of freedom through history—Swaraj (self organisation, self rule, freedom as autopoiesis), Swadeshi (self making, self reliance and creating local economies) and Satyagraha (force of truth, of creative Civil Disobedience)

Swaraj

Swaraj is the basis of Real Freedom in Nature and Society, beginning at the smallest level and emerging at higher levels. It allows the thriving of biological and cultural diversity both of which are under threat today.

“Swaraj” defined India’s freedom movement. It encompassed not just political freedom, but also economic freedom. Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj has been, for me, the best teaching on real freedom in the context of Industrialism and Empire.

It has become even more relevant in the search for freedom in times of corporate rule (also referred to as corporate globalisation and neoliberal economic reform).

Swadeshi

Swadeshi literally is self making, of creating local living economies based on local resources, indigenous knowledge, and community. It reduces our ecological footprint while enlarging our consciousness and intelligence. It allows the expression of our fullest creativity as human beings and as Earth Citizens. In Swadeshi we are co-creative with nature's intelligence, creativity, and regenerative potential, and the creativity and intelligence of our fellow human beings. Co-creativity with nature creates abundance by combining production, conservation, renewal, and regeneration in one continuous cyclical and circular economy of permanence, based on the law of return, of giving back to nature and society, on sharing and caring. This is the foundation of sustainability. It is not a linear extractive economy that is polluting, degrading to the planet and to human communities.

Swadeshi is the core of economic democracy. It is the source of Real Wealth, of well being and happiness for all.

Swadeshi is based on local economies that grow into national economies, and finally into a planetary economy, in alignment with nature and people's real freedoms, and real wealth creation and well being at every level.

While the international financial and trade organisations coerce and push the government into a blind and indiscriminate experiment with globalisation, Gandhi reminds us of

the economics of 'localisation' and local self rule.

Satyagraha

Satyagraha, or the force of truth, is Gandhi's word for non-cooperation with and non-participation in systems, structures, laws, paradigms and policies that destroy the earth and rob us of our humanity and our freedoms, that crush our potential for compassion and sharing, that atrophy our hearts, our minds, our hands.

The force of truth is the highest power for change, for freedom from unjust rule, the power to seed freedom and through our freedom, seed the future.

As Gandhi said, *As long as the superstition exists that unjust laws must be obeyed, so long will slavery exist.*

Gandhi first used Satyagraha in South Africa in 1906 to refuse to cooperate with the laws of the apartheid regime imposing compulsory registration on the basis of race. The contemporary movements against apartheid—"separation"—on the basis of religion and race, are a continuation of the spirit of Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King.

When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915, he was called to Champaran by our freedom fighters—like Dr Rajendra Prasad, who became the President of India after we gained Independence—to strengthen the movement of peasants against the forced cultivation of Indigo.

2017 was the hundredth anniversary of the Indigo Satyagraha in Champaran. The Indigo Satyagraha was based on the refusal to grow Indigo. The peasants had repeatedly said, "We would rather die than

grow indigo." But it was Gandhi's arrival to support the peasants of Champaran, and being stopped by a magistrate on his arrival, that triggered the Satyagraha.

The British had introduced Salt Laws to prohibit the Indian populace from producing or selling salt independently; instead, Indians were required to buy expensive, heavily taxed salt that often was imported. To protest against these unjust laws, Gandhi undertook the Salt March, walked to Dandi Beach, picked up salt from the sea saying, "Nature gives it for free, we need it for our survival. We will continue to make salt. We will not obey your laws." The Salt Satyagraha spread rapidly to the forest regions, and became the Forest Satyagraha against the British appropriation of community forests. Chipko, which I call my university of ecology, had its roots in the Forest Satyagraha of 1930 in Tilari in Garhwal. The Salt Satyagraha inspired Navdanya's Seed Satyagraha and Seed Freedom movement.

Satyagraha, the force of truth, is more important than ever in our age of "post truth". Satyagraha was, and has always been, about awakening our conscience, our inner power, to resist external, brute power. It is an autopoietic response to an externally imposed cruel and unjust system.

Satyagraha is the deepest practice of democracy, a "No" from the highest consciousness—the moral duty to not cooperate with unjust and brute law and exploitative and undemocratic processes because there are higher ecological and laws of humanity we must obey to be members of one planet, one humanity.

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Declaration (edited by us) adopted by

National Convention of Workers

28 September 2018, Mavlankar Hall, New Delhi

The National Convention of Workers jointly called by the ten Central Trade Unions, in association with all independent National Federations of Workers and Employees, of both Industrial and Service sectors viz., Banks, Insurance, Central Government and State Government employees, Defence Production employees etc., expresses serious concern over the deteriorating situation in the national economy due to the pro-corporate, anti-national and anti-people policies pursued by the Central Government, grievously impacting the livelihood of the working people across the country.

This National Convention unanimously condemns in strongest terms the conspiratorial and authoritarian attack of the present Government to deprive the biggest Central Trade Union in the country, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) from all representations in the tripartite and bipartite fora and committees, including the international forum. This is nothing but a severe and heinous onslaught on the rights of the entire trade union movement.

The Convention notes with utter dismay that the Government has been continuing to arrogantly ignore the 12 point Charter of Demands being jointly pursued by the entire trade union movement of the country. Despite numerous nationwide joint strike actions, the most prominent being those of 2 September 2015 and 2 September 2016, participated by crores of workers against the policies of the Governments, the ruling regime at the centre has been

increasing its onslaught on the rights and livelihood of the working people of the country. Both the organised as well as unorganised sectors are victims alike.

Unemployment situation is getting aggravated with employment generation practically turned negative even in the most labour intensive sectors. The phenomenon of closure and shut-down of industries and the forecast of huge job-loss in the IT sector is adding fuel to the fire. Price-rise of petroleum products and essential commodities, including public transport, electricity, medicines, etc, is increasing pressure on daily life of the people in general, leading to widening as well as deepening of impoverishment. The implementation of GST has further compounded the hardships. Even essential and lifesaving medicines have been subjected to hefty GST. Drastic cut in Government expenditure in social sector and various welfare schemes has made the condition of workers, particularly those in unorganised sector, more precarious.

The estimates by independent surveys and those sponsored by employers' organisations revealed loss of 70 lakh jobs because of closure of 2.34 lakh small factory units in the first few months after demonetisation. The livelihood loss of another 6 crore people in informal economy and about 17 lakh job losses in organised sector speaks about the grim ground reality. Faced with such pathetic records, the Government is busy concocting statistics to make fraudulent claims on employment generation. The regular employment

survey conducted by the Labour Ministry has been discontinued.

The anti-labour authoritarian character of the government is all the more evident in its refusal to implement even the consensus recommendations (in which the Government was also a party) of the successive Indian Labour Conferences (ILC) in respect of equal pay and benefits for equal work for contract workers, formulation of minimum wage based on the norms agreed by 15th ILC / Supreme Court Judgment and grant of workers' status for scheme workers, viz., Anganwadi, Mid-Day-Meal, ASHA, MGNREGA and domestic workers etc. Shockingly, the present Government is even refusing to implement the recent judgments of the Supreme Court on the most genuine issue of "equal wage and benefits for equal work" and on EPS, 1995 on contribution and calculation of pension on actual pay and dearness allowance.

In the vast construction sector, which has a huge unorganised workforce, the government is not taking proper action on the ruling of the Supreme Court regarding construction workers cess fund and its utilisation in the interest of the construction workers. Nearly 2.5% of the population of every city are the street vendors. The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulating Street Vending) Act, 2014 has been enacted to protect them, but it is being systematically scuttled.

Despite opposition of all the trade unions in the country, the government has been aggressively

pushing through its programme of pro-employer and anti-worker labour law reforms. It has decided to amalgamate 44 hard-earned Central Labour Laws and replace them by four anti-worker, pro-employer Labour Codes to allow the employers to 'hire and fire' in the name of 'Ease of doing Business', 'Make in India', 'Start Up', etc. This is going to impose conditions of slavery on the working people. The latest onslaught is the move to evolve a 'Social Security Code' by dismantling and demolishing the existing statutory Social Security infrastructure under Employees Provident Fund Organisation, Coal Mines Provident Fund and Employees State Insurance Corporation and many other welfare statutes, abolition of welfare related cess, and usurp the huge social security fund contributed to by the workers, amounting to more than Rs 24 lakh crore and make it available for speculation in share market under the most deceptive and fraudulent camouflage of 'universalisation of social security'.

The proposed code on Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) is very dangerous move related to Occupational Safety and Health including the welfare of the factory and service sector working class.

Privatisation of all strategic PSUs, including defence production, public sector banks and insurance, railways, public road transport, oil, power, steel, coal, etc. through disinvestment, strategic sale, outsourcing in favour of private sector, promoting 100 per cent FDI in many vital and strategic sectors is increasing day by day. Stripping all the cash rich PSUs of the investible cash reserves is an added assault. The worst and most dubious step of all is the game plan to outsource more than 50 percent

products so long being produced by the Ordnance establishments, including weapons and critical equipments,. More than 250 items manufactured by Ordnance Factories have been notified as non-core. Orders are being given to private players for supply of some of these items. Government is determined to close down 5 Ordnance Factories manufacturing items used by our soldiers and officers and this would render thousands of workers jobless, including 1600 female tailors. The move to privatise the defence sector will destroy manufacturing capability and research initiatives developed by the country over last six and half decades.

Step by step, the government is moving to completely privatise the railways. Operating private trains on the existing tracks built by railways is being permitted. Private operators are being offered free access to railway yards, sheds and workshops for maintenance of private coaches, wagons and engines etc. Already 23 railway stations, all in metro cities, have been shortlisted for privatisation. More than 600 Railway Stations along with land around them have been identified for development through private players in the name of "redevelopment of Railway Stations and land around them". Workers not only in Railways but in all Government and Public Sector Undertakings shall be the worst victims of privatisation in terms of job security, democratic trade union rights and protection of achievements in the areas of pay, perks, social security, etc. Like Central Electricity Regulatory Authority (CERC), a Railway Development Authority (RDA) has been created. Given the sky-rocketing increase in electricity tariff by CERC, under RDA too, railway fare and goods freight are poised

to be hiked, hurting the common people and benefiting the private profiteers.

The exposures of various corruptions by the BJP led NDA Government at the centre shows the real face of the ruling clique, the latest being the unearthing of the Rafael deal, which is the biggest scam to date.

Public Sector Banks are under attack through various legislative and executive measures. The ultimate target of the government is privatisation and extending undue favours to the very same private corporate crooks whose default in paying back the loans given to them has put the banking sector in severe difficulties. Instead of addressing the problems of NPA and acting against the corporate defaulters, the government is going ahead with its scheme of merger of banks, which in reality will lead to closure of numerous branches, resulting in job-losses and narrowing of the outreach of the PSU Banks.

NPAs have crossed Rs 13 lakh crore. After Vijay Mallya, now Neerav Modi and Mehul Choksy have also dodged the Indian system and run away after looting Indian people's money. The government brought the FRDI Bill, which was opposed tooth and nail by the unions, forcing the government to withdraw it. But now the government has come out with the 'Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code', which is aimed at allowing corporate defaulters to default on a major part of their debt under the camouflage of so-called "resolution process of insolvency". Banks will get back hardly 30 per cent of their due loan amount. This is another big scam in the making which would further damage the crises ridden economy.

Attempts are being made by many state governments to dismantle

public sector road transport by issuing route-permits to private parties. The central government intends to get the new Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill 2017 hastily passed in the Parliament, which will allow wholesale privatisation of road transport on the one hand and impose draconian measures on the road transport workers, including those in private sector. The Rajasthan Road Transport Workers Union is spearheading a militant struggle against a precursor of this bill (Road Transport & Safety Bill, 2014) by forging alliance with other trade unions in the sector. This Convention condemns the state governments' and Central Government's anti-people and anti-worker moves in the transport sector.

The National Convention of Workers extends full solidarity to the fighting farmers in various states as well as under the Joint National Forums of Peasants' Organisations, and also the struggle of STs for implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006. It is the same set of pro-corporate, pro-landlord policies which have created a severe crisis in agriculture, biggest livelihood provider in the economy, leading to continuing suicides of farmers in the country.

This National Convention of Workers records its strong denunciation of the communal and divisive machinations in society being carried on with the active patronage of the government machinery. The BJP Governments are using draconian UAPA, NSA as well as the agencies of CBI, NIA, IT to harass and suppress any dissenting opinions. The peace loving secular people in the country are facing a stark situation of terror and insecurity all around. Communal forces are cultivating an atmosphere of conflicts in the society on non-

issues. It is disrupting the unity of the workers and the toiling people, so vital to carry forward the ongoing struggles against the anti-people policies of the government. Working class must raise its strong voice of protest.

This anti-people, anti-workers and anti-national policy regime has not only been imposing increasing miseries on the toiling people at large, it is also severely damaging the national economy and destroying its indigenous productive and manufacturing capabilities to serve the interests of the multinational companies with Indian corporates as their junior partner. This anti-people and anti-national policy regime must be defeated squarely to force pro-people changes in policies on all fronts.

For this, the task before the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and independent national federations is to further intensify the surging struggles in various sectors through a concerted united agitation and mobilisation at national level to be followed by countrywide general strike action as a culmination and consolidation of all sectoral struggles. The National Convention of workers therefore adopts the following programmes:

- State level, district level and industry/sector level joint conventions to be held during October–November 2018
- Joint Industry-level gate meetings, rallies, etc. during November–December, 2018
- Two days countrywide General Strike on 8–9 January 2019.

The National Convention calls upon working people across the sectors and throughout the country irrespective of affiliations to make the above programmes a total success.

INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF, UTUC, and Independent Federations / Associations Of Workers And Employees

12 Point Charter Of Demands

1. Urgent measures for containing price-rise through universalisation of public distribution system and banning speculative trade in commodity market.
2. Containing unemployment through concrete measures for employment generation.
3. Strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measures for violation of labour laws.
4. Universal social security cover for all workers.
5. Minimum wages of not less than Rs 18,000/- per month with provisions of indexation.
6. Assured enhanced pension not less than Rs 3,000/- per month for the entire working population.
7. Stoppage of disinvestment / strategic sale of Central/State PSUs.
8. Stoppage of contractorisation in permanent perennial work and payment of same wage and benefits for contract workers as regular workers for same and similar work.
9. Removal of all ceilings on payment and eligibility of bonus, provident fund; increase in the quantum of gratuity.
10. Compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days from the date of submitting application; and immediate ratification of ILO Conventions C 87 and C 98.
11. Against Labour Law Amendments.
12. Against FDI in Railways, Insurance and Defence.

*Letter to Editor***Killing of Apple Employee Vivek Tiwari and Lawlessness in UP****Umar Khalid**

In their moment of grief, I wish to express my complete solidarity with family members of Vivek Tiwari. His killing by the trigger happy UP police is a direct outcome of the policy of complete impunity given by the Yogi Adityanath to the police to kill citizens. We can't even imagine the pain and grief of Vivek's family. But it is time we ask some difficult questions to the lawless Yogi government.

Even as media has woken up to the reality of fake encounters, they are not reporting that there have been over 1400 encounters in UP since Yogi Adityanath became the CM. Vivek Tiwari is the 68th person to die at the hands of the trigger happy UP police ever Yogi Adityanath became the CM. Just two days back, some of us from #UnitedAgainstHate had gone to the meet the family members of Mustakeem (22 years old) and Naushad (17 yrs), two youth who had been shot dead in a fake encounter in Aligarh about 9 days back. The police had not only killed the two youth (one of them a minor), they had terrorised the family members (all women). The inhumanity of the government can be gauged from the fact that when we reached their homes, the family of the deceased was without food for almost 2 days as the police was not allowing anyone to meet them, or even give them food. The police had raided their homes and had seized all their identity proofs such as Aadhar card and PAN cards.

In each case of encounter killing prior to Vivek's killing, the police has justified its action stating that they had gunned down dreaded criminals. Naushad and Mustakeem were poor labourers earning 2000–2500 rupees

a month, and were picked up from their homes, shot dead, and after their death branded as criminals. They had no crime record in the past. It is so easy to kill someone and then brand them as criminals. Moreover, can the claims of UP be ever taken on face value? The same UP police that a few days back beat up a woman for being friends with a Muslim man? The same UP police that supervised the lynching of Qasim in Hapur? There is complete breakdown of law and order in Uttar Pradesh under Yogi Raj!

We should demand that in all the cases of encounter killings that have taken place in UP, there has to be an independent investigation. The UP police or any other investigative agency that comes under the direct control of BJP led governments can't be expected to carry out a fair enquiry. An enquiry, under a sitting judge, has to be initiated to reach the truth of each encounter killing. The onus is on the police to prove that they actually shot in self-defense. After all, the dead can't come back to prove their innocence.

Prof. G. D. Agarwal dies in efforts to save the Ganga

Prof. G.D. Agarwal, who has been on an indefinite fast since 22nd June demanding effective action to clean Ganga, has died of a cardiac arrest at the age of 86.

Dr. Agarwal refused to take water two days ago, as none of the State Governments of the Gangetic basin, the Central Environment Ministry, the Water Resources Ministry or the Prime Minister's Office did anything at all to respond to his Sathyagraha and take action to clean the Ganga and save her for posterity. Dr. Agarwal also demanded government must stop construction of hydroelectric projects along the river's tributaries and enact the Ganga Protection Management Act to ensure the river has a chance to come back to life.

Dr. Agarwal has served as a faculty member of IIT Kanpur, guided the Central Pollution Control Board as Member Secretary in taking tough action against industrial and urban polluters, and ensure our rivers flow free and healthy. He inspired thousands by his ascetic life and dedication to

environmental causes.

Dr. Agarwal has died due to the callousness of the Government not taking action to stop the river's pollution. He has also died due to the unwillingness of the Judiciary to enforce multiple rulings about tackling the river's pollution. From the high reaches of the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, this mighty river is being intensely polluted and its watershed extensively destroyed. Yet, no one has gone to jail. But the one man who gave everything he could to save the river, has now been put to death.

We must force the Government to take immediate steps to stop destroying the Ganga, and all other rivers. The Indian Government is seriously compromising the nation's ecological, economic and health security by promoting reckless dam building, over extraction of water, deforestation, wanton industrial and urban pollution, sand mining, river linking, and promoting land-use changes destroying riverine watersheds. This must end.

India's Private Banks and Private Investors: False Theory, Dangerous Consequences

Hemindra Hazari

India's private sector banks were held up for years as the standard of efficiency and corporate governance to which public sector banks should aspire. But now it emerges that private bank after private bank has in fact been harbouring bad debts, fudged accounts, engaged in corrupt deals and gross mismanagement, and overly paid CEOs and delinquent boards.

These revelations should not be treated as an unrelated series of incidents. It is time to question the theoretical underpinnings of the Reserve Bank of India's hitherto 'hands off' style of regulating these banks. And time for us to realise that what goes on inside the banks concerns not only the banks but the economy as a whole.

According to the currently reigning economic doctrine, self-interest ensures efficient outcomes. We are told that the private sector, acting in its rational self-interest, chooses wisely, but the public sector tends to be guided by political pressures and corruption. Hence the alleged "phone banking" of government-owned banks: that is, public sector bankers were said to have taken credit decisions based on phone calls from bureaucrats and politicians for favoured industrialists.

Correspondingly, the reigning doctrine presumes that when banks are listed on the capital market, and foreign and institutional investors buy sizeable stakes in them, the boards and managements of these banks would exercise due diligence, ensure transparency and protect

shareholders' interests. Under the eagle eye of private investors, corporate governance standards in these banks would rise.

Private sector governance on display

Indeed, a few years ago, the Committee to Review Governance of Boards of Banks in India (the Nayak Committee) raised the alarm over the "fragile" state of bad debt-ridden public sector banks (PSBs). In its Report of May 2014, it contrasted the weak and disempowered state of PSB boards with the relatively active and engaged nature of the boards of private sector banks. It therefore recommended that the government stake in all PSBs be brought below 50 per cent. Further, it called for the creation of a category of Authorised Bank Investors, who could hold a stake of 20 per cent in the bank without regulatory approvals, or 15 per cent if they also had a seat on the bank board.

This notion of the superior quality of private sector governance has not fared too well in the last few months. The newspaper reading public has witnessed the spectacle of Chanda Kochhar's brazen conflict of interest at ICICI Bank, Shikha Sharma's mismanagement at Axis Bank, the lack of accounting integrity at both Axis Bank and at Rana Kapoor's Yes Bank, and the complete collapse of corporate governance by Ravi Parthasarthy's team at Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Ltd (IL&FS). In all these cases, the boards of the banks, decorated with 'independent'

directors, played the role of either mute spectators or cheerleaders for the delinquent managements.

What has not been remarked on is that this has happened despite significant foreign institutional holding in these listed entities, and despite the presence of prestigious foreign and domestic institutional investors' nominee directors on the board of the IL&FS (which is unlisted). Where scattered, less-informed shareholders might not be able to influence the management of a firm, these were cases of concentrated, well-informed, and at times board-represented investors. According to the reigning dogma, the significant foreign and domestic institutional ownership in these entities should have resulted in better corporate governance standards in them, failing which they would have been disciplined by the market. But in reality, no such thing took place.

Cooking the books

In the case of Axis Bank, on July 27, 2017, nearly 10 months before Shikha Sharma's (managing director and CEO of Axis Bank) term was coming to an end, the board of directors announced a fourth three-year term for her, commencing from June 1, 2018. This was after the bank had reported a 56 per cent fall in net profits for the year ended March 31, 2017, and simultaneously reported that it had fudged its accounts for the year ended March 31, 2016 by overstating its net profits and under-reporting its non-performing loans. Shareholders received a further jolt a few months later on October

17, 2017, when the bank reported that the Reserve Bank of India had found that Axis had misreported its financials for March 31, 2017 as well.

In the capital market, cooking the books is meant to be an extremely serious offence, as the market valuation of companies is said to be based on the financial accounts, as is senior management's compensation. Therefore, following any mis-statement of accounts, the board should have held the CEO responsible and removed the individual, and if the board failed to do it, institutional shareholders should have exerted pressure on the board to adopt this stringent punishment. The shareholding pattern of Axis Bank on July 21, 2017 reveals foreign holding of 52.55 per cent and Indian mutual fund holding of 7.54 per cent. Despite information in the public domain that Axis Bank had fudged results for the year ended March 31, 2016, not only did the board prematurely announce a fourth three-year term for Shikha Sharma, but the majority of shareholders did not seem to object to such an individual being appointed by the board for a fourth term.

A similar story unfolded in Yes Bank, where the bank reported two successive years of fudged accounts for the years ended March 31, 2016 and 2017. The bank's shareholding pattern as on March 31, 2018 shows foreign portfolio investors' holding at 42.6 per cent, Indian mutual funds at 10.3 per cent, and insurance companies (excluding Life Insurance Corporation) at 14.2 per cent. In Yes Bank's case, not only did the board decide to re-appoint the promoter-CEO Rana Kapoor for another 3-year term commencing September 1, 2018, but the shareholders at the annual general

meeting held on June 12, 2018 with an "overwhelming majority" approved the decision. The majority shareholders, consisting of foreign and private sector institutional investors who manage other people's money, were content to appoint a serial mis-reporter for another 3-year term.

Interestingly, the Nayak Committee did mention the incentives for 'evergreening' (i.e., covering up bad debt by extending more loans to the borrower to avoid default) in private banks, and it called for some measure of RBI random inspection to check this. But this point of the Committee's report, however inadequate, has been selectively buried, and only its pro-'liberalisation' recommendations have been publicised.

Promoter rewards himself at the cost of shareholders

The case of Kotak Mahindra Bank (KMB) is also interesting. In its February 28, 2005 guideline, the RBI emphasised diversified ownership, and laid down that a single entity or group of related entities could hold a maximum of 10 per cent in a bank; higher levels required RBI approval.

Thereafter, as per the RBI's revised guidelines for licensing of new private banks issued on February 22, 2013, it stated that the promoter should have a maximum shareholding of 15 per cent "within 12 years from the date of commencement of business of the bank." For KMB, the RBI's latest guideline meant that by February, 2015, the promoters' shareholding should have been 15 per cent. However, for Uday Kotak, the RBI gave extraordinary 'regulatory forbearance' (i.e. leniency) to reduce the promoter holding in KMB to 20 per cent by December 31, 2018 and

15 per cent by March 31, 2020. In all, that amounts to an extension of five years. As on June 30, 2018 the promoter's stake in KMB was 30 per cent while foreign portfolio investors was 39.93 per cent and Indian mutual funds was 6.85 per cent.

Thus as KMB's share price has consistently risen (from Rs 657 as on March 31, 2015 to Rs 1,342 as on June 30, 2018), the regulator's forbearance has resulted in a huge notional loss to the non-promoter shareholders of KMB, and corresponding undue gain to the promoters. The undue gain is estimated by this writer to be \$ 2.3 bn (Rs 156 bn, or Rs 15,600 crore). This analysis factors the gains (capital + dividends) accruing to the promoters by not selling their excessive shareholding (i.e. beyond 15 per cent) on March 31, 2015. The foreign portfolio and Indian mutual funds did not protest that this huge gain could have accrued to them instead of the promoter if the RBI had insisted on the promoter shareholding being reduced to 15 per cent by March 31, 2015. Worse, in an audacious move, the board of KMB issued 'preference capital', which is akin to debt and has no ownership and voting rights, and tried to include it in 'paid-up capital'. They thereby claimed that, following this issue, the promoter stake came to 19.7 per cent of capital, conforming to the RBI norm. The RBI rightly rejected this classification.

Passive 'sophisticated' investors

The combined market capitalisation of KMB, Axis and Yes Bank, at Rs 417,727 crore, is very significant as compared with SBI's Rs 236,502 crore. In all three cases of private banks, foreign investors and Indian mutual funds own collectively either the majority of shares, or more than the promoter, but in none

of the cases did these shareholders exert their influence on the board of directors to adopt measures which would benefit the non-promoter shareholders. In all the three banks, the board of directors completely failed to protect the non-promoter shareholders' interests. If it had not been for the banking regulator which rejected the decisions taken by all three bank board of directors, the non-promoter shareholders would have lost out.

In IL&FS, an unlisted company focusing on developing infrastructure as a project owner and as a financier, the long reign of mismanagement of a single CEO finally resulted in huge losses for the consolidated entity in the year ended March 31, 2018, and the company began defaulting on its financial obligations by early September 2018. What is interesting to note is that it had pre-eminent shareholders who had their nominee directors on the board, such as LIC, Orix Corporation, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, State Bank of India and HDFC. Yet during this entire duration, senior management remuneration kept increasing, even while consolidated losses were rising. Despite having nominee directors on the board, these prominent shareholders presided over a company where the important risk management committee only met once in the last four years, and apparently were unconcerned at how the business strategy was unravelling.

The purpose of diversified ownership, listing on the capital markets and the presence of nominee and independent directors is to ensure that the promoter and the executive are kept in check, that they do not exceed their authority and that independent directors protect non-promoter shareholder interests. But in all these celebrated companies, not

only did the independent directors fail in their responsibilities, but the foreign portfolio investors, Indian mutual funds and private sector insurance companies also failed to influence the management of these institutions.

Much is made about the lack of corporate governance in the PSBs and public sector financial institutions, but the recent shenanigans in the private sector banks and financial institutions reveal that mismanagement is not only rife in the board of directors, but that it is tolerated by the institutional investors, whose presence, it was claimed, would improve corporate governance and performance. What then of the claimed benefits of lowering the government stake in public sector banks?

Myths take a beating

The abject failure of major foreign and domestic investors to monitor the banks in which they invested remains something of a mystery. Why would profit-oriented investors, endowed with armies of analysts and with the power to demand detailed answers from managements, remain passive spectators as the banks went astray? One possible explanation is that, as long as the going remained good, these investors behaved like any ordinary retail investor. Like consumers who stick with a well-known brand when buying toothpaste or detergent, it seems these supposedly sophisticated investors did not bother to open the lid and look inside the box, but stuck to the big 'brands'—the management personnel celebrated in the media. That is, they preferred to remain passive rentiers, with no positive role to play. So much for the mystique of private investment.

The 'light touch' regulation

which the RBI has been following in recent years, particularly for private banks, is based on the notion of a perfectly-informed, rational, self-regulating capitalism, and within that a self-regulating financial sector. That notion should have been debunked once and for all by the experience of the global financial crisis which began in 2008; at any rate, the current mess in India's private banks has certainly refreshed that lesson.

It is important to realise, moreover, that the fate of the banks cannot be left to their boards. The 'stakeholders' in banks are not limited to the management and shareholders, or even their depositors. Banks by their nature are highly 'leveraged' institutions—their borrowings are very high in relation to their capital, and hence any sizeable deterioration of a bank's assets threatens the bank itself. At the same time, banks are critical to the functioning of the whole of a market economy—no sector of the economy can function without finance, and so when there is a banking crisis, the entire 'real economy' too goes into crisis. Even when there is not a full-blown banking crisis, a slump in bank lending, as at present, slows the entire economy.

Hence the 'stakeholders' of the banking system are all participants in the economy, that is, the entire citizenry. Any laxity with banking regulation can bring the economy to its knees. This calls for highly active, intrusive, and continuous regulation by the regulatory authorities, in particular the Reserve Bank of India. The sorry story of India's stellar private banks tells us what happens when, under the spell of some dubious theory, the RBI fails to do that job.

Hating Muslims in the Age of Trump

Juan Cole

These days, our global political alliances seem to shift with remarkable rapidity, as if we were actually living in George Orwell's 1984. Are we at war this month with Oceania? Or is it Eastasia? In that novel, the Party is able to erase history, sending old newspaper articles down the Ministry of Truth's "memory hole" and so ensuring that, in the public mind, the enemy of the moment was always the enemy. Today, there is one constant, though. The Trump administration has made Muslims our enemy of the first order and, in its Islamophobia, is reinforced by an ugly resurgence of fascism in Germany, Italy, Hungary and other European countries.

It's hard today even to imagine that, in the late 1980s, the rightwing *Christian Voice Magazine* published a "candidate's biblical scoreboard," urging its readers (and potential voters) to rate their politicians by how "biblically" they cast their ballots in Congress. One key measure of this: Did that legislator support the anti-Communist Muslim jihadis in Afghanistan, a cause warmly supported by evangelist Pat Robertson in his 1988 presidential campaign? Now, attempting to appeal to twenty-first-century evangelicals, President Trump has announced that "Islam hates us."

The kaleidoscope of geopolitics and Islamophobia is now spinning so fast that it should make our heads spin too. At times, it seems as if Donald Trump is the anti-Ronald Reagan of the twenty-first century, idolizing former KGB operative Vladimir Putin, but seeing former US allies in the Muslim world like Pakistan as purveyors of "nothing but lies and deceit"—until, that

is, with bewildering rapidity, he suddenly gives us the "good" (that is, oil-rich) Muslims again, willingly performing a sword dance with the Saudi royals, seemingly entirely comfortable with the scimitar of the Saracen.

Islamophobes Galore

While the president oscillates between abusing and fawning over the elites of the Muslim world, his true opprobrium is reserved for the poor and helpless. His hatred of refugees uprooted by the horrific Syrian civil war, for instance, stems from his conviction that this population (predominantly women and children, as well as some men fleeing the fighting) might actually be adherents of the so-called Islamic State group (also known as ISIL, ISIS, or Daesh) and so part of the building of a secretive paramilitary force in the West. He's even speculated that "this could be one of the great tactical ploys of all time. A 200,000-man army, maybe."

This summer, he also tweeted: "Crime in Germany is way up. Big mistake made all over Europe in allowing millions of people in who have so strongly and violently changed their culture!" And a day later claimed it had risen by 10%. Though immigrant communities can indeed produce some crime until they find their footing, the crime rate in Germany, despite the welcoming of two million immigrants in 2015 alone, has fallen to a 30-year low, as have crimes by non-German nationals.

Nor, of course, is there an army of terrorists the size of the active-duty forces of France or Italy among those hapless Syrian refugees. Still,

that outlandish conspiracy theory may be part of what lay behind the president's blatantly unconstitutional 2015 call for a "total and complete shut-down" of Muslims coming to the United States. Consider it a great irony, then, that some significant part of the turmoil in the greater Middle East that helped provoke waves of refugees and an Islamophobic backlash here and in Europe was, at least in part, the creation of this country, not Muslim fundamentalist madmen.

The Islamophobes like to argue that Islam is an inherently violent religion, that its adherents are quite literally commanded to such violence by its holy scriptures, the Qur'an. It's a position that, as I explain in my new book, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires*, is both utterly false and ahistorical. As it happens, you would have to look to far more recent realities to find the impetus for the violence, failed states, and spreading terror groups in today's Greater Middle East. Start with the Reagan administration's decision to deploy rag-tag bands of Muslim extremists (which al-Qaeda was first formed to support) against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. That set in motion massive turmoil still roiling that country, neighbouring Pakistan, and beyond, decades after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Of course, al-Qaeda notoriously blew back on America. Its September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington were then used by American neoconservatives in the administration of George W. Bush—some of whom had served in the Reagan years, cheering on the American-backed Afghan

fundamentalists, as well as their Arab allies—to set the United States on a permanent war footing in the Muslim world. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, promoted on the false pretext that Saddam Hussein’s government supported al-Qaeda, kicked off a set of guerrilla insurgencies and provoked a Sunni-Shiite civil war that spread in the region.

Hundreds of thousands would die and at least four million people, including staggering numbers of children, would be displaced over the years thanks to George W. Bush’s boondoggle. The al-Qaeda franchise ISIL (formed initially as al-Qaeda in Iraq in the wake of the US invasion) arose to expel American troops there. Ultimately, its militants made inroads in neighboring Syria in 2011 and 2012 and the US allowed them to grow in hopes of putting pressure on the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

As is now all too clear, such policies created millions of refugees, some of whom streamed towards Europe, only to be greeted by a rising tide of white Christian bigotry and neo-Nazism. There’s no way to measure the degree to which America’s wars across the Greater Middle East and North Africa have, in fact, changed our world. When, for instance, British Prime Minister Tony Blair signed on to Bush’s illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, how could he have foreseen that he was helping set off events that would result in a British withdrawal from the European Union (a decision in which anti-immigrant sentiment played an outsized role)—and so the diminishment of his country?

Having helped spread extremism and set in motion massive population displacements, Western elites then developed a profound fear of the millions of refugees they had helped chase out of the Middle

East. Executive Order 13769, President Trump’s abrupt January 2017 visa ban, which created chaos at American airports and provoked widespread protests and court challenges—many of its elements were, however, ultimately upheld by the Supreme Court—appears to have been premised on the notion that a Trojan Horse of Muslim extremism was headed for American shores.

In reality, the relatively small number of terrorist attacks here by Muslim-Americans (covered so much more intensively than the more common mass shootings by white nationalists) have most often been carried out by “lone wolves” who “self-radicalised” on the Internet and who, had they been white, would simply have been viewed as mentally unbalanced.

Still, realities of that sort don’t make a dent in the president’s agenda. In 2018, the Trump administration will likely only admit about 20,000 refugees, far less than last year’s 45,000, thanks to administration demands that the FBI carry out “extreme vetting” of all applicants without being given any extra resources to do so. Of the refugees admitted in the first half of this year, only about one in six was a Muslim, while in 2016, when 84,995 refugees were admitted, they were equally divided between Christians and Muslims.

On average, the US still admits a little more than a million immigrants annually, of which refugees are a small (and decreasing) proportion. Since 2010, more immigrants have come from Asia than any other area, some 45% of them with college degrees, which means that Trump’s very image of immigrants is wrong.

His ban on immigrants from five Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia) was largely symbolic, since they

were generally not sources of significant immigration. It was also remarkably arbitrary, since it did not include Iraq or Afghanistan, where violent insurgencies and turmoil continue but whose governments host American troops. It does, however, include the relatively peaceful country of Iran.

Trump’s Muslim ban has broken up families, even as it harmed American businesses and universities whose employees (or in the case of colleges, students) have been abruptly barred from the country. The restrictions on immigration from Syria and Yemen are particularly cruel, since those lands face the most extreme humanitarian crises on the planet and the United States has been deeply implicated in the violence in both of them. Moreover, Iranians who do emigrate to the US are, for the most part, members of minorities or political dissidents. In fact, no nationals from any of those five banned states have committed lethal acts of terrorism in the United States in the last 40 years.

The Islamophobia of President Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton, and others in the administration, aided and abetted by the megaphone that Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News offers, has had a distinct impact on public opinion. Attacks on Muslim-Americans have, for instance, spiked back to 2001 levels. A recent poll found that some 16% of Americans want to deny the vote to Muslim-Americans, 47% support Trump’s visa restrictions, and a majority would like all mosques to be kept under surveillance. (A frequent, if completely false, talking point of the Islamophobes is that Muslims here have a single ideology and are focused on a secret plan to take over the United States.) You undoubtedly

won't be surprised to learn that such unhinged conspiracy theories are far more prevalent among Republicans than Democrats and independents.

Similarly unsurprising is the fact that Americans in the Trump era give a lower favorability rating to Muslim-Americans (a little over 1% of the US population) than to virtually any other religious or ethnic group (though feminists and evangelicals are runners-up). By a spread of about 20 points, they believe that Muslim-Americans are both more religious than Christian Americans and less likely to respect the country's ideals and laws. They slam Muslims for according women and gays low status, though a majority of Muslim-Americans say that homosexuals should be accepted in society, a belief that Muslim-American women hold in the same percentages as the rest of the American public. As for those women, they are among the best educated of any faith group in the country, suggesting extremely supportive families.

In reality, Muslim-Americans are remarkably well integrated into this country and have committed little terrorism here. In the past decade and a half, on average, 28 Muslim-Americans a year were associated with acts of violent extremism out of a population of 3.5 million and most of those "acts" involved traveling abroad to join radical movements. Muslim-American extremists killed 17 people in 2017, a year in which white gunmen killed 267 Americans in mass shootings.

Changing Bogeymen

The Islamophobia that Donald Trump has made his own arose in the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, once the bogeyman of Communism was removed from the quiver of the American Right. The

1990s were hard on the Republican Party and its plutocrats (with a popular Clinton in the White House), and on the arms manufacturers facing a public increasingly uninterested in foreign adventurism with no sense of threat from abroad. The Pentagon budget was even briefly cut in those years, producing what was then called a "peace dividend." (It wasn't.) And though it's now hard to imagine, in 1995 the United States was not involved in a conventional hot war anywhere in the world.

In this no-longer-so-new century, the Republican Party, like the Trump presidency, did, however, find the bogeyman it needed and it looks remarkably like a modernised version of the rabidly anti-Communist McCarthyism of the 1950s. In fact, the endless demonisation of Muslims may be less a cudgel to wield against the small Muslim-American community than against Democratic opponents who can be lambasted as "soft on terrorism" if they resist demands to demonise Muslims and their religion.

In my own state of Michigan, Elissa Slotkin, an acting assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in the Obama years and a former CIA analyst, is running as a Democrat in the 8th District against Congressman Mike Bishop. Slotkin played a role in developing the anti-ISIL strategies that Trump adopted when he came into office. Nonetheless, our airwaves are now saturated with pro-Bishop ads smearing Slotkin, a third-generation Michigander, for her supposed involvement in President Obama's Iran nuclear deal and so for being little short of a Shiite terrorist herself. Similarly, in San Diego, California's 50th district, the scandal-ridden campaign of Republican Congressman Duncan

Hunter (indicted for embezzling \$250,000 in campaign funds) continues to broadly insinuate that his opponent, Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Christian American of Palestinian and Mexican descent, is a Muslim Brotherhood infiltrator seeking to enter Congress.

Still, despite all the sound and fury from the White House, the US Muslim population continues to grow because of immigration and natural increase. Over the past 30 years, between 3,000 and 13,000 immigrants have arrived annually from Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, and a handful of other countries. Their governments are close geopolitical allies of the US and to interdict their nationals would be politically embarrassing, as Trump discovered when he attempted to include Iraq on his list of banned countries and was persuaded to change his mind by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis.

Of course, not all Americans share Trump's bigotry. Two-thirds of us actually disapprove of politicians engaging in hate speech toward Muslims. Some 55% of us believe that Muslim-Americans are committed to the welfare of the country, a statistic that would break the 60% mark if it weren't for evangelicals. Two Muslim-American politicians, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, won Democratic primaries in Detroit and Minneapolis and so are poised to become the first Muslim-American women in the House of Representatives.

Such an outcome would be one way in which Americans could begin to reply to the wave of Islamophobia that helped lift Donald Trump into office in 2016 and has only intensified since then. The decency of Middle America has certainly been tarnished, but as the polls indicate, not lost. Not yet anyway.



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