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Press note on the Rafale judgment, 14 December 2018

A Shocking And Disappointing Judgement

Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie and Prashant Bhushan

The judgement of the Supreme Court dismissing our petition seeking an independent court monitored investigation into the Rafale deal is as shocking as it is disappointing. We had gone to court after making a detailed complaint to the CBI pointing out the following:

The Prime Minister signed an agreement for 36 Rafale jets on 10th April 2015 without any such requirement of 36 jets given by the Air Force headquarters and without the approval of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), which are the mandated first steps for any defence procurement.

The Air Force had in fact been asking for at least 126 fighter jets which had been approved by the DAC, tenders had been issued, 6 companies had applied, two were short-listed and finally Dassault was selected as the lowest tender. The tender was on the basis that 126 fighters would be procured out of which only 18 would be bought in a ready-to-fly condition and the remaining would be manufactured in India by HAL with transfer of technology by Dassault.

By 25th March, the tender negotiations had been virtually

completed with Dassault. The CEO of Dassault in the presence of top officials of IAF and HAL had said that the contract negotiations were 95% complete and that the deal would be inked soon. There was nothing to suggest that the deal had run into rough weather. However on 10th April the Prime Minister unilaterally signed a 36 aircraft deal with the French President, all to be purchased in a ready-to-fly condition. Thus 126 was reduced to 36, transfer of technology and 'Make in India' was knocked out and a clause for offset partners was brought in. Exactly at this time Anil Ambani registered a new company Reliance Defence, and Dassault entered into a partnership with this company which was to get the bulk of the offset contract from this deal. The then French President Hollande also confirmed later in an interview that the choice of Reliance Defence, a brand new company with no credibility or experience in defence manufacturing, was made by the Indian government and the French had nothing to do with it.

It thereafter transpired that the benchmark price of 36 Rafale aircrafts was fixed by three senior

officials in the price negotiating committee, at 5.2 billion euros. However this price was unilaterally increased by the cabinet committee on security headed by the Prime Minister to 8.2 billion euros and the contract was finally awarded for 7.2 billion euros. The per aircraft cost for the 36 aircraft deal comes to around Rs 1,650 crore. This can be contrasted with the price mentioned by the then Defence Minister Parrikar himself in an interview immediately after 10th April 2015, where he said that the 126 aircrafts in the earlier deal would have cost around Rs 90,000 crore, which is about Rs 715 crore per aircraft.

It was on these facts which were all documented in the complaint to the CBI, that we sought a court monitored investigation (when the CBI did not register an FIR on our complaint which is mandatory as per law).

The Court's judgement today does not even address the documented facts stated in our petition or deal with our main prayer seeking an investigation. On the contrary, it proceeds on the basis that we were challenging the contract itself and uses the facts stated by the government either in the short open affidavit filed or perhaps facts claimed in the sealed cover handed only to the court which was never shared with us. In fact some of the facts mentioned in the court judgement are not only not on record but are patently incorrect.

The Court mentions in para 25 that "The pricing details have, however, been shared with the Comptroller and Auditor General (hereinafter referred to as CAG), and the report of the CAG has been examined by the Public Accounts

Committee (hereafter referred to as PAC). Only a redacted portion of the report was placed before the Parliament, and is in public domain."

All the facts mentioned above are neither on record nor factually correct. The CAG judgment has not been submitted to the Public Accounts Committee and no portion of the CAG report has been placed before Parliament or placed in the public domain. Obviously this factually incorrect statement must be based on some communication (not on record and unknown to us) made by the government to the court. That the court has relied on such communication which is factually incorrect on 3 counts shows how dangerous it is for the court to rely on statements made in a sealed cover (not subject to scrutiny or verification) and give its judgement on that basis.

It is astounding that the court has stated such a patently incorrect fact in its short judgement. The court has also mentioned in the same para that the Chief of the Indian Air Force had communicated his reservation regarding the disclosure of the pricing details which would adversely affect national security. This alleged fact was also not on record and it is not understood as to where and how the court got this. The court has also mentioned that Air Force officials were examined by the court on the acquisition process and pricing. This is also factually incorrect as the only question asked of the Air Force officials by the court and the only questions they answered was about whether the Rafale aircraft belonged to the 3rd, 4th and 5th generation and when did the last acquisition take place. They were neither questioned, nor did they say anything, on the

acquisition process or on pricing. At least this did not happen during court proceedings.

On the acquisition process, the court obligingly accepts the government claim that the acquisition process in the earlier 126 aircraft deal got stuck and was not going ahead, which is why the new deal of 36 aircrafts had to be made. The court does not even deal with the facts mentioned by us completely shredding this claim of the government, where we had annexed a video of the CEO of Dassault of 25th march 2015 saying that the negotiations was 95% complete and the deal would be inked soon. He had also said that Dassault would remain compliant to the RFP and that they were happy and satisfied with HAL. The Court also does not deal with the specific issue of violation of the procurement procedure raised by us, that the PM signed the 36 aircraft deal with the French government on 10th April, before any requirement given by the Air Force for 36 aircrafts and before DAC okaying the need to buy 36 aircrafts without any transfer of technology or 'Make in India'.

The fact as we showed is, that no procedure was followed. The Prime Minister unilaterally announced a new deal and the CCS rubber stamped these with retrospective effect. The Court takes a dangerous step: in condoning the total disregard of procedures, the court cites clause 75 which says, "any deviation from the prescribed procedure will be put up to DAC through DPP for approval". Were this to become the norm for subsequent judicial examination, wrong doers in control of governments would have a carte blanche. They could do what they want—as the PM did

in this instance—and then have it retrospectively rubber stamped by DAC etc.

On the issue of price the court says that, “We have examined closely the price details and comparison of the prices of the basic aircraft along with escalation costs as under the original RFP as well as under the IGA. We have also gone through the explanatory note on the costing, item wise. Suffice it to say that as per the price details, the official respondents claim there is a commercial advantage in the purchase of 36 Rafale aircrafts. The official respondents have claimed that there are certain better terms in IGA qua the maintenance and weapon package. It is certainly not the job of this Court to carry out a comparison of the pricing details in matters like the present. We say no more as the material has to be kept in a confidential domain.”

The Court does not even refer to or deal with the facts disclosed by us about the sudden increase of the benchmark price from 5.2 billion to 8.2 billion euros, despite the objections of three relevant official experts in the price negotiating committee who were subsequently transferred out. It however curiously mentions a CAG report on this issue which fact was never stated and is nonexistent.

On the issue of offset contracts to Ambani’s Company the court says that this was to be decided by Dassault which was already in negotiation with Reliance since 2012. This despite the fact that the Reliance Company with which Dassault was once discussing, was a completely different company of Mukesh Ambani and had nothing

to do with the new company of Anil Ambani incorporated at the time of the 2015 deal. The court also overlooks the specific provisions of the DPP and the offset guidelines pointed out by us which requires every offset contract to be approved by the Raksha Mantri himself.

On this basis the court concludes that there is no reason for any intervention by the Court on the sensitive issue of purchase of 36 aircrafts by the Indian government. It says that “perception of individuals cannot be the basis of a fishing and roving enquiry by the Court.”

The Court overlooks the fact that we were not seeking any enquiry by the court but only an independent investigation by the CBI or SIT. The law on this has been laid down in a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court in Lalita Kumari’s case which says that if allegations made in a complaint are of a criminal offence, an FIR must be registered and investigation must be made. The allegations in the complaint by us were of huge commissions being given to Ambani’s company through the guise of offset contracts in a deal which was contrived to ensure that such commissions would be paid.

It is in these circumstances that we say that we are shocked and disappointed by the court’s judgment. However, since the court has not examined nor said that it was examining the facts in detail, and has dismissed the petition only on the basis of its perception of its own jurisdiction under article 32 of the Constitution, this judgment can by no means be considered to be the Supreme Court’s clean chit to this deal. As mentioned in our complaint, all the facts and circumstances show that this was an unholy deal which has compromised national security,

plundered our public exchequer and will bleed our public sector defence company HAL. This contrived deal has been struck only for the purpose of giving large commissions to Anil Ambani’s company in the guise of offset contracts. The Supreme Court’s judgment is thus by no means a clean chit to the government on this deal. The Courts judgment is in line with earlier judgments of the courts in the Bofors case and in the Birla Sahara case where we have seen that courts have stopped short of ordering independent investigations in matters involving corruption in high places or even given judgments seeking to put a lid on those cases. The issue will continue to agitate the public mind until there is full public disclosure of all the facts and a comprehensive and independent investigation into the deal.

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Understanding Interfaith Dialogue: A Few Critical Questions

Neha Dabhade

The issue of constructing a temple of Lord Ram on the disputed site where the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya once stood and was demolished in 1992 is once again hitting the headlines. The construction of the temple is being touted as an article of faith and the litmus test to prove respect for sentiments of 'Hindus'. This demand becomes all the more threatening when there is aggressive mobilisation to intimidate the democratic institutions like the judiciary and also the communities perceived as 'others'. This is but just one of the many examples of manipulations and contestations that are being played out in the name of religion in India which is proving to be a strain on the peaceful and harmonious inter-community relations in India.

In this context, one of the solutions being promoted is to establish inter-faith dialogue and through this dialogue build understanding between the different religions. However, it would be misplaced optimism and perhaps even a folly to believe that by speaking about the positives of our own religions in a closed conference room, one can establish any meaningful dialogue or even understand the essence of the different religions. Any sincere attempt at interfaith dialogue will require an earnest reflection about our own religion, the power structures it nurtures, the inequalities it institutionalises and also the injustices it may perpetuate.

Such a dialogue will help each community understand their own traditions, faith, beliefs and

value system in the light of other religions. A critical understanding of other religions enables us to reflect internally within our own religions. Thus, my participation in an interfaith consultation recently was a very enriching experience for me since it opened avenues of learning and assiduous critical reflection into our own faiths. The Consultation called *Seeking Life Together: Interfaith Resistance to Religious Bigotry and Discrimination based on Caste and Gender* was organised by Collective of Dalit Ecumenical Christian Scholars (CODECS) in collaboration with the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College (MBCBC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Some of the important reflections and challenges that the meet deliberated upon were crucial. For a nuanced understanding of interfaith dialogue and relations, it becomes imperative to peel layers of discrimination that institutionalised religions perpetrate with the help of scriptures and normative narratives. I have listed a few down below.

The Question of Gender

The question of gender equality is central to all religions and has unfortunately been a grim one. Women have been discriminated in the socio-cultural realm by citing justifications from religious narratives. In the seminar too, the question of subordination of women was raised very strongly. Different speakers tried to deconstruct patriarchy and patriarchal structures / understanding of scriptures.

Making a case for Dalit women in the Church, it was argued that Dalit women are "Dalit within the Dalit" thus pointing out how the axis of gender and caste lead to double discrimination of Dalit women in the Church. While support is sought from a patriarchal understanding or interpretation of biblical scriptures to entrench the lower status of women within the family and society at large, the plight of Dalit women becomes all the more aggravated due to caste identity. What perhaps was most moving and inspiring was the narrative of a Dalit woman reverend herself, who explained this oppression citing her personal journey. She explained that women face strong resistance when they try to penetrate the Church administrative structures which largely till date remain male dominated. Women's emancipation is viewed as a threat to the social order understood to be formed by God. This resistance becomes stronger if the woman is a Dalit. There was a demand to deconstruct the understanding of biblical scriptures which legitimises hierarchy and subordination of women.

The status of Muslim women evinced intense debates and interest. Two perspectives emerged. One, that the scriptures are a source of liberation and provide space for negotiating rights of Muslim women; and the other more critical one, which questioned the scriptures which are used to subordinate women. These perspectives came from the lived experiences of women who have been working with

Muslim communities in South Asia. Women's organisations working on issues of Muslim women are grappling with the discrimination faced by Muslim women in the areas of marriage, property, education and their overall socio-economic status in society. The orthodoxy often cites from the Quran to justify this discrimination. However it is equally true that there are also liberal interpretations of the Quran which have provided spaces to women to negotiate for their rights in day to day lives. But more often than not, the vested clergy and elite in the community interpret the scriptures in a way to subjugate the women.

There was a strong argument about how the discrimination faced by Muslim women is manipulated by communal forces to stigmatise and demonise Islam as a religion and also the Muslim community as being 'backward' and 'fundamentalist'. This adds to the pressure on Muslim women to sweep their questions and demands for reforms under the carpet and in effect does more harm to their cause of justice and equality. The struggles of Muslim women are at the crossroads of communal politics and patriarchy faced within the community.

It will be misleading to think that identity politics is affecting the lives of Muslim women alone and pushing them deeper into the folds of patriarchy. Women in Hindu communities are also used as pawns to play out communal politics by firmly placing them in the realm of their homes to strengthen the discourses of women being reproducers of children. Hindu women are mobilised by communal forces to construct exclusionist narratives of nationalism where Muslims are portrayed as the

common enemy, and are misled into believing that they are working to "save" their religion by indulging in propaganda of hatred. But this political agenda, despite being based on hatred, gives women the bargaining power to participate in the public sphere. For example, they are out on the streets to stop other women who wish to enter the Sabarimala temple, or to shield their male relatives when they participate in communal violence against the "others". Their concerns of equality within families, equal opportunity in terms of education and livelihoods and their agency in terms of marriages and relationships are sidelined or even opposed. Therefore reforms and a critical reflection on the orthodoxy within communities are absolutely essential if there has to be interfaith dialogue.

The Question of Caste

Caste system in India has seeped into other religions though it's not integral to their theology. The caste system which is a system of graded hierarchy or inequality has shaped the Hindu communities. The Dalits who were at the receiving end of the practice of untouchability, discrimination and dehumanisation for centuries tried to find alternatives to Hindu religion, which had been critiqued by Ambedkar in no uncertain terms. Some of the Dalits turned to Islam and Christianity in their quest for equality and acceptance. However, the persons who converted couldn't escape their caste identity. There were conversions into Islam and Christianity from upper caste Hindu religions too. This privileged group drew caste boundaries within the other religions too and reproduced brahminical culture and discourses.

And so, caste system came to haunt the Dalits in Islam and Christianity too. For instance, there are separate churches for Dalit Christians or separate mosques for Dalit Muslims.

Though there is no notion of purity and pollution in Islam and Christianity, the condition of Pasmada Muslims and Dalit Christians is appalling. The philosophy of caste is quite contradictory to the basic beliefs of Islam which explicitly emphasise equality and universal brotherhood. Islam may be normatively egalitarian, but actually existing Islam in Indian conditions is deeply hierarchical. There is a need to democratise Islam in India. The resistance of Muslim Dalits and Christian Dalits leads to a larger question of democratisation and forging a counter-hegemonic solidarity that has the potentiality and can prove to be a powerful resource for more humane interfaith dialogue.

The question of inclusion

This brings us to the question about what is the nature of religion. Religion was made for human beings and not vice-versa. Thus, one has to raise the question, is the imagery of God congruent to that of a poor man? A black man? A Dalit? A woman? Does God in the present understanding and form really dialogue with a poor or unprivileged person not conforming to the normal in society? Is institutionalised religion really inclusive? Does it emphasise humility, simplicity, concern for the poor? There are examples like Basavanna and other bhakti traditions along with Sufi saints who through their living exemplified poverty and labour. Basavanna exalted physical labour

into a religious ideology and weaved a counter narrative to caste driven brahminical society and morality. In one of famous vachanas, he says:

*The rich will make temples for Shiva.
What shall I, a poor man, do?
My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine, the head a
cupola of gold.*

These thinkers and philosophers envisaged a different social order—one which was based on rationality, equality and justice. This was a sincere attempt at democratisation of religion. Such values are most needed today where institutionalised religion is manipulated to privilege certain sections.

What should interfaith actually mean?

Interfaith dialogue is largely understood to be a process to promote tolerance of other religions. It is understood to grapple with the question as to how one is to instruct youth in the religious beliefs and values of their community, while encouraging them to be tolerant of beliefs and values deemed to be incompatible with their own. In this process, it is already presupposed that one's own religion is liberal, inclusive and perfect. Interfaith dialogues eulogise institutional religions and focus on so called progressive discourses within each religion. But no attempt is made to look at within our own religion in a rational and critical manner.

One has to acknowledge that there exists fundamentalism in every religion. Therefore, there is scope for reform in every religion. If one acknowledges this and critically reflects on one's own religion and values it promotes, this understanding perhaps will manifest in everyday conduct and social

order. The critical gaze instead of being on other religions should be projected within. As Kabir very rightly pointed out:

*Bura jo dekhna main chala, bura na
milaya koi*

*Jo man khoja apna, toh mujhsa bura
na koi.*

Why Gandhi and Marx Are More Relevant Now Than Ever Before

Ashish Kothari

The 150th birth anniversary year of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx went by this year. Such anniversaries can become occasions of tokenism—for instance, the Indian government has set up a committee with more than 100 members to coordinate celebrations of Gandhi's anniversary, crammed with political bigwigs from various parties, a few academics and Gandhian workers. I am sceptical whether it has achieved anything more than a significantly heightened scale of the hypocritical display that October 2 brings around every year. Hopefully I'm mistaken, but since any meaningful homage to Gandhi would call into question the very fundamentals of today's political and economic power, and point a sharply critical gaze at the rampant abuse of religion and nationalism, I think I'm pretty safe in being sceptical. And so too perhaps for Marx, at least where the celebrations are being led by so-called revolutionary governments in those parts of the world where Leftist parties still hold power.

This does not mean that these two figures are of no relevance

(I started searching for the devil but could not find anyone. When I searched inside me, I realised there is no one more devilish than me.)

This may lead to different sections of the society having a meaningful dialogue with each other, and will include the marginalised, in turn making such interactions more humane.

now. On the contrary, they are even more so than before. Their legacy is crucial for the majority of the world's population, marginalised by capitalism, statism, patriarchy and other structures of oppression. As it is for the rest of nature, so badly abused by humanity. And it is a legacy that is still alive and thriving, not so much in the orthodox Gandhian and Marxist organisations and in academic circles where the tussle between the two 'ideologies' is more dominant than the urge to make them relevant to the struggles of the marginalised, as in these struggles themselves.

Resistance and construction

And so we must turn for hope to the many movements of *sangharsh* (resistance) and *nirman* (construction) throughout the world. These movements realise that the injustices they are facing, and the choices they must make, are not bound by the divides that ideologues play games with.

Let's take *sangharsh*. At any given time in India, there are dozens of sites where Adivasis, farmers, fisherpersons, pastoralists and others

are refusing to part with their land or forest or water to make way for so-called development projects. One thousand farmers have filed objections to their lands being taken up by the Prime Minister's pet project, the bullet train. News that is both inspiring and depressing keeps coming from Latin America, of indigenous people standing up for their territorial rights against mining and oil extraction, and all too frequently paying the price when state or corporate forces kill their leaders. Nationwide rallies were organised by the National Alliance of People's Movements and the Ekta Parishad in October. They involved movements for land and forest rights, communal harmony, workers' security and other causes that are not so easy to place in any ideological camp.

The same goes for *nirman*, or the construction of alternatives. Across the world there are incredible examples of sustainable and holistic agriculture, community-led water/energy/ food sovereignty, worker takeover of production facilities, resource/ knowledge commons, local governance, community health and alternative learning, inter-community peace-building, reassertion of cultural diversity, gender and sexual pluralism, and much else.

It is in many of these alternative movements that I find inspiration for building on the legacies of Gandhi and Marx (and Ambedkar, Rabindranath Tagore, Rosa Luxemburg and various other luminaries) and, equally important, on the many indigenous and Adivasi, Dalit, peasant and other 'folk' revolutionaries through history. There are many examples that dot the Indian landscape: the few

thousand Dalit women farmers who have achieved *anna swaraj* (food sovereignty) in Telangana while also transforming their gender and caste status; the several dozen Gond Adivasi villages in Gadchiroli that have formed a Maha Gram Sabha to stop mining, and work on their own vision of governance and livelihood security; a Dalit sarpanch near Chennai who combines both Marxist and Gandhian principles in his attempt to transform the village he lives in. Similarly, there are others across the world: a thousand people have experimented with anarchic community life in the 'freetown' of Christiania in Copenhagen for four decades; indigenous peoples in Peru, Canada and Australia have gained territorial autonomy; small peasants in Africa and Latin America have sustained or gone back to organic farming; fisherpersons in the South Pacific have their own network of sustainably managed marine sites.

What I find of significance in many resistance and alternative movements is the exploration of autonomy, self-reliance, people's governance of politics and the economy, freedom with responsibility for the freedom of others, and respect for the rest of nature. While these movements do often call for policy interventions from a more accountable state, there is also an underlying antipathy to the centralised state, as there is in both Gandhian *swaraj* and in Marxist communism and in many versions of anarchy. Private property is also challenged. In 2013, the Gond village Mendha-Lekha in Maharashtra converted all its agricultural land into the commons. Note that commons here does not mean state-owned, a distorted form of 'communism' that has prevailed

in orthodox Leftist state regimes.

Bridging gaps

And while Gandhi was weak on challenging capital, and Marx on stressing the fundamental spiritual or ethical connections amongst humans, these movements often tend to bridge these gaps. Insofar as many of them integrate the need to re-establish ecological resilience and wisdom, some even arguing for extending equal respect to other species, they also encompass Marx's vision of a society that bridges humanity's 'metabolic rift' with nature, and Gandhi's repeated emphasis on living lightly on earth. With this they also challenge the very fundamentals of 'development', especially its mad fixation on economic growth, reliance on ever-increasing production and consumption, and its utter disregard for inequality.

This is not to suggest that Gandhi and Marx can be happily married; there are points of tension (for instance, on the issue of non-violence as a principle). There are points of ambiguity in recognising that indigenous peoples have already lived many elements of their dreams. But I have found enough in grassroots movements to be convinced that there is critical common ground amongst them, if our ultimate goals are well-being, justice and equity, based on ecological wisdom. We would do well to honour their legacy by identifying such common ground and building on the struggles and creativity of 'ordinary' people in communities across the world.

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The Poetics Of Statues

Dr. A. Raghu Kumar

Men construct huge structures, make endowments, inscribe their names on monuments, create memorials, demonstrate their authority with seals imprinted with their images, consecrate statues and there by long for permanence. One such urge of the erstwhile kings, conquerors and military generals is reflected in the statues they themselves got erected or their disciples got made to prove their allegiance to the authority. There are statues installed by democratic governments too, to celebrate an occasion or remember a person. The Statue of Liberty standing as guard at the entrance of New York Harbour on Liberty Island is a gift from France to commemorate the 100th year of signing of the Declaration of Independence of USA. A symbol of democracy, it's also a colossal neoclassical structure.

This well known statue has an inscription on its citadel, a sonnet written by Emma Lazarus (1849–1887), *The New Colossus*. Considered to be one of the finest pieces of sonnets in English literature, it compares the Statue of Liberty with the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World. The Colossus of Rhodes no longer stands. Constructed to celebrate the Rhode's victory over Cyprus, it was said to be around 33 meters (108 feet) high, almost the height of the present day Statue of Liberty. Erected by Charles of Lindos in 280 BC, it collapsed during an earthquake in 226 BC. Though it was never rebuilt, parts of it are preserved, as if questioning

the endeavours of men or their ideas of permanency!

But my Statue of Liberty, says Lazarus:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek Fame,

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame

Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name

Mother of Exiles.

Thus, Lazarus describes the Statue of Liberty as the mother of exiles, and as distinguishable from the Colossus of Rhodes. While Colossus of Rhodes stood for ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and for exhibition of power, authority and victory in war, the Statue of Liberty, says Lazarus, stands for compassion, an inviting Mother of Exiles!

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied Pomp!” cries she,

With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

The question that lingers in the mind of any liberal today is: “Is she now the same personification of liberty that Lazarus so passionately

praised?” When the golden doors of the land that was one of the first to be colonised are shut to millions of immigrants and asylum seekers, exiles and destitute in the name of “America first”, and when walls are erected on the borders of the neighbouring States, is she the same Lady of Liberty who cried “Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!” and invited those tired, poor and huddled masses yearning to breathe free? Has Time erased the lustre of the claims of Lazarus? Or is it as history has demonstrated time and again—today's heroes are tomorrow's tyrants?

There are plenty of statues, and they stand higher and higher. The Sphinx and the Great Pyramid stand far taller than the Statue of Liberty. Competitive devotees clamour for taller, stronger, higher idols to consecrate their Gods, Kings and Gurus, owned or appropriated. Now the moderns are also in the race to surpass all that is tall in the world. The Sardar, one of the triumvirate of the freedom struggle with Gandhi and Nehru, now stands as the Statue of Unity, a new colossal, bigger than his mentor in the very land of the mentor, 182 meters high, on the river island constructed by a Multinational Company, with money coming from the much tainted public sectors, consuming about Rs 3,000 crore of a poor and developing India, looking down condescendingly or with consternation at his mentor and all his comrades-in-arms? Challenging many for the title of the tallest statue in the world, including the Spring Temple Buddha and the Father of the

Nation, he occupies now more than two hectares of land, which probably he might not have ever ventured to occupy while alive!

There is another statue, which also stood for power and authority, the statue of the Egyptian king Ozymandias. He was a villainous pharaoh who enslaved the ancient Hebrews who Moses led to the Exodus. **P. B. Shelley** (1792–1822), in his sonnet Ozymandias reveals the nature and state of statue.

*I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless
legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them,
on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies,
whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold
command,
Tell that its sculptor well those
passions read*

*Which yet survive, stamped on these
lifeless things,*

*The hand that mocked them and the
heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words
appear:*

*'My name is Ozymandias, King of
Kings;
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and
despair!'*

*Nothing beside remains. Round the
decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless
and bare*

*The lone and level sands stretch far
away.*

Ozymandias, the ancient Egyptian King, now known as Ramesses II, regarded as the greatest and the most powerful Egyptian pharaoh, now stands as “two vast and trunkless legs of stone”, conveying

the ephemeral nature of human pursuits, with even civilisations themselves disappearing into a whisper. John Keats (1795–1821), a contemporary of Shelley, wrote a beautiful ode, Ode on a Grecian Urn, where he describes Time’s irrelevance to the physical and material, with a suggestion that it is art that is an anti-dote to this impermanence. The art on the Grecian Urn, a decorative pot from ancient Greece, survives the test of time. Empires, emperors, civilizations and cultures appear, and then disappear traceless into history, but the piece of art remains.

*Thou still unravish'd bride of
quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and
slow time,
. . .*

*What men or gods are these? What
maidens loth?*

*What mad pursuit? What struggle
to escape?*

*What pipes and timbrels! What wild
ecstasy?*

*. . .
When old age shall this generation
waste,*

*Thou shalt remain, in midst of other
woe*

*Than ours, a friend to man, to whom
thou say'st,*

*“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that
is all*

*Ye know on earth, and all ye need
to know.”*

We remember Sardar as one of the greatest of India’s freedom fighters, as a man with absolute integrity, honesty and sincerity, as the greatest follower of Gandhi, as the comrade-in-arms of Nehru and many other freedom fighters, as a satyagrahi of the highest order, as a man with an iron grit to unify

the nation, and as a man with great humility who spoke less and did more. He is one of the tallest figures of modern Indian history. His greatness is within and not without. Hugeness of his statue may not further the ideals of this great soul, instead it distances us from him. We want to remember Patel as one who, along with our Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nehru constituted the triumvirate who led our freedom struggle to victory. The Indian freedom struggle is, probably, one of the best human struggles for freedom and liberation in the world history! We hope that the madness to ‘dislocate’ Patel within huge fortified structures does not disturb the serious student of India’s freedom struggle from appreciating and re-appreciating his contribution to the nation.

**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
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3. **Vartaman Rajneeti ki Jwalant Chunautiyan.** Price 400 rupees.
4. **Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia ki Neetiyon:** (This booklet was published late last year.) Price 25 rupees.

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Mexico: President AMLO's Inaugural Speech Offers 'New Hope'

Martin Varese

After receiving the presidential sash in the Mexican National Congress on December 1, President Lopez Obrador gave a speech outlining an ambitious and encouraging government plan, based on bids to slash corruption, overturn neoliberalism and make important public investments.

AMLO started his speech by thanking outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto: "Mainly I recognise the fact of him not having intervened, as did other presidents, in the last presidential elections."

AMLO had previously claimed that the last two presidential elections were stolen from him. It is a good thing that the Mexican authorities, especially "the acting president, respect the will of the people," he said.

"By mandate of the people, we begin today the fourth transformation of Mexico." AMLO wants to trigger a turning point in Mexican history that would be comparable to three other historic moments: Independence, a movement mainly led by Miguel Hidalgo, which liberated Mexico from around 300 years of Spanish domination; the Reform, a struggle between liberals and conservatives, which gave the "laws of the Reform" (one of the most important was the separation of the Church from the State, mainly protagonised by Benito Juarez); and the Mexican Revolution, a war to end the 30-year regime of Porfirio Diaz, after which the current Mexican Constitution was established.

AMLO has long talked about

the fourth transformation of Mexico, in which he aims to change the political regime. Saturday, he said, started a "peaceful and orderly transformation, but at the same time deep and radical because it will end corruption and impunity that prevent the rebirth of Mexico."

AMLO's narrative, from before being elected president, has had the fight against corruption as one of its central pillars. "The crisis in Mexico was originated not only by the failures of the neoliberal economic model applied during the last 36 years, but also by the predominance, during this period, of the most filthy corruption, both public and private." Nothing has damaged Mexico more than the corruption of the people governing the country, and that tiny minority that profits from influences and "lobby."

"Neoliberalism is corruption," he continued. "It sounds strong, but privatisation in Mexico has meant corruption." Economic management during the neoliberal period, from 1983–2018, "has been the most inefficient of Mexico's modern history." Adding to this, due to the concentration of wealth in a "few hands, the majority of the population has been impoverished."

President Lopez Obrador emphatically distanced himself from the 40 years of neoliberal politics that have led Mexico into unprecedented economic crisis. "I say it without ideology: neoliberal politics has been a disaster, a calamity for the public life of the country. For example, the energy reform they

said would come to save us has only caused the lesser production of oil and the excessive price increase of energy."

The energy reform, approved in 2013 by his predecessor Peña Nieto's government, translated into the gradual privatisation of oil in Mexico, the only country in Latin America that previously had full control of this natural resource, expropriated in 1938 by Lazaro Cardenas.

"Before neoliberalism, we produced and were self-sufficient in gas, diesel, energy. Now we buy more than half of what we use. In this period the purchasing power of salaries has been slashed by 60 percent," AMLO said, arguing that Mexico's minimum wage is among the lowest in the world.

Mexico, he continued, "is in 135th place for corruption out of 172 countries evaluated (by Transparency International), emphasising that corruption and neoliberalism have been interlaced in the country. During the neoliberal period, the whole system has operated for corruption. The political power and the economic power have nourished themselves mutually. The stealing of the goods of the people has been the *modus operandi*."

The solution? "If you ask me to express in one sentence the new government's plan: to end corruption and impunity," AMLO told the cheering audience. Highlighting the importance of achieving the separation of political and economic power, he said: "The state will stop

facilitating the pillage. It will stop being a committee for a rapacious minority. There cannot be a rich government with a poor people."

The new government won't focus on revenge or trying to capture everyone who's corrupt because "there wouldn't be enough courts and prisons," AMLO said, stressing that he will focus on preventing future crimes instead of prosecuting former state officials.

Speaking about "putting a full stop on this horrible page of history," AMLO was interrupted by the audience counting to 43 in reference to the 43 forcibly disappeared Ayotzinapa students. AMLO said abuses of power will be prosecuted and promised that he would never order the repression of the people, nor "will we cover up violations of human rights."

"The government will represent all Mexicans, there will be authentic rule of law . . . but we will give priority to those who are the most vulnerable," he said. He also stressed the importance of popular consultations during his government, in order to restore the power of the people and resurrect a "real democracy."

"Republican austerity and the fight against corruption will free enough resources for development. We will not need to increase taxes, and that is a commitment. The price of gasoline will not increase beyond inflation." Austerity is based on the elimination of "unnecessary expenses" of the state: "The salaries for those on top will be reduced because the salaries of those in the bottom will increase."

AMLO also proposed an increase in public investments to overturn neoliberal policies. The construction of at least two refineries

and the recovery of six others will reduce energy prices, he said.

For "the wellbeing of our people, the plan is to combat poverty and marginalisation as has never been done in history. Today, I formally present constitutional reforms to establish the welfare state and guarantee the right of the people to health, to education and social security." He promised to work for social justice and to reduce inequality based on public investment and providing help from the government to surpass "neoliberal hypocrisy. Those who are born poor will not be condemned to die poor."

"We won't give our backs to young people, and we won't insult them by not giving them opportunities to work and study," he said. Retirees and people with disabilities will also be afforded better opportunities and government assistance.

"We want migration to be optional, not compulsory. We are going to make Mexicans happy where they were born, where their families and roots are," AMLO said.

Subsidies will be given to farmers and to the people who produce well-being in Mexico, and also announced that "a basket containing basic foodstuffs to fight malnutrition and hunger will be sold at a fair price."

AMLO also announced the banning of "fracking and transgenic (foods)," in Mexico.

And he called for cooperation and collaboration with all the peoples of the world, based on self-determination. "Mexico will not stop thinking of Simon Bolivar and Jose Marti," and will start looking more and more towards Latin America, he said, stressing the importance of the region's integration.

AMLO concluded by saying that the national problems are big, but with the cultures and strength of the country's people Mexico can continue advancing.

"I'm optimistic. We are beginning and are on the road to the rebirth of Mexico. We will become a model country, by ending corruption. We will build a society that is more just, democratic, brotherly and always happy."

The only thing Mexico needs now is a good government, AMLO said, vowing that his administration will work to change the country in such a way that it becomes almost impossible to roll back any advances.

Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

by
Rohini Gawankar

Published by
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On International Human Rights Day

Vijay Prashad

Not often does good news come on International Human Rights Day—December 10. It is mostly a somber occasion, a day to reflect on the values of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and a day to bemoan the gap between those values and our reality.

Little of the high-minded dreams have come to life. Hunger and war, desolation and alienation define our times as sharply as they did for those pioneers who wrote that text in the years after World War II. They had the Holocaust and the atomic bomb as their context.

It is worthwhile to point out that it was the Indian delegate—Hansa Mehta—who objected to the phrase “all men are born free and equal.” She insisted that it be changed to “all human beings are born free and equal.” Hansa Mehta was thinking of women when she made that alteration. She knew that the costs of war and hunger are borne so sharply by women. So did Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic) and Begum Shaista Ikramullah (Pakistan), both of whom made key interventions in that declaration.

This year, two important events took place on December 10. First, the nations of the world signed on a Global Compact for Migration. Second, the Nobel Peace Prize went to Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege, both campaigners against sexual violence as a weapon of war. These are two events that drive forward the good side of history.

Migration

In Marrakesh, Morocco, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres hosted an important meeting on migration. The upshot of this meeting was a non-binding Global Compact for Migration that provides the basis for international cooperation on migration and makes the case for migrants to be treated with dignity.

The United Nations’ Special Representative for International Migration—Louise Arbour—greeted the Compact’s passage as a “wonderful occasion, really a historic moment.” Discussion over the Compact had been ongoing for the past 18 months, placed on the table by the deaths of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea and by the terrible reaction by Europe and the United States to the migrants.

There has been so little recognition that most migrants flee from war and economic collapse—conditions created by policies made by the governments of Europe and North America. The people who make the long journey across the Sahara Desert or along the length of Central America are survivors of trade policies and extractive industries that destroy their livelihoods and lives. A true global compact would abandon those policies. But we are far from that.

Louise Arbour noted that nothing really would come of this Compact unless the countries implemented

its initiatives. It is not likely that countries such as the United States will honour the Compact. Nonetheless, here is another piece of paper with multilateral agreement that one can wave under the nose of Trump and the other xenophobes. It is a red rag to the bull.

Sexual Violence in War

The horror of war is unimaginable. Those who have been to a battlefield know its terrors: the sounds, the smells, the casualness of the killing, the hunger, the uncertainty, the peril. In the shadows lurk terrors even graver, the “invisible war crime”—Binaifer Nowrojee said at Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is the crime of wartime sexual violence.

No doubt that this violence is old. But it is shocking nonetheless. Professor Claudia Card, in an article from 1996 on “Rape as a Weapon of War,” suggests that mass murder has many methods. One way is to kill people—by gunshot or by gas or by atomic bomb. Another, she says, “is to destroy a group’s identity by decimating cultural and social bonds.” Martial rape, she says, does both. It kills people and it kills the bonds of a community.

It was shocking to hear what ISIS did to the Yazidi community—the capture of women who were then forced to be sex slaves, the rape of thousands. It is what catapulted Nadia Murad to the headlines, her bravery moving her from being a survivor of horrific violence to being

a brave spokesperson for justice and against war. She accepted her Nobel Prize on Monday and said, “thank you very much for this honor, but the fact remains that the only prize in the world that can restore dignity is justice and the prosecution of criminals.”

What the Yazidis experienced is not uncommon elsewhere. Reading the Truth and Reconciliation documents from Sierra Leone or the reports from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan is chilling. It is difficult to forget men like Mosquito, who raped a 19-year-old woman in Telu Bongor, Sierra Leone and then—according to the young woman—“ordered his men to continue the act.” “Even now,” she says, “the pain is with me.”

Denis Mukwege is from east Congo. He is a gynecologist who has watched his society be torn apart. War has been its condition for decades, war premised on the theft of raw materials that feed a world hungry for its digital goods (the mineral coltan is essential to capacitors). Mukwege’s Nobel Prize speech rattles. “Turning a blind eye to tragedy is being complicit,” he said. “It’s not just perpetrators of violence who are responsible for their crimes. It is also those who choose to look the other way.”

It is easy to be fascinated by the brutality of Mosquito, but what about the brutality of the system that produces Mosquito and the women he devastated? It is the victim, Mukwege said, who is valued less than the commercial goods that slip out of the Congo and are shipped from the ports of Mombasa, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to factories far

afied. It is worth pointing out that the worker who mines for coltan or tantalum makes less than \$1 per day, while a kilo of tantalum is likely to fetch somewhere around \$200. Violence to control these mines is the author of rape.

Safety

The Global Compact for Migration is not so far from the question of sexual violence in war. I remember the attacks on Somali refugees in the camps in Kenya in 1993. The logic of the rapists was appalling—to punish the Somalis, to enjoy the spoils of war. What was there for the Somali women in the isolated camps in Kenya is now there for the Rohingya women as they flee rape by Myanmar’s military and as they struggle with the stigma of birthing children from the sexual violence. The echoes are loud and horrifying, reminders of the Pakistani soldiers raping women in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a weapon to break the confidence of the liberation struggle. There is an echo of the rape and murder of

14-year-old Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi and her family by US soldiers in Yusufiyah, Iraq. There are loud echoes, loud screams for justice.

There is the echo from the Indian state of Manipur, where the soldiers of Assam Rifles raped and killed Thangjam Manorama—one more victim in a line of victims. She was raped multiple times, the autopsy showed, and was shot 16 times in her vagina. One day, fed up with the violence, 12 Manipuri women went out on the street, removed their clothes in front of Imphal’s Kangla Fort, where the army was headquartered, and shouted, “Indian Army, rape us, kill us.” One of the women—Soibom Momon Leima—later said, “They had their weapons. We only had our body.”

The 12 women of Manipur said that they had let out their “war cry.” Denis Mukwege said from the Nobel pulpit, “If there is a war to be waged, it is the war against the indifference which is eating away at our societies.” There is terrible indifference, silence.



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Why Extinction Rebellion Protesters Are Breaking the Law

Claire Wordley

“A 4°C future is incompatible with an organised global community,” climate and energy professor Kevin Anderson once told Grist.

Even if we cut emissions by 3.5 percent a year after 2020, we’ll hit 4 degrees Celsius warming by the end of this century. Just let that sink in for a minute. When babies born now are in their 80s, there could be no human civilisation left to speak of. The Amazon rainforest is likely to die at 3–4°C of warming. And the corals? They’ll be long gone, dying out at 2°C. Currently, perversely, terrifyingly, global emissions are still rising.

If that is what we are facing, why are we all carrying on as normal? Well, some people aren’t. Extinction Rebellion is a UK-born group committing civil disobedience to protest catastrophic climate breakdown and species extinctions. Springing apparently from nowhere, in November 2018 the group mobilised thousands of people to block bridges, roads, and government departments in London—trying to cause enough disruption to make the British government act on climate. Extinction Rebellion demands that the UK government declare a climate emergency, that the UK go carbon neutral by 2025, and that the decisions on how to go carbon neutral are taken by a citizen’s assembly.

With their use of stark hourglass and human skull imagery, their emotive wording, strong demands, and tactics of civil disobedience, Extinction Rebellion activists have raised hackles in many quarters. Here

I explore some of the reasons why this group has taken the approach it has, and assess some of the criticism it has faced.

Criticism: *They’ve picked the wrong target! The UK government is doing excellent work to stop climate change.*

First, while this protest is starting in the UK—home of the Industrial Revolution, for those that like symbolism—this movement is growing worldwide. So far chapters have been set up in Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Spain, Colombia, Tasmania, France, and the USA, and more are sprouting up every day.

Second, the body advising the UK government on climate breakdown is clear that unless huge changes are made, the government will miss its own legally binding targets. Yet the government is approving new runways, encouraging domestic flights (in a small country well served by rail), and allowing hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for gas despite public protests; while simultaneously scrapping subsidies for renewables, cancelling funding to develop carbon capture schemes, and rejecting plans for a tidal lagoon generator as “too expensive.”

Third, the UK government’s own legally binding targets on emissions won’t keep it in line with the Paris Agreement, where nations agreed to keep “well below” 2°C of warming, and ideally under 1.5°C. This led to a legal challenge against the UK government by Plan B and eleven British citizens, who argued that the UK was in breach of its

own international obligations. It is still unclear whether the case will be heard.

And finally, there’s the moral argument. The UK has been pumping greenhouse gases into the air for a very, very long time—the accumulated impacts of which are huge (remember the industrial revolution was born here). Nations industrialising today need help to decarbonise, but as a rich, developed nation, the UK has a “carbon debt” to repay to the world for its past emissions. Taken together, it seems to me that my government is a very fair target to protest against.

Criticism: *Extinction Rebellion’s 2025 target is an unrealistic timeframe for the UK to aim for carbon neutrality.*

Firstly, it’s hard to tell what is realistic or not; a lot of that depends on political will. But while 2025 is very close, Extinction Rebellion activists are not the only ones with big ambitions. Norway is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030, Costa Rica by 2021. Even Ethiopia has ambitions to be carbon neutral by 2025. These countries may or may not make it, and these targets don’t appear to include imports—but if they try hard enough, these nations are likely to make significant advances in cutting emissions.

The UK and other countries made huge changes during World War Two, when everyone was asked to “do their bit” to save the country. Think of the “Dig for Victory” campaign that got people digging up their gardens to grow vegetables, the rationing, the push

for factories to start building planes and tanks, the farmers who became fighter pilots, and the housewives who became farmers and factory workers. Imagine if we had a push now showing people that to keep their kids safe they should start growing more of their own food and eating less meat; imagine if World War Two-levels of effort were invested in renewable energy, in making public transport better, in swapping petrol pumps for electric car charging stations, in covering rooftops with solar panels. Huge changes are needed, but people have made huge changes before, and what we face now is much scarier than World War Two.

The will of the people to tackle climate breakdown is also greater than politicians might think. A 2017 survey of over 8,000 people in eight countries found that 84 percent agree to at least some extent that climate change is a “global catastrophic risk,” and almost 90 percent agree that we should probably or definitely take climate action “even if it requires making considerable changes that impact on our current living standards.” But people are unlikely and often unable to do it alone—they need a solid green infrastructure that makes behavior-change possible.

Bristol City Council in the UK recently voted to declare a climate emergency and to make the city carbon neutral by 2030—and used the rise of Extinction Rebellion as a sign that people were ready. The district of Stroud quickly followed suit. While the UK target is 80 percent domestic emissions cuts by 2050, in these cities the framing is getting closer to that of Extinction Rebellion. The UK government is currently asking the Committee on

Climate Change whether it needs tougher targets—sufficient public pressure could make zero carbon by 2025 the option everyone is talking about.

Criticism: *Why do you need to commit civil disobedience? Just have a march!*

Since the declaration of scientific consensus that humans were causing global warming in 1988, there has been a huge array of tactics used to try and get emissions cut. Scientists have produced report after report and citizens have signed petitions, held marches, and even taken legal action against their governments. Yet emissions have continued to rise. While people working to limit climate breakdown have gone through the “proper” channels, lobbyists for fossil fuel companies are less principled. They have directly lobbied governments (the UK department responsible for energy and climate change met with fracking companies 30 times in 3 years; it never met any anti-fracking campaigners who tried to talk). They have funded think-tanks that spread misinformation on the climate emergency, they have muted concerns about the emerging crisis through media outlets, they have sat hand-in-glove with governments and refused to change their ways even as the biosphere crumbles. They have even been complicit in the execution of their critics. And so, along with complicit governments, they have convinced people to carry on as normal.

Those protesting against fossil fuels do not have the same money and lobbying power, so rely on grassroots organising. Marches agreed to in advance by governments have not had sufficient impact. Civil disobedience aims to disrupt: to

disrupt economic activity, drawing the media and the governments’ attention, and to disrupt normality, to try and show other citizens that things are not OK. Humans are herd animals; if we see people rushing for the exit, we’ll follow. We can’t rush for the exit to planet Earth, but we can try to create a crisis atmosphere that may engage others to act. Civil disobedience requires remarkably few people to be effective; even just 3.5 percent of the population engaged in sustained non-violent resistance can topple brutal dictators.

Civil disobedience for the climate is taking off across the world, especially among the very young, who cannot vote yet but who will be worst affected by the climate crisis. The Sunrise Movement and the Youth Rising movements are “sitting in” and refusing to leave seats of power in the USA and Canada. In the USA, they seem to be having some influence in pressuring Democrats to draw up a “Green New Deal.” Inspired by 15-year-old activist Greta Thunberg, thousands of brave and switched-on children are committing civil disobedience by going on strike from school in Sweden and Australia, and clearly scaring their politicians. Imagine if more of us walked out from school, from university, from work, from whatever we are expected to do, demanding climate action.

Imagine cities brought to a standstill. This is part of what Extinction Rebellion hopes to achieve in its International Day of Rebellion in April 2019. If the prospect of a 4-degree world won’t make you take action, what will?

Criticism: The Extinction Rebellion messaging is not very optimistic.

Extinction Rebellion's messaging and imagery has been stark, even brutal. Hourglass symbols remind us that time is running out, human skulls tell us that people will suffer with climate breakdown, and the black capital letters on their banners spell out bleak messages. CLIMATE CHANGE = MASS MURDER. SAVE OUR CHILDREN. ACT

NOW. Research from a range of behavioral campaigns shows that we need to evoke fear, anger, hope, and courage to motivate mass movements for a safer global future.

Ultimately, the success or otherwise of Extinction Rebellion's messaging will lie in the amount of people it can mobilise, and the actions that governments take directly or indirectly as a result of

mass civil protest. So far, Extinction Rebellion has managed to motivate thousands of people in the UK in a short amount of time, and inspired the set-up of other chapters across the world. This suggests that its message has resonated with many people. But this is only the beginning—it's over to you now.

In 30 years time, what will you say you did for the climate?

The Yellow Vest Movement Strengthens in France

John Mullen

It is hard to count demonstrators spread out across thousands of mobilisations, but it seems that over half a million people were involved in "Act Four" of the Yellow Vest mobilisation in France on Saturday 8 December. In Bordeaux, a huge joint demonstration between university students and Yellow Vests chanted: "Students and Yellow Vests, same Macron, same struggle!" In Toulouse, Lyon, Saint Etienne, Marseilles, Dieppe and dozens of other towns many thousands marched. Even in smaller places like Albi or Auch there was a fine Yellow Vests demonstration.

A lively picket was organised in front of the factory in Sarthe which makes tear gas grenades. At Saint-Avold in the East of France a replica of a guillotine was placed at a major roundabout. A few days earlier in the port of Saint Nazaire in Brittany, demonstrators repainted the banks of the town in bright yellow, while a cake shop owner in the South started selling special lemon eclairs in the form of a Yellow Vest protester!

A people's movement like this can never stand still: it has to keep

rising or it will quickly decline. People make sacrifices to go out and occupy the roundabouts and motorway toll booths, they find the time and money to go to Paris or to the regional capital for the Saturday demonstration, and they live the stressful life of activism. But they want results. Although the togetherness and the dignity of resistance are important to people, unless some progress is seen each week, the temptation to go home, watch TV and repaint your bathroom instead will tend to win out.

A Rising Movement

This last week, there was none of that—there has been tremendous progress. First, hundreds of high schools have been blockaded by the students, and demonstrations organised in Paris, Lille, Marseilles and elsewhere. This new mobilisation is inspired by the Yellow Vests, but based on specific demands of the young people—against recent reforms making it harder to get into university, and against the government decision to make foreign students pay around 3,000

euros a year tuition fees (as against around 300 at the moment).

In several universities—Rennes Toulouse and Paris Nanterre among others—mass meetings of thousands have voted to blockade their universities and join the Yellow Vest movement. Dozens of motorway toll booths are still occupied by Yellow Vests letting cars through free, and road blocks are functioning at supermarkets and roundabouts: serious effects on weekend commerce are visible. At least one supermarket has closed due to lack of supplies.

Now, energy strikes have been announced for this week, some teaching unions are calling for strikes, and an influential small farmers movement has called on people to join the revolt. On 8 December, climate marches in many cities (Paris, Amiens, Nantes) were joined by Yellow Vest people, helping to put to rest the lie that Macron's fuel taxes were somehow green, when in fact he is closing down thousands of kilometres of railway and refuses to make the big oil companies pay their taxes.

In Paris, hospital workers fighting for jobs also joined the Yellow Vests, while ongoing strikes in steel and in oil depots add to the atmosphere of generalised revolt. There are many other developments, but suffice it to say this is still a rising movement.

Macron and his government have responded in three ways: repression, propaganda and concessions. None have been successful: the movement is still on the up and public opinion remains solidly with the Yellow Vests. On 5 December, polls gave 66 percent “support or sympathise” with the movement, against 24 percent “opposed or hostile”.

A month ago, these figures were 71 percent and 11 percent respectively. In smaller towns, support is stronger; age makes little difference to levels of support, and among manual workers rates of approval are extremely high (78 percent support or sympathise). And this was one of the polls least favourable to our side. Other polls show that 50 percent of the population want Macron to resign. You can feel something in the air. The lady who cleans the stairwell in our block of flats proudly displayed yellow vests on the two seat backs of her car.

Repression, Propaganda and Minor Concessions

After a couple of dozen bank branches and a few shops were smashed up in Paris on 1 December, the government decided to put into action a Project Fear at a level not seen in France these last 35 years. The presidential spokesperson claimed (without any evidence) that a “hard core of several thousand people” were heading for Paris at the weekend “to smash and to kill”.

The Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, all the high schools in Paris and a number of other institutions were closed for the day.

The huge department stores stopped work too, costing them tens of millions of euros in pre-Christmas sales. Twelve shiny armoured vehicles were trundled out along with fanfares and serious-faced TV commentators reflected all day long on “how the worst can be avoided” (although sending in the army was ruled out at the last moment).

The reason for Project Fear was partly so that the more vicious of the police chiefs and police sections understood that, whatever happened, they would be covered by the state power.

This has had its effect already. Countless videos of teenage demonstrators being thumped, kicked and beaten with batons are circulating on social media. Several high school students have been seriously injured, some permanently disfigured by flashballs or teargas canisters. Young people were kept in the cells for 36 hours because they had scrawled graffiti on walls.

One anonymous riot policeman told a journalist that for the first time in his career he had received the (illegal) order to aim tear gas grenades directly at demonstrators rather than above their heads. An 80-year-old Arab lady in Marseilles died on the operating table after she was hit by a tear gas grenade while closing her shutters: it seems the police had aimed at the woman deliberately. Two clearly identified photographers from the *Le Parisien* newspaper were hit with flashballs, and in several big towns, demonstrators were seriously injured. 1,700 people were arrested

across France on 8 December.

And then there was that video, which has gone viral, of the dozens of schoolchildren in Mantes-la-Jolie forced to kneel with their hands on their heads, like in a police state. The general reaction among the population was deep shock. Colleagues who never talk politics brought up the subject spontaneously at work. Parents’ organisations are making official complaints and Communist regional councillors and trade unions offered to organise protection for high school student demonstrations.

Over the last 30 years, police violence against demonstrators in France has been getting worse (as previous generations of high school activists can witness). The present clear intensification is meant to warn us that the state power is ready to go much further in future as its desperate fight to prop up the dictatorship of profit goes on.

Along with Project Fear, the state’s public relations experts, who have been working overtime, have come up with some other wizard wheezes. A small right wing breakaway from the Yellow Vests, which has practically no influence (called the “free Yellow Vests”) is interviewed day and night on the TV news bulletins. Riot police are interviewed anonymously, speaking of how they are terrified to go to the demonstrations and fear for their lives. And some of the media continue to claim that the movement is in the hands of the far right and Macron is the only defence against fascism.

In fact, as Yellow Vests joined the climate marches on 8 December (notably in Toulouse and Paris) and the demand for a rise in the minimum wage became

more prominent, Marine Le Pen's influence is slowly waning, since she is radically opposed to progressive action on either of these issues. In the Paris area, calls by Black activist organisations to join the Yellow Vest demos (with their own slogans against racist police violence) have also helped clarify the fundamental political nature of the movement.

Macron Trying Not to Back Down

Macron really did not want to cancel the fuel tax rise planned for January, because his reputation of never backing down is at the centre of his strategy. Nevertheless, his prime minister, Edouard Philippe announced on 4 December that the rise had been suspended. The decision was universally condemned as far too little far too late, and the very next day, Macron himself decided to announce the rise was scrapped not suspended. The episode was seen as a sign of tension between Macron and Edouard Philippe, and rumours that Macron will fire his prime minister are being heard. The episode of the wealth tax similarly showed confusion. One of Macron's ministers suggested on Wednesday that a recently abolished wealth tax might be brought back in. Macron corrected her publicly within hours.

Macron is fishing around for other concessions which they can make which will divide the movement without costing too much. A suggestion that employers in the private sector will be encouraged by tax breaks to give a cash bonus of up to 1,000 euros to their workers this year is one idea we are hearing. In officially unrelated areas, concessions are occasionally being found to head off the spread of the movement. Four hundred million euros for hospitals which

could not be found for many months was suddenly discovered by Agnès Buzyn, the minister of health.

Union Leaders

Though local and regional trade union organisations often support the Yellow Vest movement, national leaderships are worse than contradictory. I am no fan of excessive rhetoric, but it is hard to avoid the word "treacherous" when you speak of last Thursday's press release, co-signed by all the national trade union confederations except one.

It denounced the violence of demonstrators, but did not mention police violence. It declared that the unions were keen to negotiate at any time with the government, and it neither called on people to join the Yellow Vest protests nor expressed wishes for their success. Since this movement does not have an established leadership, it is hard for professional negotiators to try to close the movement down with complex but minor concessions (as often happens with strike waves), but the trade union bureaucracy seems desperate for a chance to do so.

In Thursday's statement, the dreadful role of the trade union bureaucracy is laid out in all its horror. National trade union leaders in France earn only a fraction of the bloated salaries of British trade union leaders, but their position as professional negotiators still leads them to aim at calming any revolt. The seriousness of the crisis and the mass support for the movement would have justified a call for a one-day general strike—there would have been nothing utopian about such a call—and the union leaders' action shows the dire need

for alternative leadership within the working class.

Left trade union confederations like the powerful CGT, however, have contradictory positions. As well as signing the joint statement, the national CGT leadership brought out another press release two hours later denouncing police violence and calling for a large rise in the minimum wage, and their leader Philippe Martinez recently declared that the CGT's job was to get everyone out on strike. Locally, trade unions have offered to organise protection for yellow vest demos against the police, and regional federations of the CGT have often taken a very radical line. The CGT has called for strike action nationally for 14 December.

The Radical Left

Radical and anti-capitalist socialist and left organisations have become more fully involved this week. In parliament, Mélenchon, president of the France Insoumise group of MPs (a group that believes in Democratic Socialism), made an impressive speech praising the Yellow Vest movement and predicting that the present government is on its way out. He is worth quoting:

"These are happy days we are living through, because at last France is in general rebellion against an unjust order which has survived for far too long. We have millions of people whom life had made invisible, in metropolitan France and in the overseas territories, and now these millions, the people, are moving onto the stage of the History of France. As an irony of history, this yellow vest has become in a way the new Phrygian bonnet of the French, who are abandoning resignation

and isolation, who are abandoning the idea of continuing with harsh suffering in dignified silence.”

Act Five

It is already a fine victory for our side that a mass of previously unpoliticised people have moved into action, and that a new generation of high school students have become involved in a struggle to change their lives. These are experiences which will help form the political and psychological forces which will be needed in future battles.

Understandably, some commentators have got a little carried away. France is not on the edge of a revolutionary situation or of a civil war. But the movement is on the rise, and very determined. One Parisian riot policeman who was interviewed complained “people used to be afraid of us, but they aren’t any more. They’re aiming at us, because we’re symbols of the state”.

It is crucial that we make the state’s leaders regret what was done to the schoolkids at Mantes-la-Jolie, and if we do, there is plenty of hope for radical social change.

Letters to Editor

Improve Wages and Working Conditions of Mid-Day Meal Cooks

Bharat Dogra

Several hundred thousand women are employed in cooking mid-day meals in our schools. At present the wage of a mid-day meal cook is a low Rs 1,250 per month or about Rs 41 per day. There should be a campaign to raise this wage. The mid-day meal worker cleans the kitchen, sometimes he/she is also asked to sweep other rooms as well, then an average MDM worker cooks for 50 to 100 children, cleans utensils and again cleans the kitchen before leaving. It is more or less a full-time job of great responsibility, and a wage of Rs 41 per day is just too inadequate.

Keeping in view the fact that mid-day meal cooks have an almost full working day job which requires continuous work of great responsibility, they should get the legal minimum wage. There should be adequate provisions in the budget for this. As an immediate step, the existing wage should at least be doubled.

Improving the mid-day-meal kitchen should be included in the wider sanitation programme as, if meal is not cooked in conditions of good sanitation, health of children will be adversely affected. A few model kitchens can be prepared, with many improvements from hygiene point of view, and authorities should be motivated to introduce these improvements in other areas. Cooks who adopt hygiene practices should be honoured to encourage them.

Obituary: K. P. Srivastva (1926 – 6 Nov. 2018)

Qurban Ali

Veteran journalist and freedom fighter K.P. Srivastva passed away on 6 November 2018 after a long illness, at his home in New Delhi. He was 93. During his student days in Lucknow University, he came in contact with leaders of the Congress Socialist Party, especially its tallest leaders, Acharya Narendra Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia, and became a socialist ideologically. As a student, he was imprisoned during the Quit India Movement of 1942.

He started journalism in 1942, the year of the Quit India Movement at a very tender age, and joined API, the Indian subsidiary of Reuters, which became the PTI in 1949. He rose to become an editor and retired in the late eighties.

K.P. Srivastva was President of the Press Association, Member of Parliament’s Press Gallery Committee and the Press Accreditation Committee of the Government of India. He is survived by his only daughter Indu Srivastava.

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Hind Mazdoor Sabha

Qurban Ali

In December 2018, HMS completes seventy years since its foundation in Calcutta in the newly independent India in 1948. Of course for the labour movement, seven decades are not too long a way and in that sense HMS has miles to go still. However, it is a matter of accomplishment for a national trade union center to have survived and grown without being a part of the political parties in a country like India where virtually every other central trade union organization is part of some political party or the other. From about 6 lakhs membership in 1948 to over 92 lakhs now and still growing, is no mean achievement. But the times ahead are tough. As it is, nearly 90% of the workforce in the country is unorganized, working in low paid, over worked jobs in dismal working conditions. As we move ahead, we need to stop and think - how do we build upon what we have? How do we face the challenges of the 21st century?

India, as we know, is undergoing significant politico-economic changes, led by the forces of economic liberalisation and globalisation. These changes are posing serious challenges to the trade union movement. At stake are hard won trade union rights of the workers. The role of State in India is undergoing major changes. What then should be the role of trade unions in this changing scenario? The time has come to sift from experience and draw from it the lessons for the future. This process needs to begin from looking back at the history of our own organisation, factors responsible for its growth

as well as our misjudgments that prevented us from growing as much as we should have. Most importantly, to assess how far the organisation has been able to follow up on its goals and the ideals for which it was established.

The birth of HMS:

It may be remembered that in 1947-48, apart from M. N. Roy inspired independent Indian Federation of Labour (IFL), there were two main central trade unions - the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) which was under the control of the Communist Party of India and the newly formed Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) which was set up at the behest of Congress nationalists and the Gandhians of Hindustan MazdoorSewakSangh in the Indian National Congress, the ruling Party. The Socialists in the Congress who broke away from Congress party in 1948, formed Hind MazdoorPanchayat (HMP).

This was a period of much turmoil as well as many hopes for the future of free India. This post 2nd World War period in India was marked by acute shortages, rising prices and spiraling unemployment. There was much turbulence in the industrial relations scene as workers were facing many hardships. As many as 16 million mandays were lost due to strikes in 1947 as discontent among the workers grew. The response of the two major central trade unions -AITUC and INTUC- was not acceptable to the socialists at that time. Mere militancy dictated by the needs of the communist party (as reflected by AITUC at that time)

or sub-servience to the government (as reflected by INTUC) was not meeting the needs of the workers. The socialists felt that the trade union movement could not be tied down to the needs of the political parties but must follow policies only in the interests of the Indian workers. This necessitated both cooperation with the development efforts of the country as also constructive opposition to the anti-labour, anti-employment policies of the government and the employers. This thinking led to the formation of Hind MazdoorSabha (HMS).

HMS was founded in Calcutta during the trade union conference from 24th to 26th December 1948. The conference was attended by the representatives of Indian Federation of Labour (IFL, founded in 1941), Hind MazdoorPanchayat (HMP, founded in mid 1948), unions from the Forward Block (Party set up by Sh. Subhash Chandra Bose) and leading independent trade unions at that time. Over 600 trade union leaders participated, representing 427 unions and a membership of over 600000 workers. There were leaders like Jay Prakash Narayan, Sibnath Banerjee, R.A. Khedgikar and Ms. Maniben Kara who represented the railway unions; Shri Dalvi and ShRamanujam attended on behalf of Post & Telegraph employees; Miners were represented by Basawan Singh and P.B. Sinha while Textile workers were represented by R.S. Ruikar, Anthony Pillai and P.S. Chinnadurai. There were also representatives of Government employees, Teachers, Commercial employees, Port & Docks, Printing & Paper, Tobacco, Plantations and Sugar. Although

HMS as an organisation was new, the men and women who founded it were veterans of the Indian trade union movement, most of who had been instrumental in the formation and growth of AITUC earlier. The Founding Conference elected Com. R.S. Ruikar as the first President, Com. Ashok Mehta as the General Secretary and Com. G.G. Mehta and V.S. Mathur as Secretaries. Ms. Maniben Kara and Com. T.S. Ramanujam were elected as Vice-Presidents of HMS and Com. R.A. Khedgikar as the Treasurer.

The members of the Working Committee included veteran leaders like - Jayaprakash Narayan, V.G. Dalvi, Ms. ArunaAsaf Ali, V.B. Karnik, Dinkar Desai, N.V. Phadke, M.V. Donde, Rajani Mukherjee, Haren Ghosh, Anthoni Pillai, P.S. Chinnadurai, Peter Alwares, A.M. Williams, Munshi Ahmed Din, Vinayak Kulkarni, Nibran Ch. Bora and Basawan Singh.

The formation of HMS represented the emergence of a new force in Indian trade union movement - that of unionists who believed in free, independent and democratic trade unionism. It represented independence of trade unions from the control of Government, Employers and Political Parties. It also represented a new thinking that role of trade unions is not only to oppose anti-labour policies of the government and employers but also to play a positive role in the development of industry to share gains from growth and of preparing & training workers to discharge their responsibilities as citizens (see HMS Manifesto for details).

The Early Years (1948 - 1956)

The history of HMS reflects the politico-socio-economic currents in the country and the reactions

of the different union leaders and constituent unions to these developments. Although HMS is philosophically and organizationally independent of the political parties, the diversity of political opinion often caused conflicts and pulls and pressures from different sides (especially from the Socialist and the Congress party), shaping in the process the history of HMS. In the 1950s, it was the developments (splits) in the Socialist Party that always had repercussions on HMS.

The decision of the Socialist Party in 1949 at the Patna Conference to widen its base and open its membership to different people and organizations which had faith in socialist principles and peaceful and democratic means for achieving the goals (democratic socialism) was not acceptable to a group led by Mrs. ArunaAsaf Ali, who left the party in 1951 and later joined the Communist Party.

The membership fell in 1952 not only because some leaders like Mrs. ArunaAsaf Ali and Com. B.D. Joshi left HMS to join Communist Party, taking away some of their unions to AITUC but also due to organizational overhaul. In 1952, HMS decided for organizational reasons to do away with those unions which were not functional in active sense and were not paying their membership dues to HMS. The unity of Socialists under Praja Socialist Party (PSP) in September 1952 however boosted HMS which improved its effectiveness in the trade union field. Within HMS, five unions of transport and dock workers in Bombay came together in January 1954, to form Transport and Dock Workers Union, Bombay, under the leadership of Com. P.D' Mello, which greatly expanded HMS organization and influence in the Port industry. HMS was also

represented in the Textile Working party and the Coal Working party in 1951, which were set up by Sh. GulzariLalNanda, the Minister for Labour and Rehabilitation - a very sincere man who genuinely wanted the well being of the workers and commanded much respect of the union leaders.

Major Struggles and Strikes:

During the 1950s, HMS faced a number of struggles and carried out many nationwide campaigns. Important among these are -

- * 1950 Textile Strike in Bombay, headed by Mill Mazdoor Sabha (MMS), over the issue of Bonus and collective bargaining rights of MMS and recognition through secret ballot. The strike involved over 200000 workers and lasted for 63 days leading to the acceptance of payment of bonus as deferred wage.
- * In 1952, HMS carried out a country wide campaign against the Labour Relations Bill and the Trade Unions Bill, both of which sought to impose unjustified curbs on trade unions and its activities. The whole of the trade union movement was against these black labour laws, which were finally dropped by the government.
- * 1954 Strike of Lodna Colliery workers in Jharia Coal fields in Bihar, over the issue of reinstatement of 250 workers as per the terms of agreement reached earlier and of recognition of HMS union. Over 7000 workers participated in the strike led by Com. Mahesh Desai, General Secretary of KoylaMazdoorPanchayat. Com. Mahesh Desai had to face murder trial concocted by the authorities in collusion with the Employers but the charges

were dropped after about 3 years under sustained campaign of HMS and its unions in a campaign led by Jayaprakash Narayan.

- * 116 days strike of 4000 sugar workers of Tilaknagar in Maharashtra led by Com. G.G. Mehta, the General Secretary of HMS at that time. HMS won four & half months Bonus and reinstatement in jobs of 600 workers.

Some of the other major strikes/struggles during this period were:

- December 1957 strike of 4000 workers of India Security Press, Nasik in Maharashtra, led by Com. R.A. Khedgikar for improvements in service and working conditions;
- 110 day strike from 11th April to 29th July 1958 of the workers of Premier Automobiles Ltd. in Bombay involving about 5000 workers, led by HMS affiliate Engineering Mazdoor Sabha over the issue of collective bargaining rights of the union. Management did not respect the code of discipline agreed to in the tripartite committee. Strike was withdrawn only after Sh. Gulzari Lal Nanda, Union Labour Minister intervened.
- Strike of about 2000 workers of the Coastal Shipping Companies in January, 1959 over dismissals and recruitment practices of the companies;
- Strike of Port & Dock workers on 16th June, 1958 in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Cochin, led by All India Port & Dock Workers Federation. Six workers died in Madras due to police firing. Strike called off after the Transport Minister assured to implement the Chaudhari

Committee Report.

Other major strikes during this period led by HMS were the strike of Buckingham & Carnatic Mills at Madras and Municipal workers strike led by Municipal Mazdoor Union in Bombay.

All of these strikes were conducted in disciplined and peaceful manner. In many other industries too strikes and protests were launched over the issue of non-recognition of and non bargaining with the HMS unions by the government or the employers who often favoured INTUC unions (such as in Premier Automobiles, Bikaner Gypsum Co., Orient Paper Mills in Orissa, Kirloskar Oil Engines Pune, Indian General Navigation & Railway Co. Calcutta, Bharat Sugar Mill, Bihar, etc). This was in breach of the Code of Discipline agreed to in the 16th ILC session.

In 1963, HMS Union in the Port & Dock of Goa succeeded after a bitter struggle and many arrests to end the Mukadam system of recruitment in Goa Docks.

At the same time Dock Workers Regulation of Employment Scheme came into effect due to the efforts of Transport & Dock Workers Union, Bombay. As a result workers were regularised and the Mukadam system was abolished.

1974 Railway Strike:

The Indian Railwaymen went on strike from 8th to 28th May 1974. HMS had heavy stakes in this strike since the zonal unions of western, northern and central railways were HMS affiliates. The main demands of the railway employees were that they should be considered as industrial workers, that their wages should be fixed in the same way as those of other industrial workers and as industrial workers, railway

employees should also be entitled to bonus. The strike was led by All India Railwaymen Federation, along with other railway unions all of which had been united for this struggle.

On 2nd May 1974, the day the negotiations were to start between AIRF leadership and the Railway Minister Mr. L.N. Misra, the authorities arrested AIRF President Mr. George Fernandes and his colleagues in Lucknow in the early dawn operations. The labour Minister appeared to be very ineffective during this period. This gave very clear indications that the Government was not interested in any negotiations, even when the all India Railway strike began on 8th May. HMS also took up the matter in the Asian Regional Organisation of ICFTU which extended support and sent a message to the Government of India requesting it to release the trade union leaders, start negotiations and stop victimisation of workers.

Victimisation of railway workers during the 1974 strike was quite ruthless- 46000 were dismissed, 9000 were suspended, 19000 were arrested and out of over 12 lakhs who participated in strike, 863000 employees suffered from break in service. Earlier on the eve of the strike, AITUC had also floated a new Railway Federation which later on at the instance of AITUC merged with AIRF. INTUC as usual played the role of opposing the strike. The growing economic crisis fuelled much discontent in the working class and students which led to Government imposing the infamous Emergency on 26th June 1975.

While the trade unions have played an important role in India's economic, social and political development over the last 50 years, the economic liberalisation and

Turned Out You Were Just Like Us

Fahmida Riaz

(Pakistani poet, human-rights activist and feminist, Fahmida Riaz, passed away at the age of 72 on November 22, 2018. We are publishing below the English translation of one of her oft-quoted nazms, "Tum bilkul hum jaise nikle".)

So it turned out you were just like us!
Where were you hiding all this time,
buddy?
That stupidity, that ignorance
we wallowed in for a century
Look, it arrived at your shores too!
Many congratulations to you!
Raising the flag of religion,
I guess now you'll be setting up
Hindu Raj?
You too will commence to muddle
everything up
You, too, will ravage your beautiful
garden.
You, too, will sit and ponder,
I can tell preparations are afoot,
Who is truly Hindu, who is not.
I guess you'll be passing fatwas
soon!
There, too, it will become hard to
survive.
There, too, you will sweat and bleed.
You'll barely make do joylessly.
You will gasp for air like us.
I used to wonder with such deep
sorrow,
And now, I laugh at the idea,
It turned out you were just like us!
We weren't two nations after all!
To hell with education and learning
Let's sing the praises of ignorance
Don't look at the potholes in your
path
Bring back instead the times of yore!
Practice harder till you master

the skill of always walking
backwards.
Let not a single thought of the
present
break your focus upon the past!
Repeat the same thing over and over
over and over,
Say only this:
How glorious was India in the past!
How sublime was India in days
gone by!
Then, dear friends, you will arrive
in heaven after all.
Yep. We've been there for a while
now.
Once you are there,
Once you're in the same hell-hole,
Keep in touch and tell us how it
goes!

globalisation policies at the turn of
century have posed a number of new
challenges before the Indian trade
union movement. Mere opposition
to change will not help; Trade
Union movement in India needs to
strengthen and expand its coverage
in times ahead. It is of paramount
importance to strengthen the Indian
trade union movement through -

- * forging Trade Union Unity,
- * expanding into unorganised
sectors,
- * improving trade union
communications,
- * increasing the information
collection activities, and
- * expansion of Education and
Training activities,
- * extending into new services
for the membership such as
social insurance, which the
unions are well placed to offer,
if only they could become more
professional;

It is time to reflect and take
stock. Trade union movement needs
to realise that workers interests
cannot be safeguarded by being
divided along political party lines. At
present in India, there is no political
party that stands for the policies that
will protect workers employment
and income rights, despite promises
to do so. In recent years we have
had the experience of governments
of all hues from left to right, all of
which have treaded the same path on
the economic policies front, while
doing nothing much to address the
workers genuine needs. It is our
house divided state of affairs in the
trade union movement that permits
this liberty to the political parties,
even the so called socialist parties.

In the 21st century India, if trade
Unions have to remain relevant
and strong enough to influence the
country's destiny, then there is no
alternative but to unite.

**Acharya Javadekar
A Satyagrahi Socialist**



G. P. Pradhan

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