

janata

Vol. 74 No. 15
May 5, 2019

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On May Day . . .

Gary Snyder

“Let’s drink a toast to all those farmers, workers, artists and intellectuals of the last 100 years who without thought of fame and profit . . . worked tirelessly in their dream of a worldwide socialist revolution, who believed and hoped that a new world was dawning and that their work would contribute to a society where one class does not exploit another, where one ethnic group or one nation does not try to expand itself over another, and where men and women live as equals. The people who nourished these

hopes and dreams were sometimes foolishly blind to the opportunism of their own leadership, and many were led to ideological absurdities, but the great majority of them selflessly worked for socialism with the best of hearts. . . . The failure of socialism is the tragedy of the 20th century and . . . we should honor the memory of those who struggled for the dream of what socialism might have been. And begin a new way again.”

(Gary Snyder is an American poet.)

The Capitalist Workday, the Socialist Workday

Michael A. Lebowitz

On May Day, there are four things that are worth remembering:

1. For workers, May Day does not celebrate a state holiday or gifts from the state but commemorates the struggle of workers from below.
2. The initial focus of May Day was a struggle for the shorter workday.
3. The struggle for the shorter workday is not an isolated

struggle but is the struggle against capitalist exploitation.

4. The struggle against capitalist exploitation is an essential part but not the only part of the struggle against capitalism.

What I am going to do in this talk today is to set out some ideas about the capitalist workday and the socialist workday which I hope can be useful in the current struggles around the world.

Transcript of a talk given in Venezuela on May Day.

The Capitalist Workday

What is the relation between the capitalist workday and exploitation? When workers work for capital, they receive a wage which allows them to purchase a certain amount of commodities. How much is that wage? There is nothing automatic about the wage level. It is determined by the struggles of workers against capital.

Those commodities which form the worker's wage contain a certain quantity of labour, and those hours of labour on a daily basis are often described as the "necessary labour" of the worker—the hours of labour necessary for workers to produce the commodities they consume on a daily basis.

But, in capitalism workers do not just work their hours of necessary labour. Because they have been compelled to sell their ability to work to the capitalist in order to survive, the capitalist is in the position to demand they work longer than this. And the difference between their hours of necessary labour and the total work that workers perform for capital is surplus labour—the ultimate source of capital's profits. In other words, capitalist profits are based on the difference between the workday and necessary labour; they are based upon surplus labour, unpaid labour, exploitation.

So, the more the capitalist is able to drive up the workday, the greater the exploitation and the greater the profit. Marx commented that "the capitalist is constantly tending to reduce wages to their physical minimum and extend the working day to its physical maximum". How true. Marx continued, though, and noted "while the working man constantly presses in the opposite direction". In other words, class

struggle: workers struggle to increase wages and to reduce the workday; they struggle to reduce exploitation by capitalists.

Of course, your workday is more than just the time spent between clocking in and clocking out. There is the time it takes you to get to work, the time it takes to buy the food you need to survive, the time to prepare that food—all this is really necessary labour and part of the worker's workday. But since this labour is free to the capitalist, since it is not a cost for him, it is therefore invisible to him. So, when the capitalists want to drive down necessary labour by driving down wages (or by increasing productivity relative to wages), it is not the labour he does not pay for that he wants to reduce. Rather, he wants as much free labour as possible, as much unpaid labour as possible.

It is not surprising that workers want to reduce their unpaid labour for capital and do so by struggling to reduce the capitalist workday. But it is not only the unpaid labour in the workday that is a burden for workers; it is also the paid labour that they are compelled to do for capital. In other words, the problem is not only exploitation. It is the way that capitalist production deforms working people. In the capitalist workplace, the worker works for the goals of capital, under the control of capital and with an organisation of production which is designed not to permit workers to develop their capabilities but, rather, has the single goal of profits. "All means for the development of production", Marx stressed about capitalism, "distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him" and "alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process". In other words,

the process of capitalist production cripples us as human beings. Life in the capitalist workplace is a place where we are commanded from above, where we are mere tools that capital manipulates in order to get profits.

That is why we want to reduce the capitalist workday. That is why we cannot wait to escape. It is not only the exploitation, the unfairness and the injustice in the distribution of income. Time away from capitalist production appears as the only time in which we can be ourselves, a time when our activity can be free time, time for the full development of the individual.

This is what it necessarily looks like within capitalism. But we have to recognise that so many of our ideas within capitalism are infected. The most obvious example is the phenomenon of consumerism—we must buy all those things! What we own defines us. The socialist answer, though, is not that everyone should own the same things—in other words, equalisation of alienation; rather, the socialist idea is to end the situation in which we are owned and defined by things.

The battle of ideas, which is central to the struggle for socialism, is based on the alternative conception of socialism. Its focus is not to reform this or that idea that has developed within capitalism but, rather, to replace ideas from capitalism with conceptions appropriate to socialism. So, is our idea of the workday within capitalism infected? And, can we get any insights into the workday by thinking about the workday within socialism?

The Socialist Workday

Firstly, what do we mean by socialism? The goal of socialists has

always been the creation of a society which would allow for the full development of human potential. It was never seen as a society in which some people are able to develop their capabilities and others are not. That was Marx's point in stating clearly that the goal is "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." And this is clearly the point, too, of Venezuela's Bolivarian constitution where it stresses in article 20 that "everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality" and in the explicit recognition in article 299 that the goal of a human society must be that of "ensuring overall human development".

In contrast to capitalist society, where "the worker exists to satisfy the need" of capital to expand, Marx envisioned a socialist society where the wealth that workers have produced "is there to satisfy the worker's own need for development". So, what is the nature of the workday in a society oriented toward ensuring overall human development?

Let us begin by talking about necessary labour—quantitatively. There is the labour which is contained in the products we consume daily—just like before. To this, however, we need to add the labour that workers want to devote toward expanding production in the future. In socialism, there are no capitalists who compel the performance of surplus labour and invest a portion of the profits in the search for future profits. Rather, workers themselves in their workplaces and society decide if they want to devote time and effort to expanding satisfaction of needs in the future. If they make this decision, then this labour is not surplus to their needs;

it forms part of what they see as their necessary labour. Thus, the concept of necessary labour changes here.

In a socialist society, further, we recognise explicitly that part of our necessary labour is labour within the household. In other words we acknowledge that our workday does not begin after we leave the household but includes what we do within the household. Article 88 of the Bolivarian constitution recognises the importance of this labour when it notes that labour within the household is "economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth".

The concept of necessary labour and our workday within a socialist society also includes the labour which is required to self-govern our communities. After all, if socialism is about the decisions we make democratically in our communities, then the time we need to do this is part of our necessary labour. Similarly, if socialism is about creating the conditions in which we are all able to develop our potential, then the process of education and of developing our capabilities is also activity which is necessary.

When we think about the socialist workday, in short, we think about the workday differently. Our view of the quantity of necessary labour, for example, is not distorted by the capitalist perspective of treating as necessary only that labour for which capital must pay. That is the difference between the political economy of capital and the political economy of the working class. From the perspective of workers, we recognise as necessary labour all the labour that is necessary for "the worker's own need for development".

But the difference is not only

quantitative. In socialism, the workday cannot be a day in which you receive orders from the top (even in strategic industries). Rather, it is only through our own activity, our practice and our protagonism that we can develop our capabilities. Article 62 of Venezuela's constitution makes that point in its declaration that participation by people is "the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective". In other words, in every aspect of our lives (the traditional workplace, the community, the household), democratic decision making is a necessary characteristic of the socialist workday; through workers' councils, communal councils, student councils, family councils, we produce ourselves as new socialist subjects.

Thus, when we look at the workday from the perspective of socialism, we see that the simple demand for reducing the workday is a demand from within capitalism. Its message is simple—end this horror! This is an "infected" conception of the workday. It starts from a view of labour as so miserable that the only thing you can think of doing is reducing and ending it.

When we think about building socialism, however, we recognise that the demand is to transform the workday—to recognise all parts of our workday explicitly and to transform that day qualitatively. Rather than only "free time" being time in which we can develop, from the perspective of socialism it is essential to make the whole day time for building human capacities.

In short, there are two ways of looking at the demand for the reduced workday: one way talks simply about a shorter work week

and thus longer weekend vacations; in contrast, a second way stresses the reduction of the traditional workday in order to provide the time on a daily basis for education for self-managing, for our work within the household and our work within our communities. In other words, it is the demand to redefine and transform our workday.

The first of these is simply a reform within capitalism. For socialists, May Day should be the day to struggle for the whole worker's day, to struggle for the socialist workday.

(Michael A. Lebowitz is professor emeritus of economics at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.)

Glorious Tradition of Sacrifices

Sandeep Pandey

The freedom struggle of this country witnessed a band of youth inspired by a zeal willing to put their lives at stake. Number of them were arrested, tried in court and executed by the British. Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Thakur Roshan Singh, Rajendra Nath Lahiri, Shivaram Rajguru, Sukhdev Thapar, Jatindra Nath Das are common household names in India of revolutionaries who sacrificed their lives. Most of them were hanged. Chandrashekhar Azad shot himself dead to escape arrest and Jatindra Nath Das died after a 63 day hunger strike inside Lahore prison, where Bhagat Singh also fasted with him, for better living conditions for political prisoners.

Post-independence, Potti Sreeramulu, a freedom fighter, died after fasting for 58 days in Chennai for a separate Andhra state for Telugu speaking people in 1952. Even though this demand had popular support, the reason why Jawaharlal Nehru government eventually agreed to it, Potti Sreeramulu's effort was an individual decision.

Probably one of the most epic fasts in recent times is the one by Irom Sharmila, who fasted for 16 long years in Manipur, while being force fed, demanding repeal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Her decision to go on fast and to withdraw was again individual. Fortunately, she survived the long ordeal.

All the above mentioned revolutionaries had staked their lives for a greater cause. Today, we are

witnessing a similar phenomenon among saints for the conservation of river Ganga. Most of these are associated with Matri Sadan Ashram in Haridwar. 60 fasts unto death have been organised by this Ashram so far, in which two saints, Swami Nigmanand and Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, who was earlier known as Professor G.D. Agrawal at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, died after fasting for 115 and 112 days, respectively, in 2011 and 2018. Brahmachari Atmabodhanand is currently sitting on fast for over 190 days and is going to give up water on 3rd May, 2019. Baba Nagnath had died in 2014 in Varanasi after 114 days of fast for the same demand. Swami Gokulanand, who sat on the first fast against illegal mining in Ganga in 1998 along with Swami Nigmanand on behalf of Matri Sadan was murdered in 2003. The head of Matri Sadan, Swami Shivanand, who has himself fasted against illegal mining in the past, has taken a decision that one saint after another will sit on fast until the demand of Professor G.D. Agrawal to let Ganga flow uninterrupted and clean is met by the government. While the Manmohan Singh government had agreed to some demands of Professor G.D. Agrawal when he fasted five times, the present government has chosen to ignore the sacrifices of saints.

It is a pity that most of the people who put their lives at stake were not able to generate enough mass support for themselves. That is the reason they died while fasting. They

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received very limited support from society even though the cause that they espoused for was public and would benefit the society at large. Except for Mahatma Gandhi and Anna Hazare, whose fasts attracted public attention and people were moved by them, most of the people who fasted unto death received a very feeble response from society. In fact, the society was cruelly insensitive towards them.

However, these fasts have proved that when there is darkness everywhere, when people and organisations are willing to make compromises for petty gains or are soaked in corruption and when most of the society is either submissive or afraid of authorities, there are people who come out, take a stand and face the repressive regimes. They become the hope for society and continue to inspire generations. They are icons of struggle against injustice and uphold values of truth, integrity, simplicity and adherence to universal principles for the benefit of the entire human race.

The above mentioned people who gave up their lives were the most intelligent, committed and finest human beings of our society. Their untimely demise was society's loss. This is irrespective of the fact that the great souls who made the highest sacrifice never bothered about their own lives. But what is most unfortunate is that whereas nobody expected any mercy from the governments of the day, even the larger society didn't do enough to save their lives. We are all guilty in this.

The society will always remember them for their ideals. These martyrs will continue to inspire new idealists. They will probably be never enough in number

to change the society for the better but will remind the lesser mortals like us that there are higher ideals to live for. We must not keep ourselves tied up in smaller things as to lose the sight of a bigger objective of a humane society, much less bother ourselves with unscrupulous things. If we cannot do any good for the society, we must not at least cause

harm to it. This is the least we can learn from these great souls who gave up their lives for our cause.

(Sandeep Pandey is a social activist, Magsaysay Award recipient, Ph.D. from the University of California, and has taught at several prominent educational institutions in the country.)

Surgical Strike Against Science and Scholarship

Ramachandra Guha

A term greatly beloved of the Narendra Modi government is 'surgical strike'. It was first invoked in September 2016, after a cross-border raid undertaken by the Indian army on camps in Pakistan. Notably, the army itself did not use the term; it was the prime minister and his propagandists who did. In November of the same year, the prime minister's sudden, cataclysmic withdrawal of the Rs 1000 and Rs 500 currency notes was also termed a 'surgical strike' (against black money) by spokespersons of the ruling party.

The surgical strike against terror was ineffective. For our security forces have continued to battle incursions by militants from Pakistan on a more or less daily basis. The surgical strike against black money was counterproductive. While demonetization failed to eliminate black money, it did eliminate—by sending into bankruptcy—many small enterprises whose transactions were conducted partly in cash. It also hurt millions of farmers who suddenly found themselves without the money required to buy seeds or fertilizers for their economic survival.

There is, however, one set of surgical strikes conducted by the present regime about whose efficacy there can be no argument. Since May 2014, the Modi government has waged an almost continuous war against the intellect, by wilfully undermining, one by one, our best universities and research institutes. These attempts have been extremely successful, leading to a loss of morale and credibility within these institutions, which are rapidly losing the status they once enjoyed in India and the world.

The contempt with which the current prime minister holds scholars and scholarship is manifest in the cabinet ministers he has chosen in these spheres. The two HRD ministers he has thus far appointed have absolutely no background in education or research; nor any interest in listening to experts in these fields. They have, sometimes, taken their cue directly from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, as witness the appointment of sanghi ideologues with zero scholarly pedigree as the heads of the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Indian Council of Social Science

Research, respectively. At other times, they have taken their cue from the RSS's student front, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, as witness the unrelenting hostility expressed by the HRD ministry towards two of our finest public universities, the Hyderabad Central University and the Jawaharlal Nehru University—in each case prompted by the ABVP, which is desperate to make inroads into institutions whose student bodies have not been particularly receptive to its propaganda in the past.

Some right-wing ideologues claim that all this is merely by way of course-correction—that in the past these universities were dominated by foreign-inspired Marxist ideologues who are now being replaced by swadeshi patriots. This argument would hold some water if the Modi government's war on the intellect was restricted to the social sciences and the humanities. But it is not; this is a war that has wholeheartedly taken on the natural sciences as well. The lead has come from the very top, with the prime minister himself claiming that the ancient Indians invented plastic surgery as well as in-vitro fertilization. Further, he has appointed as his minister for science and technology a man who believes that “every modern Indian achievement is a continuation of our ancient scientific achievement”, and, indeed, that the Vedas anticipated the theories of Albert Einstein.

These claims by our S&T Minister were made not in private conversation, nor in an RSS shakha, but in the Indian Science Congress. In recent years, this annual event, supposed to showcase the latest trends in modern science, has instead seen presentations by the minister's ideological kinsmen claiming that

the ancient Hindus invented the airplane as well as stem-cell research (the Kauravas apparently being the first test-tube babies).

All this would be funny were it not so tragic. Since the visionary Jamsetji Tata helped found the Indian Institute of Science more than a century ago, scientific research in this country has been guided by reason and experimentation—rather than by superstition or myth. Institutes such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the National Centre for Biological Sciences have a well deserved international reputation. Meanwhile, the IITs have played a critical role in maintaining a decent standard of technical education, with their graduates contributing to the country's economic progress in a multitude of ways. The hocus-pocus, mumbo jumbo, now promoted by Union ministers (and encouraged by the prime minister), has caused grievous and possibly irreparable damage to scientific thinking in India.

Critics of this government's war on the intellect tend to contrast our present prime minister with our first prime minister. Thus, writing in the Deccan Herald of February 7, 2019, Prasenjit Chowdhury remarks: “Nehru left India with the world's second-largest pool of trained scientists and engineers. Men like Homi Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai built the platform under Nehru's tutelage for Indian [scientific] accomplishments . . . Modi, in his attempt to negate Nehru who was noted for his vision to inspire a scientific temper, has chosen instead to mainstream pseudo-scientific orthodoxies.”

I would add that that the Modi government has also put at risk India's high quality traditions of

social science research. Contra sanghi ideologues, Marxism was merely one of several intellectual currents in the Nehruvian academy. Thus D.R. Gadgil and André Béteille were the Bhabha and Sarabhai of their fields, economics and sociology, respectively. Both were staunch liberals, as well as anti-Marxist. Gadgil and Béteille (and others like them) inspired serious research on such subjects as inequality, education, health and rural development, enabling the framing of public policies based on evidence rather than ideology. This too has now been placed at risk by the sanghi infiltration of our academic institutions.

When it comes to promoting science and scholarship, the Modi government is markedly inferior even to the first National Democratic Alliance government. Quite a few of the ministers chosen by Atal Bihari Vajpayee had a high regard for learning and expertise. The HRD minister in the first NDA government, M.M. Joshi, had a PhD in physics himself. His cabinet colleagues, George Fernandes, Yashwant Sinha and L.K. Advani, were all keen, not to say obsessive, readers of books on history and public policy. Jaswant Singh and Arun Shourie not only read serious books but wrote them as well. By contrast, I do not believe there is a single minister in this government (the prime minister not excepted) who has a deep interest in history, literature or science. I wonder if any of them read more than the daily newspaper; some may not even venture further than Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter. Little wonder then that when appointing vice-chancellors of universities or directors of research institutes, they

choose third-rate ideologues rather than first-rate scholars.

The Modi government's malevolent attitude to knowledge has not damaged this writer's career, since I left the academy 25 years ago. Yet it has left me with an abiding sense of sorrow. For I was entirely educated in India, in public universities whose autonomy was (at the time I was within them) respected and even encouraged. Now, as an unaffiliated freelancer myself, I have seen my scholarly friends and colleagues suffer, personally as well as professionally, from these politically motivated attacks on the institutions to which they have devoted their own lives.

A year after Narendra Modi came to power in New Delhi, I wrote that his government was the "most anti-intellectual" this country has seen. Since then, the Modi regime has done nothing to make me reconsider or reverse this judgment; and many things do confirm and consolidate it. From the moment it came to power, the government led by Modi has carried out a series of surgical strikes on science and scholarship, which (tragically) have been far more effective than those conducted against terrorism or black money.

By so systematically undermining our finest institutions that produce knowledge and breed innovation, the Modi government has gravely undermined the nation's social and economic future. Indians now living as well as Indians yet unborn will bear the costs of this savage, unrelenting, war on the intellect.

(Ramachandra Guha is an Indian historian and a much acclaimed biographer of Mahatma Gandhi.)

No, Mr Modi, Ram Manohar Lohia Would Not have been Proud of BJP Government – He was an Anti-Fascist

Ruchira Gupta

On March 26, Narendra Modi claimed in a blog post that Gandhian socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia would have been proud of the BJP government. Perhaps the prime minister is not aware that Lohia was ferociously anti-fascist, anti-imperialist and anti-hierarchy. He also rejected authoritarianism in all its forms.

Lohia was a PhD student in Berlin between the crucial years of 1931 and 1933 that saw the rise of fascism in Germany.

When he returned to India, the first article he wrote was titled "Hitlerism".

In the article, published in *The Hindu* on March 25, 1933, he expressed his concern about how "personal assaults by the Storm Troopers on their adversaries" had decimated the Opposition. The *Sturmabteilung*, also referred to as stormtroopers, was a paramilitary group of the Nazi Party that played an important role in Hitler's rise to power.

The Reichstag fire

Lohia defended his thesis on February 25, 1933, three days after Hermann Goering, then a minister without a portfolio in Hitler's cabinet, set up an auxiliary police force staffed with stormtroopers to attack members of other parties, dissidents, communists, feminists and, of course, Jews and Romas. Hitler had been Chancellor of

Germany for almost two months at that time.

On February 27, 1933, the German Parliament building or Reichstag went up in flames after an arson attack suspected to have been carried out by Hitler's stormtroopers. The next day, Hitler used the fire to consolidate his power through an emergency decree that said:

"Restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press; on the rights of assembly and association; and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications and warrants for house searches, orders for confiscations as well as restrictions on property, are also permissible beyond the legal limits otherwise prescribed."

Lohia, then 23 years old, was witness to the first big Nazi roundup that followed. Truckloads of stormtroopers roared through the streets of Germany, bursting in on the hangouts of liberals, socialists and communists, barging into private homes. Thousands of communists, social democrats, feminists, trade unionists and liberals were taken into what was described as "protective custody", only to be tortured.

Lessons from Germany

During his three years in Germany, Lohia saw how Hitler won over big business and exploited the political haggling between

the communists, socialists and conservatives to gain power.

German Chancellor Heinrich Bruening, who was seeking an end to war reparations, had proposed that the huge estates of bankrupt aristocrats be divided up and given to peasants. He issued a decree banning the SA (Sturmabteilung) and SS (Schutzstaffel) all across Germany in April, 1932. The Schutzstaffel, another paramilitary squad, were originally Hitler's bodyguards but later became the elite guard of the Reich.

Within a month, under pressure from business families and warring political parties, Bruening was removed from office by President Paul von Hindenberg. By June 15, the ban on the SA and SS was lifted.

Lohia wrote in *The Hindu*: "Financial help from capital and heavy industry and Herr Thyssen and Hugenberg controlling iron and coal industries of Germany being in active sympathy with Nazis, has been of the greatest assistance to the [Nazi] party . . . For though the National Socialist programme should have Socialism in it, on the basis of its name, it contains instead the assurance that private property shall exist under Nazi regime . . ."

Lohia was repulsed by the changing atmosphere in the universities. He wrote: "It was one of my most common experiences that otherwise educated and cultured German students expressed their glee even upon personal assaults by the Storm Troopers on their adversaries".

Lohia must have witnessed with pain, how one of his favourite professors, Hermann Oncken, "to whom many like me of the Berlin university owe the taste for history", was being hounded by his pro-Nazi

students in collaboration with the new administration.

Walter Frank, one of Oncken's former students, an unscrupulous Nazi upstart, accused his old teacher of distortion in an article. This gave the Nazis the pretext to suddenly retire the great scholar from his professorship in 1935.

Lohia, however, took forward the teachings of the famous "socialist of the classroom". Lohia was sympathetic to his teacher's affinity to the founder of German Social Democracy, Ferdinand Lassalle, whose political philosophy, based on Hegel's teachings, was to have a universal outlook and to bridge the abyss between the state and the working class.

Understanding fascism

Lohia had gained firsthand insights into the link between anti-rational mysticism and fascism in Europe during his time in Germany.

One of Lohia's professors, the German philosopher, Max Dessoir, was an amateur magician and parapsychologist quoted by the likes of Freud. His lectures provided students like Lohia insights into how the fascists used magic and irrational mysticism to influence the sub-conscious memory.

Dessoir's article, *Psychology of the Art of Conjuring*, was banned by the Nazis. Dessoir was also forbidden from teaching. The excuse was that he was "quarter-Jewish".

Lohia must have found the conditions in Germany unbearable and so he decided to leave Germany just a few weeks after passing his PhD, without even waiting to pick up the actual degree itself.

On his return to India, he went to work for the Indian National Congress in Allahabad at Jawaharlal

Nehru's invitation, and promptly joined the party's socialist caucus.

Lohia, Nehru and all the socialist leaders were opposed to the anti-rational mysticism of some of the members of the Indian National Congress. Both had a deep understanding of fascism and aversion to it.

Lohia stayed in Anand Bhawan, Nehru's home in Allahabad, for the next few years. During that time, he edited the party's monthly paper, the *Inquilab*, and contributed several articles to the magazine, *Congress Socialist*.

Three years on, in 1936, a 46-year-old Nehru asked Lohia, who was then 26 years old, to start the foreign cell of the Congress. The first pamphlet that Lohia wrote as secretary of the party's foreign department was titled, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, with a foreword by Nehru. Both leaders must have surely discussed the importance of laying out this treatise at a time when the party was being built. By then, Nehru had already been jailed by the British eight times for a cumulative total of more than six years. Lohia was yet to begin his jail terms.

Lohia on civil liberties

Modi has obviously not read this pamphlet in which Lohia wrote: "The persecution of racial minorities is obviously a reflection of unequal laws, as also unequal dispensation of justice and is, therefore, an attack on the civil liberties of a section of citizens."

Or when he explained that,

"On the ruins of the Bastille [the notorious French prison] was reared the imposing structure of civil liberties . . . Bastilles, of one type or the other, had been built to frighten people into submission and

acceptance of conditions as they obtained. When, finally the peoples had gathered sufficient strength to smash the state and its economic and social laws, they overthrew the Bastilles . . . To restrict, therefore, the factual authority of the State, all manners of trenches should be dug and citadels fortified in defence of people's freedom. The agitation for civil liberties is such a trench and a citadel."

Modi and his cohort have certainly not noticed Lohia's views on lynching in the same pamphlet. He wrote:

"In Alabama, the Courts and the State administration are ridden by race-hatred and the fiendish desire legally or illegally to lynch Negroes. The Negroes are underprivileged and live under the dictatorial rule of their economic masters, the former slave-owners of the South."

In 1951, on a tour of the American South, Lohia convinced officials of the Highlander Folk School, the Tennessee retreat where many civil rights activists learned to confront oppression, to include civil disobedience in the curriculum.

Four years after Lohia's visit, Rosa Parks, a seamstress from Montgomery, Alabama, who attended the Highlander course, engaged in her own Gandhian act of civil disobedience by refusing to give up her seat on a city bus to a white passenger.

Parks' single act of defiance launched movements across America to end public segregation and led to the 381-day long Montgomery bus boycott, during which African Americans refused to travel on the city's buses to protest against segregated seating. The bus boycott brought Gandhian civil disobedience to the attention of Martin Luther

King Jr.

American attorney and civil rights activist Harris Wofford, who was a friend of Lohia, later said: "I've been thinking a lot lately about causal chains. If I hadn't taken Ram Manohar Lohia to Highlander, there wouldn't have been a Rosa Parks who went to jail; there wouldn't have been a Martin Luther King to put in jail; and there wouldn't have been a phone call to Coretta [Scott King] for [John F] Kennedy to make. If you remove just one link from the chain, even one that seems insignificant, you can change the whole course of history."

Modi either fails to understand Lohia foundationally, or, as the

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is wont to do, is deliberately appropriating leaders who have played a significant role in building India, since the RSS has a paucity of such leaders.

Lohia died in 1967 at the age of 57. He had devoted his short life to laying the foundation of democratic socialist politics. His submission of a no-confidence vote against his erstwhile mentor, Nehru, in 1963, stemmed from his commitment to establishing a robust Opposition, a cornerstone for any democracy.

(Ruchira Gupta is a feminist campaigner and visiting professor at New York University.)

If War Is an Industry, How Can There Be Peace in a Capitalist World?

Vijay Prashad

On 26 April 1937, twelve bombers of the German Condor Legion and the Italian Aviazione Legionaria flew low over the Basque country of Spain in the midst of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). They tore down over the small town of Guernica, where they let loose their fiery arsenal. Almost two thousand people died in this defenceless town. Noel Monk of the *Daily Express* (London) was one of the first reporters to enter the town, hours after the bombers dropped their ordinance. In *Eyewitness* (1955), Monk wrote, "A sight that haunted me for weeks was the charred bodies of several women and children huddled together in what had been the cellar of a house. It had been a refugio (refuge)". Pablo Picasso, the artist, was so moved by news of the fascist bombing raid on this town that

he painted his most powerful work—*Guernica* (1937)—which now hangs in Madrid's Reina Sofia.

At the entrance of the United Nations Security Council in New York City hangs a tapestry of Picasso's *Guernica* that had been made by the weaver Jacqueline de la Baume Dürrbach in 1955. When US Secretary of State Colin Powell came to the UN in early 2003 to make his—false—comments about weapons of mass destruction about Iraq, the UN staff covered the tapestry with a blue cloth. In 1923, Picasso told Marius de Zayas, "art is a lie that makes us realise truth". The lies that led to the US war on Iraq could not be told with *Guernica* as backdrop.

Lies lead to war and then lies are needed to cover up the horrors of war. Over the past few years, the

International Criminal Court (ICC) had diligently begun to investigate war crimes in Afghanistan conducted by the armed forces of the United States of America, Afghanistan and the Taliban. The ICC's special prosecutor Fatou Bensouda was convinced that there is adequate evidence for the ICC to move the investigation along (including evidence provided by *Wikileaks* from various US army secret investigations). But the Trump administration, in the mode of the mafia, put immense pressure on the ICC. First, US National Security Adviser John Bolton threatened to sanction the judges and lawyers at the court and then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denied Bensouda a visa to come to New York City to deliver her report to the UN Security Council. On 12 April, therefore, a pre-trial bench of the ICC decided to stop the investigation. They said that an investigation into US war crimes in Afghanistan "would not serve the interests of justice". So it goes.

It has become impossible to hold states to account. The ICC cannot move on powerful states, such as the United States and its allies (notably Israel). No other avenue remains open to the victims of permanent wars. They will march for justice, but they will get little attention. In 2011, Haji Bismillah's son was killed by a US helicopter strike in Nangalam (Afghanistan). "My son Wahidullah's head was missing", he said with great sadness. "I only recognised him from his clothes."

Global military spending is over \$2 trillion, with the United States by itself spending almost half this amount. Total US military spending is now at \$989 billion. This number includes not only the formal expenditure on the US

military, but also expenditure on the Veteran's Administration, the Department of Energy, the National Nuclear Security Administration, the Cybersecurity component of the Department of Justice, Homeland Security and the military aspects of the State Department. It does not include the immense secret budget of the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency. Add these up and the US military budget is already over \$1 trillion, as the noted US socialist magazine *Monthly Review* found in 2007. The United States spends more on its military than the next nine highest-spending countries combined: China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, India, France, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and South Korea. 'Security' or 'deterrence' are not the main aims of such formidable military spending. A world awash with weapons leads to tragedies, such as the recent massacre in Sri Lanka, where military-grade explosives were used in the terrible murder of over three hundred and fifty innocent people.

Focus on the arms industry is sporadic, with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and others like it lonely in their work. Recent reports from SIPRI show that the volume of arms transfers—a major part of the business of the arms trade—has been rising over the years, with the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China as the biggest exporters of weapons (they account for 75% of all world arms sales). The United States, by itself, sells 36% of the world's arms—with a focus on combat aircraft, short-range cruise missiles and ballistic missiles and guided bombs. The top ten arms companies in the world are:

1. Lockheed Martin (\$44.9 billion) [USA]
2. Boeing (\$26.9 billion) [USA]
3. Raytheon (\$23.9 billion) [USA]
4. BAE Systems (\$22.9 billion) [UK]
5. Northrop Grumman (\$22.4 billion) [USA]
6. General Dynamics (\$19.5 billion) [USA]
7. Airbus Group (\$11.3 billion) [Europe]
8. Thales (\$9 billion) [France]
9. Leonardo (\$8.9 billion) [Italy]
10. Almaz-Antey (\$8.6 billion) [Russia]

Why do governments spend such a vulgar amount on weapons? In his monumental *Grundrisse* (1857), Karl Marx made the offhand, but accurate remark, "The impact of war is self-evident, since economically it is exactly the same as if the nation were to drop a part of its capital into the ocean." A permanent war economy is a waste, even if there are massive profits to be made by these warfare companies. So much can be done with \$2 trillion—a mere \$30 billion per year to end world hunger, as the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation noted in 2008. Last year, the UN began a campaign to raise \$10 billion to eradicate illiteracy. But even these meagre funds have been impossible to raise, the promise of 'billions into trillions' from the much-heralded public-private partnerships falling flat. There is always money for war, but never enough money to build the scaffolding for peace.

There is always the illusion that military spending is for security, when it appears to be more for profit. The entire industry is lubricated with bribes. Joe Roeber of Transparency International said that the arms trade is "hard-wired for corruption". "In 1997, I was told in Washington that

a mid-nineties report by the CIA concluded”, he wrote, that “arms trade corruption then accounted for 40–45% of the total corruption in world trade.” The national security argument, Roeber suggested, “throws a veil of secrecy around arms deals”, whose scale is so large that even small percentages of bribes make for large dollar amounts. Bribery is normal, the deals that are revealed are startling—bribes running from \$300 million (the South African–BAE deal from 1997–98) to \$8 billion (the Saudi–BAE deal from 1985–2007).

A few days ago, I joined a group of Iraqis (such as the writer Haifa Zangana and Thuraiya Muhammed of Tadamun: Iraqi women solidarity), journalists who covered the Iraq war and those who led solidarity campaigns for the Iraqis in signing the following note:

*Thank You, Julian Assange.
Thank You, Chelsea Manning,*

For exposing the human rights violations, criminality and horrors of US war on Iraq.

For Wikileaks that told us the truth about what was actually happening.

For providing us with The Iraq War Logs that would help us, in the near future, to hold those responsible for launching the war of aggression on Iraq as war criminals.

We had in mind the terrible bombardment of Iraqi society and civilisation. We had in mind Chelsea Manning, sitting in a prison cell, refusing to testify against Julian Assange. We had in mind Julian Assange, who is in Belmarsh prison, 20 kilometres from the headquarters of BAE systems (Britain’s main arms dealer).

And we had in mind Ola Bini, who is in El Inca prison in Quito (Ecuador), who has no role in any of this but seems to be collateral damage for the frustration of the ruling elites that their mendacity was revealed by the Afghan War Logs and the Iraq War Logs and so many more leaks.

It is not what is in these Logs that bothers the powerful, whose indignation is reserved for those brave people who expose their crimes and call them to account. A Gestapo officer barged into Picasso’s apartment in Paris. There was a photograph of Guernica on the wall. The Gestapo officer asked if Picasso had done the painting. “No”, Picasso replied. “You did.”

(Vijay Prashad is the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the Chief Correspondent for Globetrotter.)

Argentina Mobilises Against Government Policies in National Strike

Tanya Wadhwa

On April 30, as part of the National Strike, hundreds of thousands of workers, small and medium scale businesspersons and social leaders mobilised across Argentina against the economic policies of the government. “We have no other way. Plan to Fight. General Strike. Economic policy must change,” they chanted.

In Buenos Aires, over 200,000 marched to the Plaza de Mayo. The protesting workers interrupted traffic between the Crovara and General Paz avenues. The La Noria bridge and Pueyrredón bridge were also blockaded.

The strike affected transportation services the most. All the subway and metro lines were shut. Some

80 bus lines and several trains did not operate. In case of airlines, no domestic or international airline operated, except for the Flybondi. Bank workers, public administrators as well as university professors joined the strike. The attention in public hospitals was similar to that on a Sunday.

The National Strike was called by over 30 different working sector and workers’ movements, including the Trade Union Front for the National Model (FSMN), the Federal Workers’ Movement (CFT), the Argentine Workers’ Central Union (CTA) and the Argentine Workers’ Central Union-Autonomous (CTA-A).

The central agenda of all trade unions in Argentina today, whether

agricultural, banking, educational or transportation, is to fight against rampant inflation, mass dismissals, loss of purchasing power and growing poverty. For the last several months, the Argentinian working class has been continuously mobilising to reject the harsh economic adjustments and the increase in tariffs of basic public services, imposed by the right-wing government of the Cambiemos coalition, led by president Mauricio Macri. Marches, demonstrations and protests have been staged across Argentina against the neoliberal policies of Macri that have led to concentration of wealth and destruction of national industry.

Several trade union leaders addressed the protesters. Pablo

Micheli, the general secretary of the CTA-A, in his speech, referred to the upcoming general elections in Argentina. He said that the workers want the former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner back. “We want Peronism and a national and popular government to come back. Do not give up struggling [even for] a minute and accompany the road to elections with the workers’ movement on the street,” he said. José Rigane, the assistant general secretary of CTA-A, called for all Argentines to unite and “confront this government and regain sovereignty and change the energy model that is based on privatisation and foreign investment.”

Following the massive mobilisation, many continued their day of struggle and marched to the Venezuelan Embassy where members of the Venezuelan right-wing opposition were attempting to occupy the embassy, accompanying the coup d’état attempt staged by Juan Guaidó. Activists from Argentine organisations were inside and outside the embassy safeguarding it from attacks. After several hours, the Police (who had been present throughout the day protecting the group who wanted to occupy the embassy by force) began to repress the mobilisation and attacked activists with tear gas and batons. Several were injured and four were arrested and have since been set free.

Mauricio Macri: false promises and a return to the IMF

Macri’s 2015 campaign for president was centered around messages of change and progress, he promised to reduce inflation and provide better employment opportunities. However, his promises

fell flat, his government’s policies created an unstable and vulnerable economy which tanked when the the US Federal Reserve Bank raised interest rates. In 2018 alone, the Argentine peso’s value fell more than 50%. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina, the country experienced a 47.6% inflation in 2018, the highest in past 27 years.

Macri’s response to the economic crisis was to put the Argentine economy and people at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In May 2018, Macri announced that his government would initiate negotiations with the IMF for a \$30 billion loan to tide over the country’s financial crisis. A month later, after Macri met with Christine Lagarde, the IMF managing director, they reached an agreement on a \$50 billion loan, and in October 2018 the amount was increased to \$57 billion.

As expected, the IMF demanded that Argentina reduce its fiscal deficit and apply severe budgetary adjustments between 2018 and 2019. Across the board, there have been mass layoffs in the public sector, the budgets for education, health and social welfare have been slashed and the tariffs have been increased on basic services such as water, electricity, residential gas and transportation. Figures published by the Citizen’s Unity Party, a coalition of Argentine left-wing organisations, show that the tariffs of electricity have increased by 3624%, natural gas by 2401%, water by 1025%, road tolls by 1118%, inter-municipal train tickets by 601%, train tickets by 500%, metro tickets by 400% and buses by 494%.

With tens of thousands out of work, access to quality health

and education threatened due to budget cuts, loss of social welfare policies, rapid devaluation of the national currency, and costs for basic services soaring, the situation for the Argentinian working class has become a matter of day to day survival.

The widespread misery has fueled the resentment of Macri across sectors and across the country. The symbolic impact of a return to the IMF is also key to understanding their disgust for Macri. The IMF was responsible for the serious economic and political crisis that Argentina faced in the 1990s which led to a popular insurrection in the country.

And so, today, in Argentina, all working sectors, agriculture, banking, business, education, health care, transport, workers of the people’s economy, and others, have been taking the streets against Macri’s policies of hunger, misery and despair. Alliances and fronts have been forged between trade unions, social and political organisations, cultural groups, student movements and community organisations in order to come up with strong campaigns and plans of mobilisation that have the capacity to build power and momentum and defeat the regressive neoliberal government.

(Tanya Wadhwa writes for People’s Dispatch.)

Spectre of Fascism

Contribution Rs. 20/-

Published by
Janata Trust & Lokayat

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Grant Road (W), Mumbai 400 007

Modinomics = Corporatonomics

Part IV: Modi’s Budgets and the Social Sectors: Health

Neeraj Jain

In the previous issues of Janata, we have analysed Modinomics and shown that the Modi Government, if it wants, can raise enough resources to increase its expenditures on the social sectors. Instead, it is giving away huge subsidies to the tune of several lakh crore rupees to the corporate houses. In this article, we specifically discuss Modi’s budget allocations for health.

State of India’s Health System

India's health system is in “crisis”. India is the disease capital of the world:

- More than 2 lakh people in the country die of malaria every year, while TB kills 3 lakh;¹
- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India accounts for nearly one-fourth of the deaths in the world due to diarrhoea, more than one-third of the deaths due to leprosy and more than half of the deaths due to Japanese encephalitis;²
- India's under-five child mortality rate is the highest in the world, with 12 lakh such deaths in 2015; a majority of these deaths are preventable;³
- India is also in the grip of an epidemic of non-communicable diseases (long-term diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases [such as hypertension, heart attacks and stroke], chronic respiratory diseases (such as asthma

and cancers], which account for more than 60% of the deaths in the country.⁴

The reason for this ‘health emergency’ is the dismal state of India’s public health services. India spends barely 1.02% (in 2015–16) of its GDP on public health services, lower than even most low income countries, and far below the world average of 6% (see Chart 1). The WHO World Health Statistics 2015 ranked India at 187 out of 194 countries in public health spending.⁵

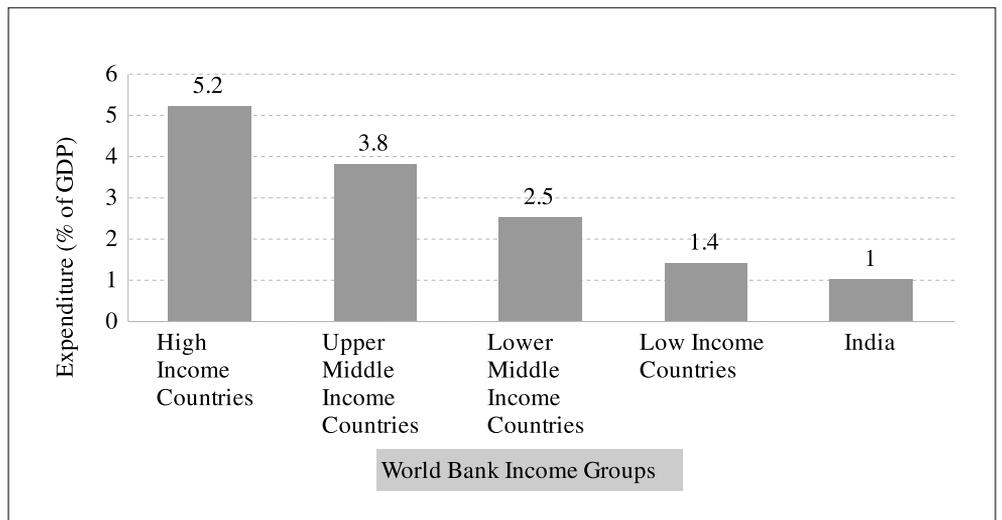
The difference between the health expenditure of developed countries and India becomes even starker when we compare the per capita GDP expenditure on health. The public health expenditure in the developed countries is as high as \$3000–5000 per capita; it comes down sharply for developing countries like Thailand (\$166 per capita), Sri Lanka (\$63) and Indonesia (\$38), but is only \$16 per

capital for India.⁷ This is equivalent to Rs 1,100 per person per year, less than the cost of consultation in one of the country’s top private hospitals. It works out to Rs 93 per month, or Rs 3 per day.

Consequently, the public health system in India is in bad shape. Around 33% of the population lives in urban areas. Since the focus of public health has been on rural areas since independence, primary urban health infrastructure remains grossly neglected. On the other hand, secondary and tertiary health care facilities are well developed in urban areas, and more than 60% of the government hospital beds in the country are located there (4.31 lakh out of 7.11 lakh, according to National Health Profile, 2018).

The rural health care infrastructure in India is a three-tier system—a sub-centre, a Primary Health Centre (PHC) and a Community Health Centre (CHC). The sub-centre is the first contact

Chart 1: Public Expenditure on Health, by Countries Income Groups⁶



point between the primary health care system and the community, caters to a population of between 3000–5000 people, is required to be staffed by at least one auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM)/female health worker and one male health worker, and provides services related to maternal and child health, family welfare, nutrition, etc. The PHC is the first base for doctors, and is the referral unit for around 6 sub-centres, and thus caters to a population of around 30,000. Therefore, it must have one medical officer, supported by paramedical and other staff, including one female and one male health assistant. The PHCs are supposed to screen and feed the more serious medical cases to CHCs (4 PHCs to 1 CHC), which are supposed to be staffed by at least four medical specialists, that is, surgeon, physician, gynecologist/obstetrician and pediatrician, along with supporting staff.

Even by standards set by the government, there is a 18% shortfall in the number of sub-centres, 22% in PHCs and 30% in CHCs in rural areas, as on March 31, 2018, according to Rural Health Statistics (RHS) Bulletin, 2017–18 (see Table 1).⁸

Worse, of these currently functioning health centres, only 7% sub-centres, 12% PHCs and 13% CHCs are functioning as per Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS). The condition of the sub-centres is so bad that 16% do not have regular water supply, while 24.7% do not

have electricity.⁹

These health units are also severely deficient in hospital staff:

- Of the 1.58 lakh sub-centres functioning: 7,194 do not have ANMs, and 1,04,318 (66%) do not have male health workers, while 5,089 do not have both.
- Of the 25,743 PHCs functioning: 10,557 (41%) do not have female health assistants and 16,981 (66%) do not have male health assistants, while 3,673 do not even have a doctor.
- The 5,624 functioning CHCs suffer from a whopping 82% shortage of specialists (they have only 4,074 specialists out of the required 22,496). This huge shortfall makes redundant the rural health infrastructure. For instance, with no surgeons to man them, the 4,696 CHCs with functional operating theatres can only exist as empty structures.¹⁰

Including both rural and urban areas, the population–doctor (allopathic doctors only) ratio in India in 2017 was 11,082:1 in government hospitals, 25 times higher than the WHO recommendation of 25 professionals per 10,000 population. Likewise, the average population to government hospital ratio in the country was 55,951, which is also very high.¹¹

This dismal state of public health care has forced citizens to depend upon the private sector for treatment. Of the total health spending in the country, public

health spending accounts for only 31.3%, households undertake the rest—at 65.6%, private expenditure on health care by Indians was the sixth highest in the world (among 184 nations surveyed), with the world average being 22.8% (see Chart 2). [This does not include health expenditure financed by private insurance; including this, private health spending by Indians increases to 68% of total health spending.]¹²

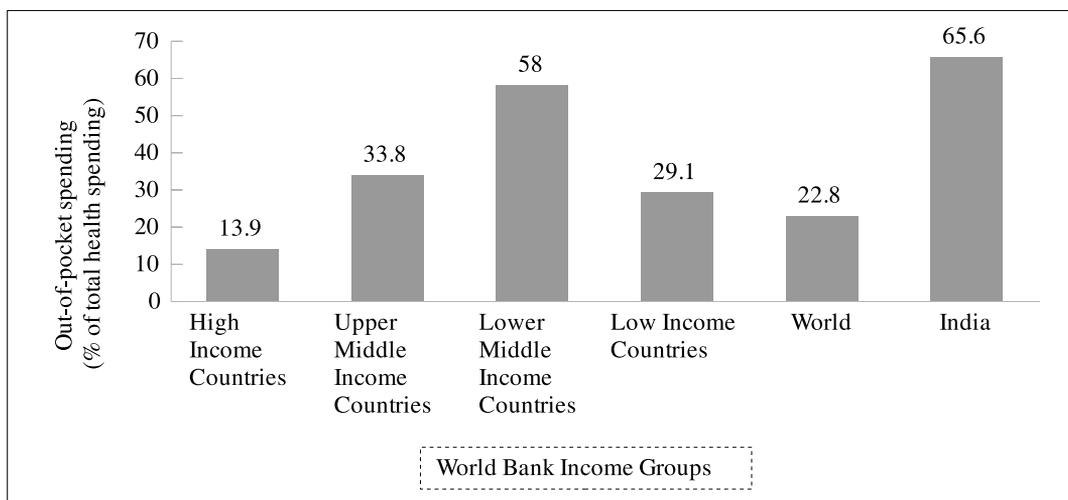
Because of lack of affordable medical services and high cost of private health care, an analysis based on data from NSSO 2014 showed that 3.6 crore households, or around 14% of total households in the country, incurred health expenses that exceeded the annual per capita consumption of those households. These figures underestimate the extent of health shock faced by the people of the country, as many people are simply too poor to go for any treatment even when a member faces a life-threatening disease. How many? This is difficult to say, but some clues can be had from NSSO data. The data says that while among the richest 5% people in the country, 98% received some kind of treatment before death, for the bottom 25%, a staggering 39% do not receive any medical attention before death. Maybe many of these poor people could have been saved had good quality and affordable health care been available in the country for all.¹⁴

Another study based on analysis

Table 1: State of Rural Health Infrastructure

	<i>Health Sub-centres</i>	<i>PHCs</i>	<i>CHCs</i>
Functioning, as on March 31, 2018	1,58,417	25,743	5,624
Shortfall	32,900	6,430	2,188

Chart 2: Out-of-Pocket Spending as % of Total Health Spending¹³



of NSSO survey data of 2004 and 2014 estimates that more than five crore people were pushed into poverty over the decade 2004–14 due to out-of-pocket health spending.¹⁵

Modi–Jaitley Total Allocation for Health Care

The BJP came to power in 2014 promising to increase public health spending. Its manifesto stated that if it was voted to power, it would ensure that the orientation of the health care system would be to provide “Health Assurance to all Indians” and “reduce the out-of-pocket spending on health care”. Soon after assuming power, it released the

draft National Health Policy (draft NHP 2015) that promised to increase the public health expenditure of the country to 2.5% of GDP, of which 40%, that is 1% of GDP, would be borne by the Centre. It promised to achieve these spending targets by 2020. Considering the dismal state of public health care in the country, this is obviously a very inadequate level of public health spending.¹⁶ The government took more than 2 years to finalise this report, and the final National Health Policy document was released only in 2017. It kept the spending target the same as that in the draft NHP 2015, but advanced the date for the target to

be achieved to 2022.¹⁷ As we have mentioned above, this target is less than half the global average public expenditure on health.

Be that as it may, since then, three budgets have gone by. The total expenditure on health care as a percentage of GDP has seen no increase during Modi’s five years and in 2018–19 BE was at the same level as in 2014–15 BE (at 0.31%); in 2019–20 BE too, it has remained at that level. Minus the allocation for the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme which does not go to improve the public health infrastructure in the country (discussed below), the health budget

Table 2: BJP Budget Allocations for Health (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2017–18 A	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare: Total	37,965	53,114	56,046	63,298
Ministry of AYUSH	1,272	1,531	1,693	1,740
Total Health Budget = (1)	39,237	54,645	57,739	65,038
(1) as % of GDP	0.31	0.32	0.31	0.31
Ayushman Bharat PMJAY = (2)	–	–	2,400	6,400
(1) – (2) = (3)	39,237	54,645	55,339	58,638
(3) as % of Budget Outlay	2.19	2.55	2.25	2.11
(3) as % of GDP	0.31	0.32	0.29	0.28

as a percentage of GDP has actually fallen, from 0.31% in 2014–15 BE and 0.32% in 2017–18 (A) to 0.29% in 2018–19 RE and 0.28% in 2019–20 BE—less than one-third of the target set in NHP 2017 (Table 2).

But then what about the Modi Government's ambitious health programme, Ayushman Bharat or National Health Protection Mission, rolled out by the government last year? It hit the headlines in both the print and electronic media, and has been called a game-changer in terms of providing health care to the poor and needy.

Let us take a closer look at this much tom-tommed programme. It has two components: Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY).

Health and Wellness Centres

In his 2018–19 budget speech, Jaitley announced a provision of Rs 1,200 crore for converting all the 1.5 lakh health sub-centres into Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs). He said that these would provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services. He added that these centres will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic

services. The allocation for these HWCs is probably under the sub-head 'Health Systems Strengthening' within the head 'National Rural Health Mission', for which the budget had been increased by Rs 1,357 crore in the 2018–19 BE (over 2017–18 RE). The revised estimates show that the government spent Rs 1,000 crore on this. This works to an investment of Rs 63,000 for upgrading each health sub-centre.

Considering the terrible state of our rural health services, it is obvious that this allocation is simply too inadequate. *The Rural Health Statistics 2017–18* point out that of the 1.58 lakh health sub-centres functioning, 16% do not have regular water supply and 24.7% do not have electricity; 7,194 health sub-centres do not have a female health worker, 1,04,318 do not have a male health worker, and 5,089 do not have both. For a sub-centre to become a Health and Wellness Centre, at the least, these basic facilities and human resources need to be provided. It is hard to understand how this can be done with the meagre funds allocated. The number of health sub-centres functioning is also less than required—the *RHS* points out that there is a shortage of 32,900 health sub-centres. Clearly, the finance minister has no intention of opening

up new health centres to make up for this shortfall.

Further, what is the point in only improving the health sub-centres, if the referral centres for these basic health units, which are supposed to provide medical care by a qualified doctor, are not in good condition. As we have mentioned above, the conditions in the PHCs and CHCs are simply abysmal. More than 50% of the PHCs do not have health assistants, 3,673 do not have a doctor, and the CHCs suffer from 82% shortage of specialist doctors! But the finance minister has increased the allocation for Health System Strengthening by only 10.66% over the last two years, barely enough to beat inflation (Table 3).

Actually, a closer look at the budget allocations reveal that like his several other announcements, this announcement of the finance minister regarding HWCs is also only a 'jumla'. That he is absolutely non-serious about the improvement of rural health services becomes clear from the fact that the total budget for the National Rural Health Mission has actually decreased over the last two years even in nominal terms, which works out to an effective cut of 16% in real terms (see Table 3). The finance minister has succeeded in cutting total

Table 3: Budget Allocations for National Rural Health Mission, 2017–20 (Rs crore)

	2017–18 A	2018–19 RE	2019–20 BE
Total Budget for National Rural Health Mission	26,178	25,243	25,789
<i>Within this:</i>			
<i>RCH Flexible Pool including Immunisation Programs</i>	7,640	5,729	5,254
<i>Flexible Pool for Communicable Diseases</i>	3,206	1,829	1,928
<i>Flexible Pool for Non-Communicable Diseases, Injury and Trauma</i>	923	566	717
<i>Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres</i>	–	1,000	1,350
<i>Health System Strengthening under NRHM</i>	8,444	9,188	10,282

allocation for rural health services, while allocating money for HWCs, by slashing the budget allocation for other important rural health care programmes, such as ‘Flexible pool for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), injury and trauma’ which are the largest cause of death in the country,¹⁸ and the important program for maternal and child care—‘RCH flexible pool including routine immunisation program and pulse polio immunisation program’ (see Table 3).

Urban Health Mission

The NRHM’s urban counterpart is the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM). The Union Cabinet had estimated the share of Central funding for this scheme to be around Rs 3,400 crore per annum way back in 2013 when it had given approval to this scheme aimed at addressing health care challenges in towns and cities with focus on the urban poor.¹⁹ However, the allocation for this has remained at much below this during the Modi regime: it was Rs 950 crore in the 2016–17 BE, but actual expenditure was only half of that, Rs 491 crore; allocation for it fell in subsequent years, and then rose back to Rs 950 crore in the 2019–20 BE. Clearly, the Modi Government is not serious about this scheme too.

While the Modi Government has reduced the budgets for the important rural and urban health missions, the budget allocation for the deceptively named Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)—which is actually a scheme for building AIIMS-like institutes and upgrading government medical colleges—has been significantly increased in successive budgets. The allocation for this has gone up from Rs 2,450 crore in 2016–17 BE to Rs 3,875

crore in the 2018–19 RE to Rs 4,000 crore in 2019–20.

When we examine this increase in the backdrop of the reduction in the budgets for rural and urban health missions, it becomes clear that this is in tune with the overall approach of the Modi Government—build a few high quality facilities, amidst a huge expanse of neglect and ruin. This is what is happening in every sector—build a few airports, while neglecting basic transport infrastructure like the public bus transport system; build a few IITs, while neglecting school and college education, and so on. This does not mean that airports and IITs are not needed, but if funds are limited, priority should be given to improving primary transport and education facilities. Similarly, it is not that new high quality public tertiary hospitals are not needed—the problem is that this is being done while the primary health care sector is being neglected. If primary level health services are good—that is, if the PHCs and CHCs are running well—most illnesses can be taken care of at this level itself, and this will not only improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of delivery of public health services, it will also improve the overall health status of the people. Therefore, priority should be given to improving primary health care; but as we have discussed above, this has been neglected in the successive Jaitley budgets.

Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance Scheme

The other component of the Ayushman Bharat scheme is the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). Jaitley proclaimed it to be “the world’s largest government funded

health care programme”. Under this scheme, the government promised to provide medical insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per family to 10 crore poor families (roughly 50 crore people) in case of hospitalisation (that is, out-patient care is not covered).

It is proof of the vacuity of our media that this announcement was highlighted by every TV news channel and hit the headlines of nearly every newspaper the next day. It was actually the biggest hoax of the budget.

Last year, Jaitley spent Rs 2,400 crore on this scheme as given in the 2018–19 RE, and this year, he has hiked the allocation to Rs 6,400 crore.

Even assuming that the finance minister is serious about providing medical insurance to the poor for hospitalisation, this increased allocation is simply not enough to provide the required insurance cover to 10 crore households. Various estimates suggest that the scheme could end up costing the government anywhere between Rs 12,000 crore to Rs 50,000 crore; with Jaitley allocating much less than even the lower of this estimate, obviously the government has no intention of meeting its target of providing health insurance to 10 crore people.²⁰

Do the poor really benefit from such health insurance schemes like the PMJAY? Some idea of it can be had from data regarding how many have benefited from the previous insurance scheme for the poor, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), which provided an insurance cover of Rs 30,000 per year to every BPL household in case of hospitalisation. The government has not been very willing to release RSBY data, and so comprehensive evaluations have not

been done. Independent evaluations of the RSBY based on NSS data for 2014 show that only 1.2% of the hospitalisation cases of the rural population and 6.2% of the urban population received even part reimbursement. Studies have also shown that private hospitals often force people to pay extra money even after receiving RSBY insurance funds.²¹ Therefore, it is too early to say as to what extent will this new avatar of RSBY—PMJAY—will benefit poor families with regards to their hospitalisation expenses.

But the most serious problem with PMJAY is that it is not a universal health care scheme even for the poor. It does not cover out-patient costs, and these constitute 63.5% of the health related out-of-pocket expenditure (that is, personal spending by people) in India (data for 2014).²² As mentioned above, India's health-related out-of-pocket expenditure, which pushes families into indebtedness and deeper poverty, is among the world's highest.

PMJAY: Excuse for Privatisation of Health Care

PMJAY does not cover out-patient expenses of the poor. It only meets their hospitalisation expenses—and past experience with similar insurance schemes raises legitimate doubts as to what extent will the poor benefit from this scheme. But the sectors that are undoubtedly going to enormously benefit from PMJAY are private hospitals and private insurance companies. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the real purpose of the PMJAY is to benefit them. The chief of the Ayushman Bharat scheme tweeted some time ago that private hospitals should

quickly get themselves empanelled with the scheme as, "We are offering you business of 50 crore people!"²³

The Modi Government is in fact using the PMJAY as an excuse to accelerate the privatisation of health care in the country. The government has already announced incentives for the private sector to set up hospitals in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. These incentives include allotting unencumbered land for such hospitals, providing viability gap funding (VGF)—a euphemism for providing them grant of up to 40% of the project cost—and speeding up clearances. In November 2018, the Centre sent a note to all states asking them to sanction loans at agricultural rates of interest and provide electricity at residential rates to these private hospitals.²⁴

The private hospital business is one of the most profitable in the country. Most of our readers will have at least a few stories about how their friends and relatives have been fleeced by private hospitals. And yet the government wants to incentivise the setting up of more private hospitals, and even provide them a grant (not a loan) of up to 40% of the cost of the project!

As if this was not enough, Niti Aayog and the health ministry have recommended to all states that they partially privatise their district hospitals, and transfer sections of these hospitals, including land and a certain number of hospital beds, to private players.²⁵ The Niti Aayog guidelines for these 'public-private-partnerships' (PPPs) imply that the staff of these district hospitals would now be basically engaged in PPP implementation, referring patients to the private doctors and facilitating the reimbursement of expenditure of individuals incurred

in PPP facilities.²⁶

Hospitalisation constitutes only a small part of the total health expenses of any individual, as not every disease needs hospitalisation. Even diseases like diabetes and respiratory problems and heart problems only require hospitalisation if the patient's condition takes a turn for the worse. And since PMJAY covers only hospitalisation costs, this means that as the privatisation of government hospitals advances, out-patient costs are going to go up sharply, which the poor will not be able to afford—it is going to further worsen the health crisis gripping the country.

Additionally, many lower middle class and middle class families not covered by PMJAY also go to government hospitals as they cannot afford private medical care. Privatisation of government hospitals is going to mean that in case they fall seriously ill and need to be hospitalised, it would mean catastrophic medical expenses for them.

Under the guise of rolling out the world's largest health care initiative, the anti-people Modi Government is actually seeking to destroy whatever that remains of India's failing public health care system and privatise it. It is going to have terrible consequences for the people.

Can't Jaitley Increase the Health Budget?

The only way in which reliable and good quality health care can be provided to ordinary people is by strengthening public health care facilities—and thereby provide them both out-patient and hospitalisation care free or at affordable rates. That is what governments have done

around the world. To do that in India, the Indian government needs to increase its health care budget.

The NHP promises to increase Central government health spending to 1% of GDP, and total Central and State government spending on health to 2.5% of GDP. That is a very low target, it should be increased to at least 3% of GDP, and more subsequently. Presently, the expenditure on health is 1% of GDP; so that means the total initial increase in spending on health by the Centre + States should be at least 2% of GDP or Rs 4.2 lakh crore. As we have shown in our previous articles, it is not that the government cannot raise the required funds to make this allocation; it is a question of priorities—whether priority should be given to profiteering of corporations, or providing essential health and education facilities to the people.

The media headlines have got it all wrong. The Modi Government's health budget is not about the world's largest health protection plan. It is about a country which has the highest number of deaths in the world due to disease, a country with the highest number of child and maternal deaths in the world, criminally neglecting this health 'crisis' and spending less than almost all other countries in the world on improving public health facilities—while at the same time giving lakhs of crores of rupees as subsidies to its uber rich.

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