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The Congress party is holding a meeting of its highest organ, the Working Committee, the very same week at Belgaum, at the border of Karnataka and Maharashtra—this again to mark the Gandhi homage festival as it was at this very city that the Congress session was held in 1922 over which Gandhiji had presided. No doubt there will be functions galore in the months ahead which will pay fulsome allegiance to the memory of the one who had steered the freedom struggle to victory and thereby rightfully earned the love and gratitude of his countrymen for which they called him the Father of the Nation.

Leaving aside all the glittering functions to mark the sacred occasion, this is the time for reflections—to ponder over in our mind how relevant is Gandhi today for our country beset as it is with a thousand problems—some of them are intractable and almost seem to defy any solution while others are formidable enough to baffle even the tallest of our national leadership, not to speak of the hollow men who strut about today claiming to be his political heirs.

To begin with, Gandhiji had strong objections to the partition of India. Although he had never sharply criticised the decision of the Congress High Command of those days to accept the Mountbatten Plan of partitioning India as a concomitant condition to the transfer of power from the British to Indian hands, he had no doubt that the partitioning of India would create more problems than solving any. As it turned out, Gandhiji was right.

Relevance of Gandhiji’s Message Today

Nikhil Chakravartty

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proved right when the blood-soaked victims of the partition crossed the border on both sides. While he could not avert the partition, Gandhi’s views were not to minimise its fall-out as far as he could by undertaking that hazardous crusade for communal amity into the distant corners of Noakhali and was planning to do the same in Pakistan. But his life was cut short in a fit of anger by a fellow-countryman who did not spare Gandhi.

What is important to bear in mind is the fact that Gandhi understood the real implications of the partition—that it could perpetuate mutual hostility between the Hindus and Muslims as the gift of the partition. Because, the minority community in both the neighbouring countries—the Hindus in Pakistan and the Muslims in India—became suspect in the eyes of their respective majority communities—the Muslims in Pakistan and the Hindus in India. It is this factor which has kept up the accursed communal divide even to this day. Fortyseven long years after Mountbatten’s partition was accepted by the national leaders, the question of repudiating it does not arise, but that communal antipathy could be brought down by fostering good and friendly relations between India and Pakistan. In the brief few weeks that he survived after independence, he devoted himself to this question. It is worth recalling in this context that one of his last political acts was to direct Nehru and Patel not to withhold the financial dues of Pakistan even though the Pak-sponsored tribal invaders were devastating the Kashmir Valley.

Today when communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims has been widely conceded even by the ruling establishment, it would certainly be wise to pay heed to Gandhi’s prophetic warning—that the Hindu-Muslim problem would always beset us so long as we do not trace its origin to the partition, and find its solution by cementing Indo-Pak goodwill.

In many other spheres of our national life, Gandhi’s relevance abides even today. He understood the baneful impact of the caste system on our social life. Although he did not denounce the caste system as such in the style of a modern-day rationalist, he took up the most inequitable feature of the caste system—oppression of the untouchables—and carried on a tireless campaign to rectify such vicious aspects as the ban on temple entry. He understood the inequity and suppression in public life of the so-called backward communities. Hence came the provision for reservation in our Constitution.

Gandhi seriously believed that it would not be correct to whip up caste antipathy as that would destabilise the entire social structure, but was concerned how to rouse the whole society and act as a trust for a better deal for the underprivileged. Here lies the difference between Gandhi’s line and that of other leaders who have been campaigning for the promotion of the backward castes and the untouchables. Gandhi did not live to see his endeavours come true, while the others who have taken up the cause of the underprivileged castes and communities are realising today the dangerously sensitive nature of the problem which threatens to create bitter antipathy and virtual anarchy in the social and political set-up.

In the sphere of economic rebuilding, Gandhi’s views were widely known. His insistence was on expanding the domestic market by large-scale promotion of khadi and village industries to meet the demands of the huge rural market. He then did not really oppose the introduction of heavy machine and heavy engineering based industries, but stood for the harmonious blending of the two streams of economic thinking. However, in our enthusiasm to build a strong economy befitting a powerful country, Gandhi’s mandate of strengthening and expanding the village industries was nearly forgotten with emphasis on the production of heavy industries and the major consumer goods.

As this approach of a mixed economy is today nearly forgotten, the country is in the excitement of a free-market dispensation reducing the role of the state in economic activity to the minimum. Gandhi’s prescription for the vast rural economy becomes all the more valid for a country like ours. With the introduction of new technology and the enthronement of the ideology of the market, our country faces the prospect of an affluent elite at the top and a vast ocean of the underprivileged at the base. This will increase disparities—social and economic—and that in turn will accentuate social tension which is likely to threaten the very foundations of political stability. It is in this context that one has to take into account the validity of Gandhi’s economics for the vast rural hinterland. It is not that Gandhi glorified poverty and condemned the rich. He himself used to camp in Birla’s mansions and had no hesitation in persuading the rich to donate openly for the causes he espoused. The culture that he promoted upheld the self-respect of
the humblest citizen of independent India.

In Gandhiji’s design for a good society, the poor are to inherit the earth and the rich to hold their affluence as a trust to society. In the culture shock that the so-called globalisation is bringing to our society, the need for Gandhiji’s message has become all the more relevant and imperative if India has to retain its identity as a great country with a rich culture. If anything, Gandhiji is remembered today by his countrymen more insistently than at any time since his final departure forty-six years ago.

[Nikhil Chakravartty (1913–88) was a famed journalist and the founder-editor of the respected current affairs weekly Mainstream.]

Ecuador’s People Win a Huge Victory

Neeraj Jain

On the night of Sunday, October 12, the people of Ecuador were out on the streets, celebrating a major victory after 11 days of continuous protests in which hundreds of thousands of people had participated, despite massive police repression. The celebrations followed an announcement by the government of President Lenin Moreno that it was withdrawing Decree 883 under which it had imposed a deeply unpopular package of neoliberal reforms. These reforms were a part of a $4.2 billion loan agreement with the IMF. The withdrawal of the decree took place following talks between representatives of Indigenous movements and organizations and the government team, which included Moreno himself.

Of course, the people have only won Round One against the Moreno government, as the government is definitely going to implement more reforms in the coming days, backed by the IMF and the US-led imperialist powers. This is obvious from the fact that soon after making the concession, the government arrested key leaders of Citizen Revolution, a group founded by former president of Ecuador Rafael Correa and which is one the groups leading the mass protests in Ecuador. The government has accused them of causing violence during the protests. The arrests are an obvious attempt to divide the masses taking part in the protests, as both the indigenous people of Ecuador representing Ecuador’s Indigenous nationalities and peoples, and Citizen Revolution have jointly led the protests, and Moreno has sought to divide the movement by appearing soft towards the indigenous people. Moreno claimed that he has “always respected Indigenous people” and “treated them with care” but then went on to say that the rest of the people protesting are violent and bad, those that “created chaos and an apocalyptic situation”. Moreno even resorted to the tired tropes of accusing the ‘violent’ protesters of having links to drug trafficking, being foreigners and employing tactics used by guerrilla groups in Colombia. He also reiterated the claim that they were instigated by Rafael Correa and his followers. The president of CONAIE, Jaime Vargas, immediately denounced the arrests, criticised the government for seeking to divide the protesters, and highlighted the unity on the streets.

The latest explosion of mass protests in Ecuador began after the government’s announcement on October 1 of a series of new economic measures to reduce “wasteful” public spending and further balance the budget. The most controversial measure was the complete elimination of fuel and petrol subsidies, in place since the 1970s, directly contributing to a 123% rise in the price of diesel and similar increases for other fuels.

Furthermore, the package introduced a 20% cut in public employee salaries and the initiation of plans to privatise pensions and remove safeguards for workers’ conditions and job security.
Foreseeing the likelihood and magnitude of protests against his government, Moreno declared a “national state of emergency” and deployed the police and military against protests in the capital, Quito, and other areas.

But the people did not bow before this repression, and right from the very next day, October 2, tens of thousands were out on the streets, defying the emergency. Leading the protests were former president Rafael Correa’s Citizen Revolution Movement (MRC), the Popular Front (FP) political party, and social and trade union organisations, such as the United Workers’ Front (FUT) and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE).

The next day, October 3, both transport workers’ unions and the taxi drivers’ associations announced strike action, bringing several cities around the country to halt, among them Quito and Cuenca.

Tens of thousands of workers, students, Indigenous people, peasants, Afro-descendant people, women and citizens came down from all over Ecuador and took over the streets of Quito, Ecuador’s capital city. So intense were the mobilisations that President Moreno fled the capital and shifted the seat of government to Guayaquil.

Similar mobilisations took place in several provincial cities. The province of Pichincha was converted into the epicentre of popular struggle, with more than 10,000 people taking part in the strike and protests.

The MRC criticised the state of emergency as being unconstitutional, as it lacked any specific parameters regarding proportionality, legality, temporality, territoriality and rationality (as mandated in the constitution). The people realised that it was only a measure to prevent a repeat of the mass uprisings in major cities that overthrew the neoliberal governments of Jamil Mahuad in 2000 and Lucio Gutiérrez in 2005. Moreno was following down the same path.

Moreno has attempted to consistently discredit previous President Correa’s highly successful and popular economic strategy of combining increased social spending with public investment in major infrastructure and energy projects, and the diversification of the economy away from oil.

Instead, his government has pursued an IMF-mandated package of reforms, including the dismissal of thousands of public sector employees, reducing the size of the public sector, initiating privatisation (particularly the public banking services) and cuts to education and healthcare.

Consequently, levels of poverty and inequality have significantly risen under Moreno’s government. According to official figures, structural poverty rose from 23.1% in June 2017 to 25.5% in June this year, with some economists projecting that it will reach 30% by the end of the year, if the new economic measures are enacted.

Extreme poverty has risen from 8.4% to 9.5% during the same period. Furthermore, the Gini coefficient for economic inequality has risen from 0.462 in June 2017 to 0.478 in June this year, reflecting Moreno’s policy of reducing social spending principally to benefit the rich.

The country has witnessed a continuous breakdown of constitutional law, such as the persecution of the former vice-president Jorge Glas on dubious charges, the censorship of critical media, the “INA Papers” scandal and discovery of secret off-shore bank accounts linked to Moreno’s family. The newly elected Council of Citizens’ Participation and Social Control was dismissed and Ecuador also withdrew from the Union of South American Nations and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

There has also been a political witch-hunt against Correa and other leaders of the MRC, such as former foreign minister Ricardo Patiño and former deputy Sofia Espin.

Moreno had won the Presidential elections in Ecuador in 2017 as a close supporter of Rafael Correa. But after coming to power, he made a complete U-turn and began implementing neoliberal economic policies. Ever since then, the country has been on a boil, with people protesting the reversal of all the gains made by them during the ten years of Correa’s presidency. The latest package of neoliberal reforms was the last straw that broke the camel’s back, and saw people all over the country rising in defiance.

On October 8, 2,000 protesters from different Indigenous, peasant and social organizations and trade unions occupied the Ecuadorian Assembly and held a People’s Assembly. They too were brutally repressed by the national security forces, who threw tear gas and shot rubber bullets at the demonstrators. Several dozens who participated in this action were arrested and processed.

Unable to quell the protests, the police began using live ammunition against the protesters, leading to several deaths. Thousands were injured, and the police made several thousand arrests. Yet the protests did not stop, finally forcing President Moreno to backtrack and begin negotiations, leading to the withdrawal of Decree 883.
Gandhiji and Lohia: An Intimate and Fruitful Relationship – Part 2

Prem Singh

Lohia's critique of Gandhiji has been a significant contribution to Gandhian studies in the post-Gandhi era. Lohia as a heretic Gandhian makes perhaps the most revolutionary interpretation of Gandhiji's philosophy and modes of action. He left incomplete his long essay "Economics After Marx", that he had begun in 1943–44 (the essay is compiled in *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*), but later took fresh initiatives for the construction of his own kind of socialist philosophy and politics. In his construction, or to use his own word "integration", of the new philosophy he found more useful material in the ideas, life and actions of Gandhiji. According to him, the new socialist philosophy, opposed to communism and capitalism both, will be the basis of a new civilisation. Lohia accepted the fact that he was influenced by the great personality of Gandhiji but was never blinded, intimidated or sentimental about it. After keeping Marx aside he embarks upon a serious interpretation of Gandhiji. Lohia's interpretation of Gandhiji is an integral part of his serious philosophical venture. But at the same time it is not aimed at proposing some sort of a separate creed of Gandhiism.

In Indian politics Lohia is known as a socialist thinker and leader. His intellectual and political activism was aimed at socialist revolution in India as well as in the rest of the world. He wrote in this connection, "Capitalism and communism are almost fully elaborated systems, and the whole world is in their grip, the result is poverty and war and fear. The third idea is also making itself felt on the world stage. It is still inadequate, and it has not been fully elaborated, but it is open. In an open system there is still some chance of truth and progress, while a closed system does violence to facts and wishes them away in order to prove their meaninglessness. Open systems live in accordance with the facts, and in any case we expect such systems to revitalise themselves with obstinate or changing situations. This idea is the socialist idea." (18)

It is obvious that in the twentieth century, the idea of socialist revolution is mainly linked to Karl Marx. Lohia accepted the place of Marx in his tradition but at the same time he said "this talk of being a Marxist or an anti-Marxist is futile and irrelevant. What is relevant is correct thinking and integrated approach. Our mind must be on a quest, a quest for the essence that lies under Gandhiji's or Marx's thoughts. Quest and not entanglement with tradition can help us to do this." (19) There is a prevalent belief that Lohia tries to mix Gandhi and Marx. Lohia himself refuted this : "Socialism need not proclaim itself as Gandhian or Marxist on the one hand and as anti-Gandhian or anti-Marxist on the other, for this would only substitute thought by a charm." (20) It is not possible to present a detailed description of Lohia's doctrine of socialism but here it is important to mention that it is a left doctrine; it is rooted basically in the Indian and Asian situations; it is committed to "leftism from below" instead of "leftism from top"; and to make it viable, Lohia proposed a package of "seven revolutions".

Lohia was not a Gandhian of the Marxist blend, nor a Marxist of the Gandhian variety, but an individual thinker in his own right. Besides Gandhi and Marx, Lohia made it a point to give due consideration to other thinkers and philosophers. He also seriously tried to understand ancient Indian philosophy, concepts, myths and symbols. Only after a serious contemplation of all this did he embark upon his ideas about the "new integrations" required in the making of a new civilisation: "Nevertheless, as between a person who is arrogantly and pompously an adherent of any existing philosophy and another who has gone through the gamut of all philosophies and has come to the stage when he rejects them outright, I would prefer the latter, if it were the singular good luck of anybody to achieve a still newer integration, there could be nothing better." (21)

In this way, Lohia broke the myth of dogmatic commitment to a particular philosophy or ideology and at the same time also broke the myth of the purity and originality of a particular philosophy or ideology. He wrote, "it is not the fault of Marx that people stay put at Marxism." Lohia criticises the Gandhians in a similar manner : "The Gandhi doctrine has proved a little more inadequate. It will be countered that what prevails in the country today is not the Gandhi doctrine but a somewhat inferior brew of Gandhism and Marxism. That is substantially correct, but it confirms the weakness of Gandhism in so far as Marxism forces it to mix and also that the best in it is unable to burst..."
forth." (22) He spoke of two types of Gandhism after Gandhiji's death: governmental Gandhism (sarkari gandhivad) and monastic or priestly Gandhism (mathi gandhivad). In the first category come Gandhiji's political successors and in the second one, the lot engaged in various institutions, established in the name of Gandhiji and funded by the government. Lohia found them both ineffectual: "These governmental and monastic wings together comprise what is authoritatively accepted as Gandhism.... Authoritative Gandhiism has proved after victory to be a mousy doctrine. All its teeth are out, giving rise to the doubt if it ever had any. Monastic Gandhiism is wholly dependent for its being on governmental Gandhiism. Governmental Gandhiism does nothing except to chase the pale shadow of limited public sector planning. Both live a merry, contented, smug life, not devoid of luxury of a hierarchic kind." (23)

It can be argued that despite influences coming from various sources, Lohia was closest to Gandhiji. Lohia did not reject Gandhiji's ideas on truth, time, history, progress and development like the Marxists and capitalists. Gandhiji's vision of life was cyclic. Lohia also talked of the "cyclic view of history." (24) In the modern civilisation the linear view of the driving forces of history has come to be accepted as the gospel truth. Gandhiji and Lohia refused outright to ride the chariot of that 'history' which raced ahead only for a small section of the world's total population. However, in comparison to Gandhiji, Lohia gave more importance to the driving forces of history, yet he also placed equal significance on the universal values inherent in epics, myths and symbols situated beyond the boundaries of history. Thus, the most important contribution of Lohia to Gandhiism was his critique of the dominant paradigms of development, which used the experience of the lower castes. All the Dalit and lower caste radicals had endorsed the project of modernity totally; leaders like Ambedkar were at the forefront of this endorsement. His hostility towards Gandhiji may possibly be located in this context. But Lohia developed Gandhiian sociology in terms of its analysis of the relationship between the caste system and capitalism. Lohia had understood that in India capitalism and its positive aspects were hijacked by upper castes, and they had made it a project of caste elites. Gandhi had developed his own critique of the project of modernity in his Hind Swaraj; Lohia's entire political economy can be treated as an imaginative restatement of Hind Swaraj. Lohia combined the radical social philosophy of the lower caste radicals with Gandhian economics.

Gandhiji was most deeply concerned with Dharma. Many scholars accept him as a totally religious individual and a prophet. Gandhiji himself believed that his politics is steeped in Dharma and his life motivated by the desire to see God or attain moksha. Gandhiji, in fact, upturned the entire modernist project itself, which placed man rather than God in its core. In Gandhiji's scheme of things, God assumed a stronger hold on life's core centre. Lohia was not religious like Gandhiji but he viewed "politics as a short term religion and religion as a long term politics." Although like the modernist–secularists, he did not see religion as meaningless for the past, present and future civilisations, nevertheless, Lohia was harsher than Gandhiji in his dissection of the Hindu religion. Lohia called himself a religious radical. He did not see politics as a religious matter, instead he approached religion as a political matter. He stated, "After all it is not God who has created man. It is man who has created God." Therefore, while Lohia's concern with religion and God was basically cultural in its content, Gandhiji's concern with it was spiritual in its nature.

Lohia seemed to find Gandhi's emphasis on the purity of ends and also on the purity of means an attractive proposition, although he interpreted this differently. He relates this to Gandhi's idea of the change of heart: "And there with hangs the whole story of change of heart, which is a phrase that has very often been abused not only by critics of Mahatma Gandhi but also by his admirers and followers. If some have looked upon it as an instrument to deny the revolution, others have actually used it so that it has checkmated the revolution. In both cases, admirers as well as critics have reduced the phrase 'change of heart' to such mimic proportions that it bears no relationship whatsoever to Mahatma Gandhi's own conception of life.... Gandhiji spent just about a year of his life changing the heart of Smuts, Irvin and Birla, while he devoted over forty years to putting courage into and thereby changing the hearts of tens of millions of people all over the world.... What stands out in all this is Gandhi's assumption that man can be good, even though he is almost certain to be bad in some situations." (25)

Lohia gave utmost importance to the human factor in the foundation of the new civilisation. Lohia's argument was that the essence and justification of each deed should be embedded in the deed itself. It
should not become necessary for man to make prefatory or post-script justifications for his deed whereby misdeeds like lies, deceit and bloodshed might be explained away. In his emphasis on the "principle of immediacy", the best illustration of which he found in the myth of Shiva, one can also see the clear influence of Gandhiji. In fact an important reading of Gandhiji by Lohia rests on the merger of radical energy and ethics. Lohia was able to see that its monastic followers reduced Gandhism to harmless and pious ethical doctrine of vegetarianism and nonviolence. Lohia sought to integrate the politics of immediacy with the larger ethical conduct in politics. In other words, the oppositional content that Gandhians had lost was restored by Lohia.

It is a well-known fact that before plunging into Indian politics Gandhiji undertook the task of understanding the conditions in the country. Lohia too agreed with Gandhiji on this score: "Conditions must be studied before they can be improved upon. There is often no effort in human mind to investigate the real conditions but a frequent attempt to advise, exhort and give moral precepts. One should never identify what is with what ought to be." (26)

In addition to this Lohia was also in agreement with the manner in which Gandhiji proceeded from the 'local' to the 'universal'. It will be a repetition to say that Gandhiji, though grounded in India, responded to the whole universe. This is a unique feature of Lohia's thought that any idea or mode he suggested to revolutionise the "Indian mind" also held good for the rest of the world.

The last and most important point is that Lohia accepted in totality Gandhiji's method of civil disobedience (civil nafarmani) against injustice, "enabling the individual to resist oppression by himself and without any support", which fact was, to his mind, "the greatest quality of Mahatma Gandhi's action and life." He further elaborated the point: "The greatest revolution of our time is, therefore, a procedural revolution, removal of injustice through a mode of action characterised by justice. The question here is not so much the contents of justice as the mode to achieve it. Constitutional and orderly processes are often not enough. They are then transgressed by the use of weapons. In order that this should not happen and that man should not ever get thrown around between ballet and bullet, this procedural revolution of civil disobedience has emerged. At the head of all revolutions of our time stands this revolution of satyagraha against weapons although it has in actual effect made only a faltering appearance to date." (27)

Lohia analysed the ideological and institutional basis of modern civilisation in more concrete terms. Consequently, the alternatives suggested by him were also more concrete, in his own word, sagun. Lohia theorised in general terms the specifics of Gandhiji's ideas, images and actions in support of the socialist system. For example, analysing the spinning wheel he wrote, "The spinning wheel is ephemeral and so is nature cure sectional, although not entirely of the moment. Gandhi's concrete image, so vital for immediate action, must be made to deliver its abstraction equally vital for continued action. Man must have tools, which he can command in more senses than one. His immediate habitat must be self-sufficient and he must govern it in direct democracy. The message of the spinning wheel is controllable technology and village government." (28)

Lohia's interpretations of the various ideas of Gandhiji, which could be elaborated at length, is a matter involving details, whereas the basic theme underlying such interpretations remains the same, viz these interpretations are made for the "new integration" of the socialist philosophy. Thus, this is not interpretation for interpretation's sake but an extension of Gandhiji's ideas and actions in the direction of the socialist system: the extension of spinning wheel into controllable machine (through the notion of controllable technology he paved the way for building of a new form of ecological socialism); the village government as a part of a four pillar state, and decentralisation of economic and political power in the four limbs of the four pillar state; and so on.

(The author teaches Hindi at Delhi University.)

References
19. Ibid., p. 366.
20. Ibid., p. 427.
21. Ibid., p. 186.
22. Ibid., p. xii.
23. Ibid., p. xii.
27. Ibid., pp. xxxi–ii.
28. Ibid., xiii.
The release of richest people’s lists is usually a signal for much back-slapping and triumphalism in the corporate world and its hangers on in the media. It is seen as some kind of symptom that India is doing well, people are getting wealthier, *achhe din* (good days) are here, although such lists are only for a 100 people (as in the case of the Forbes India list) or perhaps more (as in IIFL Hurun list), in a country of 1.3 billion people.

But these lists also reveal another side of the super wealthy corporates of the country. A comparison between the Forbes India richest people’s lists of 2014 and 2019 reveals which of the corporate honchos have flourished under Narendra Modi’s rule and which have not done so well.

Before going into the individuals, it should be noted that the total wealth of the top 100 richest Indian corporate heads increased from about Rs 25 lakh crore to over Rs 32 lakh crore between 2014 and 2019. That’s a 31% increase. The wealth of just these 100 people in 2019 is about 6% of the country’s GDP (gross domestic product). This is a measure of the high degree of inequality in the country that just 100 people own so much wealth while the vast bulk of India’s people have only a very small fraction of it.

Who has Flourished Under Modi?

Coming now to the rather curious case of individual growth among corporates, it turns out that the richest person in India, Mukesh Ambani, has more than doubled his wealth. It has increased by 118%, to be precise, from Rs 1.68 lakh crore to Rs 3.65 lakh crore between 2014 and 2019. [See chart below for top 10 sourced from the Forbes India lists]

In Gautam Adani’s case, the rise has been better. His wealth zoomed up by 121% from Rs 50.4 thousand crore in 2014 to a breath-taking Rs 1.1 lakh crore in 2019. He climbed up from the 11th place in the 2014 rankings to becoming the second richest man in India in 2019.

Both these illustrious men are known to be quite friendly with Prime Minister Modi and the ruling dispensation. Modi had even appeared in a full-page advertisement for the launch of Jio, the Reliance telecom service, which has, in three years, the largest subscriber base in India.

Modi’s elevation to New Delhi that marked a phenomenal upswing in Adani’s fortunes.

A look at the chart above, shows that only two other people exhibit a marked growth in their wealth—Uday Kotak, owner of Kotak Mahindra Bank and other financial services, and Radhakishan Damani, who owns the DMart chain of hypermarkets in India, promoted by Damani-owned Avenue Supermarts Ltd., a company that had revenues of $2.7 billion in 2018–19. Damani’s rise is also dramatic, but remember that he owned just Rs 7,100 crore back in 2014. So, the percentage increase is from a very small beginning. He ranked 100th in 2014, and now he is at number 7.

Uday Kotak is another blue-eyed boy of the current government, and was appointed last year to head the government-controlled board of the

But, it was Modi’s elevation to New Delhi that marked a phenomenal upswing in Adani’s fortunes.

| Table: Top Ten Corporate Heads and Change in Net Worth, 2014–19 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| Name                   | Group           | Net Worth (in $Sbn) |
|                        | 2019  | 2014  | % Change |
| 1 Mukesh Ambani        | Reliance Industries | 51.4  | 23.6  | 118          |
| 2 Gautam Adani         | Adani Ports and SEZ | 15.7  | 7.1   | 121          |
| 3 Hinduja brothers     | Ashok Leyland | 15.6  | 13.3  | 17           |
| 4 Pallonji Mistry      | Shapoorji Pallonji Group | 15.0  | 15.9  | – 6        |
| 5 Uday Kotak           | Kotak Mahindra Bank | 14.8  | 6.1   | 143          |
| 6 Shiv Nadar           | HCL Technologies | 14.4  | 12.5  | 15           |
| 7 Radhakishan Damani  | Avenue Supermarts | 14.3  | 1     | 1330         |
| 8 Godrej family        | Godrej Group   | 12     | 11.6  | 3            |
| 9 Lakshmi Mittal       | Arcelor Mittal | 10.5  | 15.8  | – 34         |
| 10 Kumarmangalam Birla| Aditya Birla Group | 9.6    | 9.2   | 4            |

(Source: Forbes India Richest List, 2014 and 2019)
All the other corporate bigwigs among the top 10 are doing well but only just. Pallonji Mistry, owner of construction behemoth, Shapoorji Pallonji, saw a 6% decline in wealth, as did UK-based Lakshmi Mittal, owner of steel giant Arcelor Mittal (by 34%). Kumarmangalam Birla, an old-timer in the rich list, grew his wealth by just 4%, the Godrej family increased its wealth by 3% and Shiv Nadar of HCL Technologies by 15% in five years.

Many notable rich families do not figure here because this is a list of rich men or brothers (mostly). Groups like Tata Sons have distributed wealth though each of their individual components are giants in their own right. But they do not make it to the top 10. Others like Wipro Chairman Azim Premji have ‘donated’ substantial chunks of their wealth to run charities or educational trusts and have thus fallen off the list, though they continue to be super rich.

Corporate–RSS Bonhomie

A noteworthy trend that has emerged in recent years—which may have some relevance to wealth creation—is the growing bonhomie between the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (which is the mentor of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party) and corporate bigwigs. Only a few days ago, Shiv Nadar of HCL was the chief guest at the Foundation Day of RSS at Nagpur. A few days before that, Azim Premji visited the RSS headquarters and met Sangh supremo Mohan Bhagwat. In April, Ratan Tata had visited the RSS headquarters to meet Bhagwat. In fact, last year, Tata Trusts donated Rs 100 crore to Nagpur’s National Cancer Institute run by an RSS-affiliated trust named after Dr Aabaji Thatte, the personal assistant of second RSS chief M S Golwalkar. In 2017, ONGC, a premier public sector undertaking too donated Rs 100 crore to the hospital. Last month, Rahul Bajaj visited Smruti Mandir to pay tributes at the memorial of RSS founder K B Hedgewar at Nagpur.

Corporate India doesn’t kowtow to anybody unless they envisage some benefit. This increasing closeness of corporate honchos to the RSS, so much so that they have been making a beeline to Nagpur to pay respects to the founder and to confabulate with the current chief, is their way of extending support to the Modi government and generally be in its good books.

Who’s Afraid of the Word ‘Dalit’?

Following a Central government ‘directive’ last year asking all state governments to refrain from using the word ‘Dalit’ in official communication, the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra government has asked all its departments not to use the word “Dalit” in “all official transactions, matters, dealings and certificates and instead use Scheduled Caste or its appropriate translation in other national language(s)”. A notification issued by the joint secretary of the social justice department D.R. Dingle says in keeping with directives issued by the Centre’s social justice ministry, the word “Dalit” should be replaced with “Schedule Caste or Anusuchit Jati (in Marathi)”. Justification of this overtly political play is a judicial decision of the MP High Court in 2018. This court order had invited sharp criticism last year. A reading of the Court’s order in question, however, shows it only wanted the Centre “to consider the question of issuing such direction to the media and take suitable decision upon it.” The court had not gone into the merits of using the term. After it was brought to its notice that the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had issued a directive to use only the term ‘Scheduled Castes’ in all official matters, the court merely noted that since media institutions were not a party before it, the I&B Ministry could consider the question of issuing a similar direction to the media. The I&B Ministry’s advisory had come across as confusing as it uses the words “for all official transactions, matters”, though the media’s references to the community

(finished text)
are usually beyond official contexts.

However, Dalit groups have vociferously criticised the ‘ban’ of the use of the term Dalit over the past year and have asserted that the word conveys a sense of identity and is of political significance.

The debate over the appropriateness of using the term ‘Dalit’ to refer to members of the Scheduled Castes is neither recent nor new. Merely a decade ago, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes had not favoured the use of ‘Dalit’, which it felt was ‘unconstitutional’. This is because belonging to a ‘Scheduled Caste’ is a legal status conferred on members of castes named in a list notified by the President under Article 341 of the Constitution. Therefore, some believe, ‘Scheduled Caste’ may be the appropriate way to refer to this class of people in official communications and documents.

However, the debate seems to be beyond the usage of the term in official documents. “Dalit” literally translates into “broken” or downtrodden.” Dr. Anand Teltumbde says, “Ambedkar used ‘Dalit’ as a quasi-class term; included within its ambit were the downtrodden and poor. This gave character to the germinating anti-caste movement at the time.”

Rumi, a Mumbai based artist, sculptor and an independent researcher who has been interrogating the subject of identity politics and Dalit visual art practices, taking the discourse forward, “The term Dalit is an Assertive Anti-caste position, and is important for researchers, writers, artists and ethnographers of the Dalit consciousness movement, which is a rising phenomena right now.”

Rumi also shines a light on the historical usage of the term. She adds, “The term is especially important because Jyotiba Phule used it first, and later B.R. Ambedkar did. It was further popularised and mobilised by the Dalit literary movement of the 60’s, especially by Dalit Panthers. It’s a term of assertion and is not derogatory in any ways. How can it be, if Babasaheb and Phule used it to locate caste oppression.”

The focus of the government to keep indulging in the matters of nomenclature when it comes to the several other issues that communities face at large could also be a case of misplaced priorities, as highlighted by the former Mumbai University Vice-Chancellor, Bhalchandra Mungekar who said that instead of changing nomenclature, the government should implement policies for the welfare of Dalits. “The term Dalit has acquired worldwide acceptance because it denotes not only the former so called ‘untouchables’ but a vast majority of disadvantaged sections. Instead, policies drafted for welfare of Dalits should be implemented and Dalits must feel the government is working for them,” he said.

After the I&B Ministry’s advisory to media on the issue last year, The Press Council of India too had said there could not be a ban on the word ‘Dalit.’

Gangadhar Pantawane, a Dalit writer from Maharashtra defines Dalit as a notion of change and revolution. The Dalits belief was humanism instead of sacred books, heaven and hell as it made them a slave to other castes. "What is Dalit. To me, Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. The Dalit believes in humanism.... Dalitness is a matter of appreciating the potential of one's total being.

Rumi says, “The new constitutional term cannot be made mandatory, as Dalit is the preferred and accepted term of the literary writers, artist's, ethnographers from the Dalit consciousness movement, they should speak up at this point, and assert the term Dalit.”

The term Dalit has evolved over a period of time and has come to symbolise different meanings. Some of these are: self-respect, assertion, solidarity and opposition to caste based exploitation. In the past Dalits have been forced to lead an undignified life full of shame, trauma and atrocities. Dalits have been referred as ‘untouchables’ but the official term used by the British was ‘depressed classes’. Mahatma Gandhi referred to Dalits as ‘Harijans’ which was rejected by the community which saw the word as patronising and sanctimonious. Moreover, Gandhi wanted to keep Dalits within the sphere of Hinduism and hence he chose the term which first figured in the hymn Vaishnava jana by Narsinh Mehta.

However, such usage led to a debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar who wanted to represent Dalits as a separate community.

After Ambedkar’s death, the first Dalit movement that revolutionised the discourse on Dalit politics was the Dalit Panthers Party founded in the 1970s in Maharashtra's then Bombay. Its method of fixing instant accountability with the upper castes caught the imagination of Dalits in Maharashtra who were facing atrocities despite the Constitution outlawing inequality and caste-based discrimination.

The Dalit Panthers manifesto was published in 1973 and gave a new definition to the term ‘Dalit’:
"Dalits are members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Neo-Buddhists, the working people, landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion."

A close aide of the Dalit-Ambedkarite group Bhim Army, Kush, says, “Scheduled Caste is a limiting term. In the past, we have been abused using the term ‘Dalit’ but this hatred united us under one umbrella, which has now become our collective identity. This is the reason why the term Dalit is being removed from books, or sometimes this sort of propaganda is done in the name, but the truth is that the government is afraid of our unity.”

Rumi also believes that the removal of the term from official documents is an attempt to curb the rising public Dalit consciousness and that voices must be raised against this from all quarters, especially the ones making and amending laws. She says that this kind of neutralisation in the public consciousness isn’t a “good thing”.

Several scholars in the past year too, have questioned the need for this ‘word-play’. Social scientist Satish Deshpande had asked, “To prohibit or even ban insulting terms etc. is understandable, but why do this for a self-chosen word/name? The only reason I can think of is that word brings to mind the antagonistic relationship between caste Hindu society and the so-called ‘out-castes’, the discrimination and oppression still practiced by the dominant sections of society.”

Over the past couple of years, if any people’s movement has self-organised and resisted government’s atrocious policies, it is the Dalit movement with its several strands and colours, especially the Ambedkarites.

Whether it was the struggle for social justice after the scholar Rohith Vemula’s institutional murder or the resistance after Bhima Koregaon, a vibrant Dalit movement has time and again posed vast challenges for the government in terms of asking to be accountable for its actions. While grave issues such as manual scavenging still persist in the Indian society even after seven decades of independence, the government chooses time and again to indulge in word-play which may be unnecessary or even suited to its own majoritarian agenda.

 Courtesy: Sabrangindia

The young Swedish woman Greta Thunberg has faced an exceptional outpouring of hatred, expressed as the most vile macho attacks, the most sordid insinuations about her mental health, the lowest calumnies about her autonomy, and even barely veiled death threats.

You don’t have to look far to find the source of these ever-growing waves of hatred. They flow from the national-populist, climate denying, sexist, racist and antisemitic extreme right-wing, which is spreading like a cancer, especially since Trump’s election, Brexit, and the successes of the German AfD, the French FN/RN and the Italian Lega, among others. The photoshop montages showing Greta alongside financier Georges Soros or a fighter of the Islamic State clearly show the anti-semitic or Islamophobic intentions of these circles.

The links of the extreme right with fossil capital are proven, in particular through the European Institute for Climate and Energy (EIKE), which collaborates with the Heartland Institute, a US climate denying think tank funded by the oil sector and the violently climate denying Koch Group, the most powerful private company in the US, active in the fossil fuel sector and chemicals.

If we dig a little deeper, we find in the campaign against Greta Thunberg the whole galaxy of collaborators in reactionary think tanks and other climate denying “institutes” funded by Exxon and Chevron. Notably the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) from which came Myron Ebell, a member of the Trump transition team at the head of the EPA, Breitbart News, etc.

The main themes of the attacks on Greta Thunberg are the same on both sides of the Atlantic: that she should go back to school to learn what she doesn’t know; that she is a puppet in the hands of Al Gore and green capitalism; that those who pull the strings are using a disabled child to impose an emotional dictatorship; that her call for a strike is totalitarian; that the poor girl is a fanatic, a sick woman, etc. Most of these elements were present in the comments made by Jordan Bardella (a leader of the French far right party National Rally) during Greta’s visit to the French National Assembly.

But climate denial does not explain it all, far from it. Hatred...
against Greta Thunberg is all the more vicious because the target is a woman, a young woman. A young woman who is not afraid to accept herself as she is, with, as she herself says, her different personality.

A brave, determined, intelligent, sensitive young woman who knows what she’s talking about. A young woman who expresses herself very clearly, in the name of youth, in the name of the future, and does not hesitate to face the powerful with cheerful insolence. In a word: a witch.

When it comes to attacking women, what some call the “tradition of liberty” often makes France, unfortunately, the place where the most pestilential unpleasant smells are released. Those from Bernard Pivot (a left leaning French intellectual) exceed everything. Given this character’s academic distinctions, this is an opportunity to recall a historical phrase: “Sir, you’re just a piece of shit in a silk stocking.” He brings to mind this political reality: sexism and machismo always build a bridge to the far right.

At first, the representatives of capital focused on co-opting Greta Thunberg and using her to neutralise the youth. Hence the invitations to Davos, the European Parliament, the National Assembly and many other official venues. Since she called for the unity of all against the threat, and the rulers are changing their tactics. She pilloried them all without hesitation (“How dare you? You only talk about money!”) and her message had maximum impact worldwide. After the summit failed, she again called for strikes. As a result, the attempts to co-opt her are over. They aren’t smiling now.

The turning point is clearly visible in France: Macron blames Greta Thunberg for “antagonising our societies,” advises young people to act as “citizens” rather than strike, or to go to Poland to demonstrate against the climate denier Duda. As for LVMH’s (the world’s largest luxury-goods company) CEO, Bernard Arnault, he led the attack against Greta Thunberg for “antagonising the youth.” The media that carried her to the top will drag her through the mud, and the politicians who tried to use her will hand her to the executioner for witchcraft, and the far right will offer to do the job.

Incredible as it may seem, given the context, powerful people are concerned, even worried. They fear a total break between youth and the old world. Their world of politics in the service of the rich, of competition between nations, of capitalism that destroys nature and life.

They fear that the global youth movement, as it grows, will involve other layers: peasants, exploited people, indigenous people whose forests are sacked, the oppressed in general. Impossible? Who knows? Who knows? The call of the Greta generation resonates deeply, because the 99% do not like the idea that our children’s world will be worse than ours.

Since the youth refuse to fall into line, the the 1% who are responsible for the disaster will use all possible methods to discredit the symbol of the movement, Greta Thunberg. The media that carried her to the top will drag her through the mud, the politicians who tried to use her will hand her to the executioner for witchcraft, and the far right will offer to do the job.

The hatred against this young woman is an expression of the struggle of the dominators to maintain their domination. Their fight is against youth and women, of course. But it also against employees, peasants, racialised people, indigenous peoples, different people, and the living in general. This is the class struggle in the Anthropocene.

Whatever Greta Thunberg’s limitations, our place is at her side, in the struggle she has constantly promoted and which it is now a matter of democratically organising. It is the place of both the left and of any ecology worthy of the name.

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(Daniel Tanuro is a socialist and ecology activist in Belgium.)
Greed of 'Border-Industrial Complex' Fuelling Militarisation

Eoin Higgins

A new report detailing the ways US corporations are profiting off of President Donald Trump’s war on immigrants calls the partnership between security firms and the federal government a "powerful border–industrial complex," the existence of which presents a major barrier to reform, and explains that making money off of the border is nothing new.

"More Than a Wall," the report from the Transnational Institute, "looks at the history of US border control and the strong political consensus—both Republican and Democrat—in support of border militarisation that long pre-dates the Trump administration.

The report lays out how both Democratic and Republican administrations have regularly increased the budget for border enforcement since the 1980s, and how the constant flow of cash has created a powerful industrial and political force interested in maintaining the oppressive policies which have contributed to the Trump-era immigration detention crisis.

Just 14 companies are considered the power players in the industry: Accenture, Boeing, Elbit, Flir Systems, G4S, General Atomics, General Dynamics, IBM, L3 Technologies, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, PAE, Raytheon and UNISYS. But, as the report explains, it's not just corporations—research centers and universities are making money off border security as well.

Universities and research institutes have also cashed in through nine Centers of Excellence (COEs) on Borders, Trade, & Immigration that in 2017 received $10 million directly, with another $90 million dedicated to research and development (R&D). The University of Houston, University of Arizona, the University of Texas El Paso, University of Virginia, West Virginia University, University of North Carolina, University of Minnesota, Texas A&M, Rutgers University, American University, the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and the Migration Policy Institute all receive DHS funding.

Without addressing the profit motive, says the report, there's little chance of making real change.

"Any strategy to change the direction of US policy on migration will require confronting this border–industrial complex and removing its influence over politics and policy," the report says. "For while those corporations who profit from the suffering of migrants remain embedded in positions of power within government and society, it will be a huge challenge to forge a new approach that puts the lives and dignity of migrants first."

(Eoin Higgins is senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams.)

The Knowledge of a Better World

Michael A. Lebowitz

There is an old saying that if you don’t know where you want to go, then any road will take you there. I think that recent years, years of neoliberalism, imperialist outrages, and the virtual destruction of almost every effort to create an alternative, have disproved this saying. Our experience tells us that if you don’t know where you want to go, then no road will take you there.

Our greatest failing is that we have lost sight of an alternative. And, because we have no grand conception of an alternative (indeed, we are told that we should have no grand conceptions), then the response to the neoliberal mantra of TINA, that there is no alternative, has been: let’s preserve health care, let’s not attack education, and let’s try for a little more equality and a little more preservation of the environment. Because of our failure to envision an alternative as a whole, we have many small pieces, many small noes; indeed, the only feasible alternative to barbarism proposed has been barbarism with a human face.

This essay was originally presented as a talk on December 3, 2004, at the World Encounter of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity, in Caracas, Venezuela.
Let us think about a real alternative but yet a very simple one. I have in mind a simple idea expressed by Karl Marx in 1844 (but which runs throughout his work)—the unity of human beings based upon recognition of their differences. That is a conception which begins from the recognition that people are different—that they have differing needs and differing capabilities—and that they are interdependent.

Whether we act upon the basis of this understanding of our interdependence or not, we cannot deny that we produce for each other, that as beings within society, there is a chain of human activity that links us. We produce inputs for each other, and the ultimate result of our activity is the reproduction of human beings within society. We can think of this as the activity of a collective worker, as that of the human family, or as that of the family of workers; but, this chain of human activity exists whether we consciously produce on this basis or not—whether we understand our unity or not.

In fact, as we know only too well, outside of little oases (some societies, some families), in this society we do not consciously produce for the needs of others, and we do not understand our productive activity as our contribution to this chain of human activity. Instead of valuing our relationship as human beings, we produce commodities, we value commodities; instead of understanding this chain of human activity as our bond and our power, we understand only that we need these commodities, that we are dominated by them.

**The Knowledge of Commodities**

This, as is well-known, is what Marx called the “fetishism of commodities” in the first chapter of *Capital*. It is a powerful concept. In my view, no one has ever communicated this idea better than an artist—Wallace Shawn, an actor and playwright from the United States. In his play *The Fever*, Shawn’s protagonist at one point finds a copy of *Capital* and begins to read it at night. He thinks about the anger in this book, and then he goes back to the beginning, which he had initially found to be impenetrable. Here I’ll quote a long passage from Wallace Shawn:

“I came to a phrase that I’d heard before, a strange, upsetting, sort of ugly phrase: this was the section on “commodity fetishism,” “the fetishism of commodities.” I wanted to understand that weird-sounding phrase, but I could tell that, to understand it, your whole life would probably have to change.

His explanation was very elusive. He used the example that people say, “Twenty yards of linen are worth two pounds.” People say that about every thing that it has a certain value. This is worth that. This coat, this sweater, this cup of coffee: each thing worth some quantity of money, or some number of other things—one coat, worth three sweaters, or so much money—as if that coat, suddenly appearing on the earth, contained somewhere inside itself an amount of value, like an inner soul, as if the coat were a fetish, a physical object that contains a living spirit. But what really determines the value of a coat? The coat’s price comes from its history, the history of all the people involved in making it and selling it and all the particular relationships they had. And if we buy the coat, we, too, form relationships with all those people, and yet we hide those relationships from our own awareness by pretending we live in a world where coats have no history but just fall down from heaven with prices marked inside. “I like this coat,” we say, “It’s not expensive,” as if that were a fact about the coat and not the end of a story about all the people who made it and sold it. “I like the pictures in this magazine.”

A naked woman leans over a fence. A man buys a magazine and stares at her picture. The destinies of these two are linked. The man has paid the woman to take off her clothes, to lean over the fence. The photograph contains its history—the moment the woman unbuttoned her shirt, how she felt, what the photographer said. The price of the magazine is a code that describes the relationships between all these people—the woman, the man, the publisher, the photographer—who commanded, who obeyed. The cup of coffee contains the history of the peasants who picked the beans, how some of them fainted in the heat of the sun, some were beaten, some were kicked.

For two days I could see the fetishism of commodities everywhere around me. It was a strange feeling. Then on the third day I lost it, it was gone, I couldn’t see it anymore.

In this quotation from Wallace Shawn a certain type of knowledge is described—price. Price is the form in which that chain of human activity and human relationships appears to us. This knowledge comes in monetary units. We know the prices of the things we need. We know the price we have ourselves received. And, now we must take that knowledge and make individual
rational decisions … as consumers, as capitalists—we’re all the same, maximisers on the basis of the knowledge we have, maximisers on the basis of money.

Think about the knowledge we do not have in this world where money is the medium of knowledge. We know nothing about all that that does not come to us with a price—the natural environment around us; our own needs for the development of our potential; we know nothing about the lives of all those people who have produced the things we purchase, all those people with whom we have entered into a relationship by buying the results of their activity. Our situation is one of social ignorance, and that very ignorance is what permits us to be divided, turned against each other, and exploited by the owners of commodities, the owners of the chain of human activity.

When our knowledge is the price of things, how can we avoid being divided? When we don’t recognise our unity, how can we avoid competing against each other to the benefit of the owners of knowledge?

**Another Kind of Knowledge**

Think about another kind of knowledge—a knowledge based upon recognition of our unity, knowledge based upon a concept of solidarity. It is a different knowledge when we are aware of who produces for us and how, when we understand the conditions of life of others and the needs they have for what we can contribute. Knowledge of this type immediately places us as beings within society, provides an understanding of the basis of all our lives. It is immediately direct social knowledge because it cannot be communicated through the indirect medium of money.

Knowledge of our needs and capacities is radical because it goes to the root, to human beings. And, when it is obtained because we recognise our unity, it is knowledge which differs qualitatively and quantitatively from the knowledge we have under the dominant social relations. It is quantitatively different because existing relations no longer make its monopolisation and restriction a source of private gain. It is inherent in knowledge that it is a public good. Knowledge can be reproduced at almost no cost, and unlike scarce commodities, I do not have less knowledge if I give you some of mine. In a rational society, knowledge should be shared without any restriction.

The existence of institutions which make knowledge property and a source of private gain, then, are contrary to the concept and ethos of knowledge and demonstrate the social irrationality of those institutions. Take the grading mechanism in many universities, for example. It is a common practice for professors in North America to grade according to a normal statistical curve—so many As, Bs, Cs, Ds, and Fs—regardless of overall student performance. What kind of behavior does this make rational for those who function within such a structure? Clearly, it is to keep knowledge to themselves (or to a small subset of friends). The more other students know, the lower are one’s own chances for a good grade. (In fact, it makes rational giving other students false information.) The structure in this case puts students in competition—a situation that Robert Wyatt, the British singer, once sang about with the line, “How can I rise, if you don’t fall?” This artificially created structure produces a zero-sum game in the case of knowledge which, by its very nature, is not zero-sum.

Thus, whereas ideally a university might be viewed as an environment dedicated to the fullest possible development and dissemination of knowledge—something which a collective learning process would encourage—we can see that the creation of an environment which rewards private ownership of knowledge is contrary to the idealised concept of the university.

In many respects, this can be seen as a parable of intellectual property rights. What intellectual property rights do is to attempt to create an artificial scarcity that will compel people to pay more for knowledge than its actual cost of reproduction. Their purpose is to make what Marx called the products of the social brain a source of private enrichment. In a society, on the other hand, which begins from the recognition of the needs of all its members, the logical and rational impulse is to make knowledge available to all at its true cost of reproduction—zero.

Where our social relations and institutions are not such as to lead us to view our knowledge as property, there is another kind of knowledge that could be expanded easily, but does not expand. Much knowledge—especially about how we work—is not codified; it is “tacit knowledge”—knowledge, for example, of how work could be done better, knowledge of how it could be easier. Within antagonistic productive relations, especially in the situation where there is wage labour, this is knowledge to be kept to oneself—in order to ensure that it is not used against you. This
knowledge is wealth which would flow naturally in a society which is based upon the recognition of our interdependence.

Tacit knowledge is an example of a type of knowledge available freely under a different set of social relations. It is not, however, the only difference in the knowledge which would be available. When we begin from the conception of an alternative society, it becomes clear that a certain type of knowledge is hidden from us under our existing relations. The knowledge that is not communicated in a commodity economy is that which has no price in the market. The natural environment in which we live, the air we breathe, the sights we see, the sounds we hear, the water we drink (ah, once the water we drank) has no price and thus does not enter into our monetary calculus. And, without that price, it is invisible when we as atomistic maximisers make our decisions. It means that these decisions, based upon partial knowledge, are inherently biased. If we were able to place an appropriate price upon clean air, our actions as calculating producers and consumers would produce different decisions—ones more likely to ensure the maintenance of clean air. Hypothetically, too, if we were able to place a price upon the full development of human potential or upon the ability to live in a just society, faced with this altered set of prices, our individual decisions would differ (as would the decisions of those who currently purchase our abilities without the need to consider their real price).

But, how, in the absence of commodity exchanges, can such information which takes into account what Marx called “the worker’s own need for development” be generated? If we share Marx’s emphasis upon the importance of the rich human being, “the totally developed individual,” then certainly we must concern ourselves with the mechanisms by which the knowledge of needs and capabilities can be produced.

The Accumulation of Knowledge for Human Development

Those who are here to discuss ways to defend humanity against the barbarism it currently faces begin from certain values. These values are embodied in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela—in the goal described in Article 299 of “ensuring overall human development,” in the declaration of Article 20 that “everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality,” and in the focus of Article 102 upon “developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society.”

That Constitution also is quite specific on how this human development occurs—participation. Much like Marx’s stress upon human activity as the way people transform both circumstances and themselves, Article 62 of the Bolivarian Constitution declares that participation by people is “the necessary way of achieving their involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective.” Human development, in short, does not drop from the sky—it is the result of a process, of many processes, in which people transform themselves. It is the product of a society which is “democratic, participatory and protagonistic” (to quote the Constitution once again).

Through social forms (as set out in Article 70) such as “self-management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms,” through democratic planning and participatory budgeting at all levels of society, people develop their capabilities and capacities. This process of transformative activity, though, is precisely the process of developing the knowledge required for this alternative society. That information cannot come from markets, from surveys nor negotiations at the top—it comes neither from the fetishism of commodities nor the fetishism of the plan. It is through democratic discussions and decisions at every level that we can identify our needs and our capabilities. The creation of democratic institutions is precisely the way in which we expand the quality and quantity of knowledge that can make a society based upon unity and the recognition of difference work. How else can we understand the needs of others except by hearing their voices? How else can we consciously insert ourselves in the chain of human activity? The knowledge needed to build and sustain an alternative society, a society based upon human bonds, is necessarily “democratic, participatory and protagonistic.”

The Battle of Ideas

Knowing where we want to go is a necessity if we want to build an alternative. But, it is not the same as being there. We live in a world dominated by global capital, a world in which capital divides us, setting the people of each country against each other to see who can produce more cheaply by driving wages, working conditions, and environmental standards to the lowest level in order to survive in.
the war of all against all. We know,
too, that any country that would
challenge neoliberalism faces the
assorted weapons of international
capital—foremost among them the
IMF, the World Bank, and imperialist
power (in various forms including
the US National Endowment for
Democracy and other forces of
subversion).

The most immediate obstacle,
though, is the belief in TINA, i.e.,
that there is no alternative. Without
the vision of a better world, every
crisis of capitalism (such as the one
upon us) can bring in the end only
a painful restructuring—with the
pain felt by those already exploited
and excluded. The concept of an
alternative, of a society based upon
solidarity, is an essential weapon in
defense of humanity. We need to
recognise the possibility of a world
in which the products of the social
brain and the social hand are common
property and the basis for our self-
development—the possibility in
Marx’s words of “a society of free
individuality, based on the universal
development of individuals and
on their subordination of their
communal, social productivity as
their social wealth” (Grundrisse).

For this reason, the battle of ideas
is essential.

That battle can be fought in
many ways. For one, it points to the
importance of the deepening of the
real process in societies where the
beginnings of an alternative have
been made. The glimpses of a better
world that they provide—even in the
midst of concerted attacks by
imperialism—are an inspiration for
struggles everywhere around the
world, a demonstration that there is
an alternative.

But, it is only in those struggles
themselves that we spread an
understanding of that alternative.
These are struggles which start from
people’s needs, from their discontent
over the gap between what society
promises them and what they are able
to obtain. The battle of ideas begins
here by communicating knowledge
of the nature of capitalism—by
demonstrating that poverty is not
the fault of the poor, that exclusion
is not the fault of the excluded, that
wealth is the result of the chain of
human activity.

These struggles, too, are
explicitly about knowledge—
the struggles against property
rights that deny free access to
the intellectual accomplishments
of humanity. They are struggles
against commodification, against
the invasion of money and price
into all aspects of life. But, they are
also struggles for new democratic
forms that are a means of tapping
the wealth in the heads of all people
and of communicating all our needs
and capacities. They are struggles, in
short, for a democratic, participatory
and protagonistic alternative.

In this era of capitalist
globalisation and neoliberalism,
however, it is obvious that more
than local democratic institutions
are needed. How can we understand
the needs and capacities of people
who are geographically distant
but intimately close as parts of the
human chain of activity? How can
we see other limbs of the collective
worker as human beings with needs
rather than as competitors? We
develop our understanding of our
unity and interdependence with
those who capitalist globalisation has
assembled around the world through
solidarity with those people—not
only with their specific struggles
as workers or citizens but also by
linking up with them directly on the
basis of community to community.

To build a world based upon
solidarity, we must practice
solidarity—and in that way transform
both circumstances and ourselves. If
we know where we want to go and
we know what is necessary to get
there, we have begun the battle to
defend humanity against barbarism.

Finally, to take up a theme
introduced last night by President
Chávez and Pablo González
Casanova about the need to make
real changes in the world, let me
close by paraphrasing Marx, using
the language appropriate to this
conference: the idea of human
society is sufficient to defeat the
idea of barbarism. But, it takes
real human action to defeat real
barbarism.

(Michael A. Lebowitz is professor
emeritus of economics at Simon
Fraser University, Burnaby, British
Columbia, Canada.)
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Aristotle

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