They pledged to do it, and they did—Bolivian feudal lords, mass media magnates and other treasonous “elites”—they overthrew the government, broke hope and interrupted an extremely successful socialist process in what was once one of the poorest countries in South America.

One day, they will be cursed by their own nation. One day they will stand trial for sedition. One day, they will have to reveal who trained them, who employed them, who turned them into spineless beasts. One day! Hopefully soon.

But now, Evo Morales, legitimate President of Bolivia, elected again and again by his people, is leaving his beloved country. He is crossing the Andes, flying far, to fraternal Mexico, which extended her beautiful hand, and offered him political asylum.

El Alto, until recently a place of hope, with its playgrounds for children and elegant cable cars connecting the once dirt-poor communities, is now beginning to lose its native sons and daughters. Battles are raging. People are charging against the oppressors, carrying flags, dying.

A civil war, or more precisely, a war for the survival of socialism, a war against imperialism, for social justice, for indigenous people. A war against racism. A war for Bolivia, for its tremendous pre-colonial culture, for life; life as it is being perceived in the Andes, or deep in the South American rainforest, not as it is seen in Paris, Washington or Madrid.

* * *

The legacy of Evo Morales is tangible, and simple to understand. During almost 14 years in power, all the social indicators of Bolivia went sky-high. Millions were pulled out of poverty. Millions have been benefiting from free medical care, free education, subsidised housing, improved infrastructure, a relatively high minimum wage, but also, from pride that was given back to the indigenous population, which forms the majority in this historically feudal country governed by corrupt,
ruthless ‘elites’—descendants of Spanish conquistadors and European ‘gold-diggers’.

Evo Morales made the Aymara and Quechua languages official, on par with Spanish. He made people who communicate in these languages, equal to those who use the tongue of the conquerors. He elevated the great indigenous culture high, to where it belongs—making it the symbol of Bolivia, and of the entire region.

Gone was the Christian cross-kissing (look at the crosses reappearing again, all around the oh so European-looking Jeanine Añez who has grabbed power, ‘temporarily’ but still thoroughly illegally). Instead, Evo used to travel, at least once a year, to Tiwanaku, “the capital of the powerful pre-Hispanic empire that dominated a large area of the southern Andes and beyond, reached its apogee between 500 and 900 AD”, according to UNESCO. That is where he used to search for spiritual peace. That is where his identity came from.

Gone was the veneration of the Western colonialist and imperialist culture, of savage capitalism.

This was a new world, with ancient, deep roots. This is where South America has been regrouping. Here, and in Correa’s Ecuador, before Correa and his beliefs were purged and ousted by the treacherous Moreno.

And what is more: before the coup, Bolivia was not suffering from economic downfall; it was doing well, extremely well. It was growing, stable, reliable, confident.

Even the owners of big Bolivian companies, if they were to care one bit for Bolivia and its people, had countless reasons to rejoice.

* * *

But the Bolivian business community, as in so many other Latin American countries, is obsessed with the one and only ‘indicator’: “how much higher, how much above the average citizens it can get”. This is the old mentality of the colonialists; a feudal, fascist mentality.

Years ago, I was invited, in La Paz, for dinner by an old family of senators and mass media owners. With no shame, no fear, openly, they spoke, despite knowing who I was:

“We will get rid of this Indigenous bastard. Who does he think he is? If we lose millions of dollars in the process, as we did in 1973 Chile and now in Venezuela, we will still do it. Restoring our order is the priority.”

There is absolutely no way to reason with these people. They cannot be appeased, only crushed; defeated. In Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador or in Bolivia. They are like rats, like disease, proverbial symbols of fascism as in the novel The Plague, written by Albert Camus. They can hide, but they never fully disappear. They are always ready to invade, with zero notice, some happy city.

They are always ready to join forces with the West, because their roots are in the West. They think precisely like the European conquerors, like North American imperialists. They have double nationalities and homes scattered all over the world. Latin America for them is just a place to live, and to plunder natural resources, exploit labor. They rob here, and spend money elsewhere; educate their children elsewhere, get their surgeries done (plastic and real) elsewhere. They go to opera houses in Paris but never mingle with indigenous people at home. Even if, by some miracle, they join the Left, it is the Western, anarcho-syndicalist Left of North America and Europe, never the real, anti-imperialist, revolutionary Left of non-European countries.

They don’t need the success of the nation. They don’t want a great, prosperous Bolivia; Bolivia for all of its citizens.

They only want prosperous corporations. They want money, profit; for themselves, for their families and clans, for their bandit group of people. They want to be revered, considered ‘exceptional’, superior. They cannot live without that gap—the great gap between them and those ‘dirty Indians’, as they call the indigenous people, when no one hears them!

* * *

And that is why, Bolivia should fight, defend itself, as it is beginning to do so right now.

If this, what is happening to Evo and his government, is “the end”, then Bolivia will be set back by decades. Entire generations will again rot alive, in desperation, in rural shacks made of clay, without water and electricity, and without hope.

The ‘elites’ are now talking about ‘peace’. Peace for whom? For them! Peace, as it was before Evo; ‘peace’ so the rich can play golf and fly for shopping to their beloved Miami and Madrid, while 90% of the population was getting kicked, humiliated, insulted. I remember that ‘peace’. The Bolivian people remember it even better.

I covered the civil war in neighboring Peru, for several years, in the 90’s, and I often crossed over into Bolivia. I wrote an entire novel about it—“Point of No Return”. It was an absolute horror. I could not
even take my local photographers to a concert or for a cup of coffee in a decent place, because they were cholos, indigenous. Nobodies in their own countries. It was apartheid. And if socialism does not return, it will be apartheid once again.

Last time I went to Bolivia, few months ago, it was totally different country. Free, confident. Stunning.

Remembering what I saw in Bolivia and Peru, quarter of a century ago, I declare, clearly and decisively: “To hell with such ‘peace’, proposed by elites’”!

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In Paris, on the 10th November, in the middle of the Place de la Republique, a huge crowd of treasonous Bolivians gathered, demanding the resignation of Evo. I filmed and photographed these people. I wanted to have this footage in my possession, for posterity.

They live in France, and their allegiances are towards the West. Some are even of European stock, although others are indigenous.

There are millions of Cubans, Venezuelans, Brazilians, living in the US and Europe, working tirelessly for the destruction of their former motherlands. They do it in order to please their new masters, to make profit, as well as various other reasons.

It is not peace. This is terrible, brutal war, which has already taken millions of lives, in Latin America alone.

This continent has the most unequally distributed wealth on earth. Hundreds of millions are living in misery. While others, sons and daughters or Bolivian feudal scum, are attending Sorbonne and Cambridge, to get intellectually conditioned, in order to serve the West.

Each time, and I repeat each time, a decent, honest government is voted in, democratically, by the people, each time there is someone who has invented a brilliant solution and solid plan to improve this dire situation, the clock begins ticking. The years (sometimes even months) of the leader are numbered. He or she will either be killed, or ousted, or humiliated and forced out of power.

The country then goes back to, literally, shit, as has happened just recently to Ecuador (under Moreno), Argentina (under Macri) and Brazil (under Bolsonaro). The brutal status quo is preserved. The lives of tens of millions are ruined. “Peace” returns. For the Western regime and its lackeys.

Then, as a raped country screams in pain, countless international NGOs, UN agencies and funding organisations, descend upon it, suddenly determined to ‘help refugees’, to keep children in classrooms, to ‘empower women’, or to fight malnutrition and hunger.

None of this would be needed, if the elected governments which are serving their people were to be left alone; left in real peace!

Enough is enough!

Latin America is, once again, waking up. The people are outraged. The coup in Bolivia will be resisted. Macri’s regime has fallen. Mexico is marching in a cautiously socialist direction. Chile wants its socialist country back; a country which was crushed by military boots in 1973.

In the name of the people, in the name of the great indigenous culture, and in the name of the entire continent, Bolivian citizens are now resisting, struggling, confronting the fascist, pro-Western forces.

Revolutionary language is once again being used. It may be out of fashion in Paris or London, but not in South America. And that is what matters—here!

Evo did not lose. He won. His country has won. Under his leadership, it became a wonderful country; a country full of hope, a country that offered great prospects to hundreds of millions all over La Patria Grande. Everyone south of the Rio Grande knows it. Marvelous Mexico, which has given him asylum, knows it, too.

Evo has won. And then, he was forced out by the treasonous military, by treasonous business thugs, feudal land owners, and by Washington. Evo and his family and comrades have been brutalised by that extreme right-wing paramilitary leader—Luis Fernando Camacho—who is calling himself a Christian; brutalised by him and by his men and women.

Bolivia will fight. It will bring back its legitimate President where he belongs; to the Presidential Palace.

The plane which is taking Evo to Mexico, north, is actually taking him home, back to Bolivia. It is a big, big detour. Thousands of kilometers, and months, perhaps even years... But from the moment the airplane took off, the tremendous, epic journey back to La Paz began.

The people of Bolivia will never abandon their President.

And Evo is, forever, tied to his People.

And Long Live Bolivia, Damn It!

(Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He has covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. He presently resides in East Asia and the Middle East.)
The Ayodhya Verdict is Based on a Strange Feat of Logic

Markandey Katju

The recent Ayodhya verdict of the Supreme Court will go down in the annals of Indian legal history in the same category as its 1975 decision in ADM Jabalpur vs Shivakant Shukla—except that unlike the latter, in this one there is not a single courageous dissent.

In substance, the court has said that might is right, and has laid down a dangerous precedent sanctifying aggression.

As Pratik Sinha noted on Twitter, it is like a bully snatching a child’s sandwich in school, and the teacher giving a ‘balanced judgment’ by allowing the bully to keep the sandwich, and giving the child a slice of dry bread as ‘restitution’.

One need not go into the correctness or otherwise of the court’s suggestion that the Babri Masjid was built by one of Babur’s generals on a site where a non-Islamic structure pre-existed and may have been destroyed. It is true that many Hindu temples were destroyed by Muslim invaders, and mosques built on their sites, sometimes even using the material of the temple. For example, the Quwwat ul Islam mosque near the Qutub Minar in Delhi has pillars with Hindu carvings, or the Gyanvapi Masjid in Varanasi whose rear wall has Hindu carvings, or the Atala Devi Masjid in Jaunpur. But is India to move forward, or backward?

It would be a different matter if a Hindu temple is illegally demolished today and converted into a mosque. But where this was done allegedly 500 years ago, does it carry any sense to go about restoring the structure to its Hindu original? This kind of revanchism, which is what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad sought, will be stupid, and can only polarise society, serving the political agenda of some people who wish to keep the communal fires burning for getting votes.

In paragraphs 786 and 798 of its judgment, the court has observed that the Muslim side adduced no evidence to show that from 1528, when the mosque was constructed, to 1857, it was in possession of Muslims who offered namaz there. But what evidence could possibly be adduced? There cannot be any eyewitnesses alive belonging to that period, and it is well known that in the 1857 war of independence, almost all records in Avadh were destroyed. In any case, it is common sense that when a house of worship, whether a temple, mosque, church or gurdwara is built, it is built for use, and not just for decoration.

In para 798 of the judgment it is stated, “The exclusion of Muslims from worship and possession took place on the intervening night between 22/23.12.1949 when the mosque was desecrated by installation of Hindu idols. Ouster of Muslims was not through lawful authority, and Muslims have been wrongly deprived of a mosque that had been constructed well over 450 years ago.”

Despite this clear finding, the court has handed over the site to Hindus by a strange feat of logic!

In this vein, it is foolish to think that the Ayodhya verdict will bring about communal peace. Appeasement, like the Munich pact of 1938, only whets the appetite of the aggressor. Cries of “Abhi to yeh jhaanki hai, Kashi Mathura baangi hai” were heard soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992, threatening a move on Muslim sites in Varanasi and Mathura, and are bound to be repeated soon. BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj has said that the Jama Masjid in Delhi was built on a Hindu temple, which should be restored. A similar claim has been made about the Taj Mahal by BJP hot heads. Where will all this end?

To say that Ram was born at a particular spot is ridiculous. Even if he was a historical, not mythical, figure, how can anyone say where a person was born thousands of years ago?

India is passing through a terrible economic crisis, with GDP growth languishing, manufacturing and business in steep decline, unemployment at a record height (even according to the government’s own National Sample Survey), an appalling level of child malnourishment (every second Indian child is malnourished according to the Global Hunger Index), 50% of Indian women anaemic, farmers suicides continuing unabated, healthcare and good education for the masses in a pitiable state, etc.

Evidently our leaders have no clue how to solve these huge problems, so to divert attention from them they must resort to gimmicks like Yoga Day, cow protection, Swacchata Abhiyan, abrogation of Article 370, etc. It should be obvious that building a Ram Mandir...
in Ayodhya is in the same category.

After the partition of 1947, the demolition of the Babri Masjid by political vandals was India’s greatest tragedy. The Ayodhya verdict says this demolition was illegal, but in the same breath sanctifies it. Well done, My Lords!

(Markandey Katju is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India.)

Has Supreme Court Caved in to Hindutva?

Ajaz Ashraf

The Supreme Court’s majority decision to club the issue of women’s entry into the Sabarimala temple with pending matters of similar nature and refer all these to a larger, seven-member bench for consideration echoes, even though subliminally, the Hindu Right’s arguments and cribs against religious reforms.

These pending matters include whether Muslim women can enter a mosque/dargah (mausoleum), whether Parsi women married to non-Parsis are allowed to go into a fire temple, and whether the practice of female genital mutilation in the Dawoodi Bohra community should be banned.

Justice RF Nariman and Justice DY Chandrachud dissented with the majority opinion. Their argument was that the pending matters were not raised in over 50 petitions requesting the Supreme Court to review its 2018 judgement on the Sabarimala temple, which allowed entry to women of all ages.

The Supreme Court’s decision to group together myriad matters pertaining to religious reforms addresses the fundamental crib of orthodox Hindu leaders—that the Indian state’s zeal to reform their religious customs and practices does not extend to those of religious minorities.

The duality of approach to reform, according to orthodox Hindu leaders, is because of the Westernised elite’s grip over the Indian state. Neither steeped in the Hindu tradition nor religious, they seek to reform Hindus regardless of their sentiments. In contrast, religious minorities are not subjected to the elite’s modernising project.

This line of argument surfaced during the ferocious debate over the Hindu Code Bill in the 1940s, and then after India’s Independence. It became an article of faith for the Hindu Right when the Congress government, in 1985–86, overturned the Supreme Court judgement ordering that Shah Bano, a Muslim, was entitled to maintenance allowance from her husband who had divorced her.

As recently as last year, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat referred to the ‘duality’ of approach to reform in his customary Vijaya Dashami speech.

Referring to the unrest triggered by the Supreme Court’s judgement allowing women of all ages to enter the Sabarimala temple, Bhagwat said, “The questions such as why only the Hindu society experiences such repeated and brazen onslaughts on its faith, obviously rise in the public mind and lead to unrest. The situation is not at all conducive for the peace and healthiness of the society.”

By clubbing the issue of gender-based exclusion of Hindu, Muslim and Parsi women from their places of worship, the Supreme Court seems to have heeded Bhagwat’s criticism. The future ruling of the seven-member bench could always have a different bearing on each of the three religious groups.

Yet the Supreme Court will be simultaneously examining the tenets of Hinduism, Islam and Zoroastrianism. This is a significant victory for the Hindu Right. Its ideology now frames the dispensing of justice and conduct of politics.

The grievance of orthodox
Hindu leaders that only their religion is singled out for reform, dates back to 1941, when the Hindu Law Committee, under Justice B.N. Rau, was appointed to modernise Hindu laws that govern marriage and inheritance. On the basis of its report, a Hindu Code Bill, in two parts, was prepared and circulated for discussion. The first part of the Bill, dealing with succession, was said to have been framed by Sir Sultan Ahmed and was introduced in 1943 in the Central Legislative Assembly.

Orthodox Hindu leaders were severe in their criticism of the Bill. Among those leading the charge against it was the Gita Press, which represented the worldview of the Hindu Right. Journalist and independent researcher, Akshaya Mukul, in his book, Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India, writes, “Gita Press realised that its arguments against the Hindu Code Bill would have even greater resonance in the orthodox world if they were articulated through the Hindu-Muslim prism…”

Thus, the provision in the Bill giving a daughter the right to inherit her father’s property, was projected as an instance of imposing Muslim law on the Hindus. “Since the bill is the brainwave of Sir Sultan Ahmed it is natural such a provision has been made,” wrote Kalyan, a Gita Press publication. “The battle between bhai-bhai (brothers) would now become a battle between bhai-behen (brother and sister). Daughters would get rights from their fathers but would have to give away similar right to their nanads (husband’s sister)… The peace and tranquility of our homes would be gone.”

The Bill, however, lapsed and was subsequently reintroduced in the Constituent Assembly. It was referred to a Select Committee under the chairmanship of Law Minister B.R. Ambedkar. The Select Committee’s report was discussed in the Constituent Assembly, where the Hindu Right now changed the tack of its attacks. From projecting the Bill as a Muslim conspiracy, its leaders now taunted the government that its zeal for secularism was confined to reforming Hindu laws and interfering in their religion.

Their line of criticism was palpable from the intervention of orthodox Hindu leaders, many of whom were in the Congress party. Outside the Assembly, the attack on the Bill was launched by the RSS, which, as Ramachandra Guha writes in his book, India After Gandhi, “They brought batches of volunteers into New Delhi, to shout slogans against the Hindu Code Bill and court arrest. Among their larger aims were the dismemberment of Pakistan and the unseating of Jawaharlal Nehru as prime minister”—as they shouted, ‘Pakistan tod do’, ‘Nehru hukumat chhod do’ [Break Pakistan, Nehru quit ruling].”

Academician Chitra Sinha in her paper, ‘Rhetoric, Reason and Representation: Four Narratives in the Hindu Code Bill’, cites the Hindu Mahasabha’s Chennai wing describing the Hindu Code Bill as a “suicidal folly”. Why? This was because, the Mahasabha argued, the new Hindu code “based on monogamy may get the credit of having converted the whole of India into a vast Pakistan where the surviving Hindus will be treated as strangers in their own fatherland.”

In the Constituent Assembly, the Hindu Right was not quite as illogical. Its preferred mode of attack was to wonder why the Hindus were being reformed, not other religious communities. They were not convinced by the government’s explanation that a secular India, with an overwhelming Hindu majority, will not interfere in the religious affairs of religious minorities.

For instance, Seth Govind Das, a Hindu Right leader in the Congress, told the Constituent Assembly, “Today when we call our country a ‘secular state’… Dr Ambedkar should have presented to this House such a Bill which would have concerned not the Hindus alone, but would have been made applicable to all citizens of this country. While admitting this country as a ‘secular state’, the idea of introducing a Hindu Code Bill seems to me quite inappropriate.”

The government had not brought in a universal civil code because it did not dare to touch the Muslims, said Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra, who had been elected from West Bengal. “But you know that Hindu society today is in such a bad way that you can venture to do anything with it. Only a few ultra-modern persons, who are vocal, but have no real support in the country, are interested in this Bill,” he said.

Maitra also thought the Bill reeked of “un-Hindu ideas: a spirit of supreme contempt for anything Hindu permeates the whole Bill from the beginning to end.”

The remarks of H.V. Pataskar, who was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1963, sounded as paranoid as that of an RSS pracharak (propagandist) today. A uniform code would have taken away certain privileges that Muslims enjoy because of their personal law. Pataskar said, “By the present Bill also you are giving the exclusive right to a Muslim to have as many wives as he likes or at any rate up to four. Now what happens, if a man—a very wealthy man—wants to marry...
another wife, he can get himself converted into a Muslim and he can have as many wives as he likes.”

Then there was Gokulbhai Daulatram Bhatt, awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1971, who said, “I must say that it is the Hindu community alone which would quietly take whatever blows you might give it. Look at the Muslim community. Did anyone have the courage to draw up a code for them? Why not unite the Shia and Sunni schools of thought? Could you just dare meddle with the law of the Christians? Or could you dare tackle the Parsis? This poor community alone must stand everything.”

Bhatt said the Bill was an outcome of Ambedkar’s inferiority complex.

Ambedkar, however, saw the demand for a uniform code as a strategy to sabotage the Hindu Code Bill. Guha writes, “As Dr Ambedkar put it, ‘those who until yesterday were the greatest opponents of this [Hindu] Code and the greatest champions of the archaic Hindu Law as it exists today’, now claimed that they were ‘prepared for an All-India Civil Code.’ This was because they hoped that while it had already taken four or five years to draft the Hindu Code it will probably take ten years to draft the Civil Code.”

In clubbing the religious issues of Hindus, Muslims and Parsis, RSS leader Bhagwat cannot crib or wonder why “only the Hindu society experiences such repeated and brazen onslaughts on its symbols of faith.”

For the public, though, the Supreme Court’s majority decision in the Sabarimala case will seem a testament to the judges succumbing to pressure from Hindutva forces.

(Ajaz Ashraf is a freelance journalist.)

Restoration Of Democracy: March From Jammu To Srinagar

26 November To 1 December, 2019

A march (part by vehicle and part by feet) has been planned from Jammu to Srinagar from 26 November to 1 December, 2019 to demand restoration of democracy in Jammu & Kashmir. We believe that the decision taken by central government in August regarding J&K is undemocratic and if the government thinks what it has done is in the interest of J&K, then it must get it endorsed by the people of J&K. But the manner in which curbs have been imposed on fundamental rights of people of freedom of expression and others, it is analogous to giving a bitter pill to a child saying that it is in the interest of the child while not even allowing the child to cry after that. This is not how decisions are taken in any democracy. While the central government is engaged in a process of dialogue with Nagas and Bodos to resolve their political issues in accordance with their wishes, it did not consider it worth to consult even a single Kashmiri before taking a decision which will significantly impact the lives of citizens of J&K adversely. The entire state of J&K cannot be punished in the name of separatists or terrorists whose number is not more than a few hundred. Worse, even political parties, local or national, are not being allowed to function. It is ironical that the courts when allowing opposition political leaders’ entry in J&K are making it a condition that they should not indulge in political activities when Bhartiya Janata Party’s act has been a part of the political agenda of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh for a long time. Will BJP be the only party allowed to carry on with its political agenda of dividing the society on communal grounds, curbing civil liberties and disrupting peace, and activities of all other organizations be banned? Is its narrative of one nation, one constitution, one language, etc. moving towards a one party rule in the country?

We are accepting this challenge of BJP to finish democracy from this country and declaring this march with the objective of bringing back democratic norms and culture in this country. We request the individuals and organizations that stand for maintaining communal harmony, defending civil liberties and preserving peace to support us in this endeavor.

To participate in the march please contact any of the following and reach Jammu latest by 26 November, 2019 morning. Also, please help us raise resources for this march by contributing or organizing donations. We expect an expenditure of about Rs 60,000 for this endeavour with Rs 40,000 for the bus alone. If you wish to contribute, please contact us and we shall send you the required account number.

- I.D. Khajuria, J&K Forum for Peace and Territorial Integrity, 9419152093, idkhajuria@gmail.com
Narendra Modi does not agree but the world has never hesitated in recognising Jawaharlal Nehru as a historical figure who left a mark on India and the world. When Nehru died in 1964, the New York Times plainly referred to him as the “maker of modern India”; the Economist ran a cover story titled “World without Nehru”. It recalled his “almost magical grip” on the masses and regretted that the world stage would be poorer without the “great man”.

There has been a considerable shift in opinion about Nehru in India. He was idolised by the public while he lived but nowadays there is a tendency to try and actively forget him or diminish his role. Now Prime Minister Modi has told parliament that “India did not get democracy due to Pandit Nehru, as Congress wants us to believe.” Nehru has been dropped from school textbooks of Class VIII in the state of Rajasthan. He did not find a mention in a National Archives exhibition on the Quit India movement. The Ministry of Culture has decided to convert the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library at Nehru’s official residence “into a complex showcasing [the] lives of all Indian prime ministers.” This is a mystifying form of equal opportunity eminence that perhaps has few parallels. Imagine if the Lincoln Memorial were to suddenly sprout statues of other luminaries.

There are several reasons why Nehru has become a target. The RSS has long despised him for banning the organisation after Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination and it vehemently disagrees with the form of secularism that he instituted as state practice. It has been easy to rouse public sentiment against Nehru by invoking the humiliating defeat in the 1962 war against China. Nehru’s foreign policy of non-alignment and his faith in state planning have also been questioned. Many also resent his prominence in public life—for the way the Congress has appropriated him politically with statues, roads and government programmes named after him, the numerous advertisements in newspapers bearing his image and so on. In some ways, his ubiquity has obscured the detail that makes Nehru great.

Rise to greatness

Nehru’s life is worth recalling to get a sense as to what he meant to India then and what he offers to the country now. There are fewer biographies of Nehru than he deserves. Part of the reason may have to do with the difficulty in taking on his daunting oeuvre, given how much he wrote and said by way of books, articles, private correspondence and speeches. Historian Judith M. Brown’s excellent 2003 biography, Nehru: A Political Life, is very helpful in that regard. Drawing on existing material and Nehru’s post-1947 papers made available to her by Sonia Gandhi, Brown offers a fascinating, even-handed assessment of his career.

Born into a privileged home with a wealthy lawyer and political leader for a father in Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal grew up around the time when colonial rule was, to paraphrase Brown, challenging India’s religious and social conventions while affording material and political opportunities for educated Indians. Nehru’s political opinions were shaped by his education at Harrow and Cambridge, where he developed a strong distaste for imperialism. After a few desultory years on return, Nehru is drawn to politics, inspired by Gandhi and the protests around 1919–20. The nationalist movement then is marked by debates between moderates and radicals over tactics and strategy, over the use of non-cooperation, questions over pushing for full independence or being content with gradualist approaches.
In this fractious climate, Nehru stands by Gandhi and sees him as being central to India’s path to independence, even if the Mahatma’s political approaches and emphasis on moral transformation often frustrate him. Nehru’s outlook is shaped by other factors as well. One, that he grew up in a household marked by Hindu–Muslim cultural mingling; Motilal’s early education from a Muslim tutor was only in Arabic and Persian and being a Kashmiri family in Allahabad, the Nehrus could never really be considered locals and were not prone to narrow, provincial loyalties. Nehru was in some ways always a perennial outsider—a fierce nationalist who admired Britain culturally, he felt deeply about India’s subjugation under foreign rule but disapproved of its beliefs and customs.

Nehru soon became preoccupied with politics and Congress matters. He also read voraciously. Being in prison a lot helped. In the 23 years from 1921 to 1945 he was sent to jail for nine terms in periods ranging from 12 days to 1041, a total of 3,259 days—which was nearly nine years of his life. He acclimatised to prison life and wrote of the friendships and hobbies he developed and the irritations of lacking privacy. “His greatest solace was reading,” Brown writes. He read on politics, economics, science, literature and contemporary affairs. “Solid reading is a necessity in prison; without it the mind stagnates and rots,” he was to say. In one phase, between February 1934 and September 1935, he read 188 books, averaging 15–20 volumes a month.

This no doubt shaped his own ability to produce magical prose, as seen through his own writings in Autobiography and the Discovery of India and the deeply evocative letters and speeches he wrote. Through his years in India and Britain and his travels to Europe and interactions with leaders from other countries, Nehru developed strong convictions about colonial rule, equality within and between nations, the need for land reform and state intervention in the economy and society, the place for science in a nation’s life (as opposed to faith, which he was dismissive of), the need for a greater role for women in nation-building and on India’s place in the world.

This form of intellectual development was critical to India’s future as Nehru was to attain prominence in the Congress in the 1930s, including as president of the party, and as the nationalist movement wound through phases of agitation, accommodation, factional division and stasis. Gandhi was ceasing to be a “serious political leader” in the decade and was focusing his energies on the condition of the “untouchables” instead. Around 1936, Gandhi was “publicly proclaiming that Nehru was his heir, and felt that Nehru with his many gifts and total commitment to India rather than to any sectional cause or personal concern was the one who could be relied upon” to achieve unity in the Congress. Nehru was at this stage not only a key player in party deliberations but also a mass leader attracting a good deal of public adulation.

As is well-known, Nehru went on head an interim government in 1946 and was the central figure in the negotiations leading up to Partition and independence alongside Lord Mountbatten and M.A. Jinnah. Nehru, who insisted on full independence for India long before Gandhi was prepared to agitate for it, was to vehemently oppose Mountbatten’s proposal to devolve power to the provinces before transferring power—as that would amount to the Balkanisation of India. Mountbatten recanted but Nehru and his colleagues were to face a range of challenges in the weeks leading to independence, including, as Brown writes, raging communal violence, provincial choices about joining India or Pakistan, the future of the Indian princes, the division of assets of British India and so on. Nehru also had to deal with the crisis in Kashmir soon after—and the assassination of Gandhi within six months of independence.

Three important legacies
Nehru owes much of his reputation to his post-1946 career. He made at least three decisive interventions that have made India the republic it has become.

First, he ensured that his vision of India was inscribed in the Constitution. He drafted and moved in the Constituent Assembly a resolution that set out its objectives, which included the declaration of India as an independent republic in which all power was derived from the people. Everyone was to be guaranteed “social, economic and political justice, equality of status and opportunity, and freedom of thought, religion and association.” There were to be safeguards for minorities, backward and tribal areas. All of this was not a given. The 1937 provincial elections were limited by property ownership and had given the vote to only about 30 million Indians. There were, by contrast, 173 million eligible voters in the 1951 elections in independent India. Historian Ramachandra Guha
writes in *Patriots and Partisans* that "Nehru was without question the chief architect of our democracy. It was he, more than any other nationalist, who promoted universal franchise and the multi-party system."

Brown writes that “at the heart of Nehru’s vision of India was the conviction that it was a composite nation, born of a civilisation which over centuries had drawn from and assimilated the many religious and cultural traditions present on the subcontinent.” Nehru also worked in a context when India as an independent nation emerged as a political compact where units like princely states and other communities were open to alternative political futures. The Indian Union could hold together based on guaranteed fundamental rights to all, secularism and a state policy that addressed social inequalities and divisions. Nehru instinctively understood the utility of a constitutional democracy for a people with disparate identities; India was also lucky to have a generation of other gifted leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad and C. Rajagopalachari and together they crafted a political framework for Indians to coexist and evolve a state policy that addressed social inequalities and divisions. Nehru instinctively understood the utility of a constitutional democracy for a people with disparate identities; India was also lucky to have a generation of other gifted leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad and C. Rajagopalachari and together they crafted a political framework for Indians to coexist and evolve a shared imagination of the nation while preserving specific identities.

Second, Nehru’s impact on world politics is widely acknowledged. He emerged as an authoritative voice and critic of racism, imperialism and an advocate of Asian unity, Afro-Asian solidarity and world peace. He presciently crafted the policy of Non-Alignment to steer clear of power blocs in order to benefit from contacts with both sides, and as Guha points out, it also enabled India to emerge as a mediator between nations and as a leader of developing countries. Nehru’s conduct of foreign affairs had, as Brown puts it, “created for his country a distinctive, independent international identity.”

Third, Nehru was also focused on domestic social change and saw state planning as a driver of growth and an agent for addressing inequality. This socialist mode of governance with a measure of mixed economy has been discredited in recent years but such policies did not lack support then—Indian industrialists, for example, also wanted protection from competition. Brown writes that in this, Nehru was impressed by the pace of Soviet industrialisation and wanted to replicate it in India without the attendant violence. It’s worth noting where India was setting out from: it’s literacy rate at independence, for instance, stood at 14% and poverty levels were high; state intervention was indeed necessary in several sectors and yielded significant results in several areas.

**Mistakes and failures too**

Of course, Nehru had many failures. He completely misread China’s intentions and didn’t expect Mao to launch an offensive in 1962. Worse, he allowed his assumption to affect India’s defence preparedness. Nehru’s failure to delegate undermined the development of political talent and cost India dearly in inestimable ways. Many of his aspirations on the domestic front like land reform were thwarted by state level leaders who had ties to rural landed elites. As Guha has written, the Right thinks he was too statist, some on the Left think he wasn’t interventionist enough. The big dams that he initiated have displaced indigenous communities. Kashmir’s alienation with India in some part began with the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah for long periods. In turn, Nehru often found himself at odds with his countrymen: he was frustrated with administrative incompetence, communal rhetoric, venality in the Congress, and narrow provincial and casteist outlooks that were out of step with the spirit of nation-building.

The scale of his achievement, however, remains. Guha cites a telling tribute by Nirad Chaudhuri who once wrote that Nehru’s leadership was “the most important moral force behind the unity of India.” He said properly speaking there could not be a successor to Nehru, “but only successors to the different elements of his composite leadership.” In some ways that speaks of the range of his influence.

Gandhi is understood to be a sage but Nehru was no less a counsellor to India, constantly drawing attention to the principles and direction of its politics and society. He inspired, he cajoled, he rebuked. He also failed. He worked tirelessly to the point of exhaustion several times in his career. Guha recalls the Australian diplomat Walter Crocker writing that the “great bulk of the people sensed, and they never lost the sense, that Nehru wanted only to help them and wanted nothing for himself…”

His was truly a full life lived for India—and there is scarcely any public institution or aspect of the republic that Nehru did not shape or influence. There is plenty in his legacy to both celebrate and contest. Belittling his role—or worse, forgetting him—only betrays India’s degradation, even if it cannot alter Nehru’s place in history.

*(Sushil Aaron is an independent journalist.)*
Bhopal Gas Tragedy: Erased from Memory?

Sabrangindia

Do you know what happened in 1984? A Google search may help, but will it really? The first page of the results will show you only the most talked about incident – the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the anti-Sikh riots that followed. What it doesn’t show you are the photos of more than 10,000 people who died and more than 5 lakh afflicted in Bhopal in the country’s worst industrial disaster.

35 years on Bhopal seems to have been struck with two tragedies—the one that happened immediately and the other that unfolded in the years that followed.

What Happened Then

On the night of December 2, 1984, millions in Bhopal took their last breath when the chemical methyl isocyanate (MIC) spilled out from Union Carbide India Ltd’s (UCIL’s) pesticide factory turning the city into a gas chamber. Vomiting and dying, people ran out on the streets. As the cloud of gas hit the town, people woke from their sleep choking, gasping, and vomiting. Many were immediately affected, their skin burning and lungs failing. The US-based multinational company, Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) which owned the plant through its subsidiary UCIL, did nothing to help alleviate the human tragedy.

35 years later, the people who survived the tragedy and their innocent children are still fighting for justice. And what has been the State’s response to their misery? Nothing but callous.

Even today, the victims and survivors are battling extreme insensitivity and being shortchanged by incoming and outgoing governments. Not only has the ghastly incident taken a toll on their lives as well as their next of kin’s, the survivors till today are paying the price of what happened that night.

The Victims End Up Paying the Damages

Physical Trauma

Because Union Carbide used trade secrecy to withhold information with regards to the exact composition of the leaked gases, nobody knew about the toxin that leaked out of the factory on the ill-fated night of December 2, 1984. Nobody knew about the antidote either. While over 300 toxic chemicals are said to have been released during the leak, research has been carried out only to check the toxicity of pure MIC.

While a few weeks later, while some claimed that the worst was over, till date nobody knows the impacts of MIC or how to treat patients exposed to it. Furthermore, it is not just the victims present at the site who suffered. It is all those children born after the incident who bore exposure to the deadly gas in their mother’s wombs and people living there today exposed to the chemical wastes dumped in and around the UCIL factory that have contaminated drinking water.

Mental Trauma

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy was the first disaster in India to be studied systematically for mental health effects by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). Even though the vastness of the disastrous emotional and mental trauma was established within a fortnight of the incident, the involvement of psychiatrists / neurologists did not begin until 8 weeks after the incident as none of the five medical colleges in MP had a psychiatrist on the staff.

The dead may have not been apparently under pressure from UCC and its lawyers.

Uninspired research from the government did not yield much. Independent studies pointed out to serious crises from birth defects to cancer to mental problems.

Over the past five years, the Canadian researcher Shree Mulay and volunteers working with Sambhavana, a nonprofit clinic set up by activists, have been collecting data on mortality, birth defects, fertility, cancer and many other aspects of people’s health. With about 5,000 families in each group, the study includes 100,000 people in all. Mulay’s team is still analyzing the data, but preliminary results indicate that people exposed to the gas or the water or both have a higher incidence of cancer, tuberculosis and paralysis than those exposed to neither. They also suggest that gas-exposed people have 10 times the rate of cancer, particularly liver, lung, abdominal, throat and oral cancers, compared to the other groups.
so unlucky after all. Their end, though horrible, had been brief. The survivors though, will never get relief so quickly. Amid convulsions, screams, fainting spells and fear of the dark—men, women and children are left to their resources to fight the ghosts of those memories that keep coming back to haunt them.

Environmental Impact
A 1982 safety audit by US engineers had noted the filthy, neglected condition of the plant, identified 61 hazards, 30 critical, of which 11 were in the dangerous MIC/phosgene units. The audit warned of the danger of a major toxic release.

It’s not just MCI that UCIL was manufacturing. The factory used to manufacture three pesticides: carbaryl (trade name Sevin), aldicarb (trade name Temik) and a formulation of carbaryl and gamma hexachlorocyclohexane (g-HCH) sold under the trade name Sevidol. Till 15 years after the disaster, the factory dumped by-products, process wastes, solvents and polluted water at dump sites outside the plant. In addition to that, there is another 350 tonnes of waste kept at a leaking shed at the site.

In August 2009, samples of water from handpumps in the area were analysed by a Greenpeace laboratory in the UK. Carbon tetrachloride was found at 4,880 times the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) limit.

All of these chemicals take hundreds of years to degrade and even the decontamination and cleaning of the dump site has run into legal wrangles over who should pay for its clearing—the State, Centre, incineration companies or non-profits.

The toxic waste and poisoned water have now become a legacy for the people of Bhopal.

The Culprits that Got Away
Union Carbide, the American chemical company that became infamous for the world’s worst industrial disaster, is now a wholly owned subsidiary of Dow Chemical Company. Warren Anderson, the then CEO of Union Carbide who was declared an absconder and a fugitive lived in anonymity and seclusion in Long Island, New York before his death on September 29, 2014.

Both Dow Chemicals and UCC washed their hands off the disaster. UCC said that it was not subject to jurisdiction of the Indian court as it wasn’t involved in the operation of the plant for it was operated by the Indian arm of the company.

Anderson kept a stoic silence on the issue for more than two decades, avoided social contact and hid from media and activists who have fought tooth and nail to bring him to justice. Warren Anderson did not appear for any of the judicial proceedings conducted by either the District Court, Bhopal or the Supreme Court of India.

The Indian government has never been very serious about pursuing the case against Dow Chemicals and UCC. Documents available in the public domain, including on the internet, show how maintaining future FDI and Indo-US relations took precedence over holding culprits accountable for their actions.

Promises – Just Promises
With physical relief came the need of economic rehabilitation and today, three decades after the incident, the government has to still secure Rs 61.72 crore for 3,629 cases which are pending approval. The Centre has still not acted on their request.

In the meantime, the number of eligible survivors who should be compensated has increased—many of whom have moved the appellate court in Bhopal to hear their appeals. More than 200 new cases of permanent and partial disability have been granted approval for compensation but are still awaiting their payments.

Nearly 50,000 survivors have been compensated since the tragedy in 1984, but around 48,000 claimants are yet to receive their payments—more than three decades after the tragedy occurred.

In 2018, an RTI revealed that The Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Vishwas Sarang misused 60 per cent of the funds allocated by the Government of India for the economical rehabilitation and construction of 2,500 homes of the gas victims living in the vicinity of the Union Carbide Factory.

Out of Rs 272.75 crore allocated by the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers in 2010, only Rs 129.50 crore was used by the government till 2018. Rs 85.87 crore was diverted from the remaining Rs 143.25 crore to fund different government schemes.

At the time of the incident, UCC settled in 1989 for $470 million in damages, with each patient getting Rs 25,000 (roughly $2,200 at the time). The International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) has since been fighting for a higher compensation and to get the site cleaned up, but to no avail. This, even when Dow merged with DuPont
in 2017 on a contract of $130 billion.

In June, at a review meeting the Centre thought of utilizing the corpus fund of around Rs 891 crores of the Bhopal Memorial Hospital Trust (BMHT). There were also talks of the BMHT being merged with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), but that too is pending necessary approvals. Till then, all the payments to claimants have been frozen.

The government, which alleviated some public outcry by paying an additional sum of taxpayers’ money to victims and their families in 2010, has now filed what’s known in India as a “curative petition” to the Supreme Court, urging it to reconsider its ruling and compel Union Carbide to pay more. The SC earlier dismissed the curative petition by the government calling for Dow to pay $1.2 billion. Activists and survivors are fighting for a figure of close to $8 billion keeping in mind the widespread health impacts on thousands in the city.

Activist Rachna Dhingra of ICJB recalled the fine of $21 billion paid by Union Carbide over the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. She said that the issue of race played a very important role in this matter. The victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy were considered lesser human beings.

Will Bhopal Ever Get Justice?

For pushing political agendas, for treating humans like pawns in a game, for usurping everything what the afflicted deserved and yet leaving them to suffer—will the people of Bhopal ever get justice? Only time will tell.

Police Brutally Attack JNU Students

Thousands of students from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, India, who were marching to parliament to protest the massive hike in hostel fees were detained and baton-charged, leaving some of them grievously injured yesterday. The students continued their march but were stopped at many places. The protesters said they would not relent until the government withdrew the fee hike. Officer-bearers of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) were detained and taken to an undisclosed location.

There was massive police deployment near the university in a bid to prevent the students from marching.

"Twelve of us have been put in a bus and been taken to unknown location because we were peacefully marching for our right to education," Aishe Ghosh, president of JNUSU posted on Facebook.

Meanwhile, the JNU Teachers Association (JNUTA), in a statement, expressed deep concern over the massive deployment of police and barricading of campus gates.

"Any such measure to thwart the exercise of constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights and to impede the students form peacefully taking the voice beyond the campus would be extremely unfortunate," it said in a statement.

Hundreds of students from JNU have been protesting for nearly three weeks against the draft hostel manual, which has provisions for a hostel fee hike, dress code and curfew timings. The manual increased hostel fee by nearly 1000%, in addition to imposing regressive restrictions on students, such as curfews. Some students belonging to extremely marginalized sections have expressed fear that they may have to abandon their studies if the fee hike was not rolled back. Following intense protests, the administration claimed it had rolled back a portion of the hike but the students pointed out that it was a minor step and sought the complete withdrawal of the hike.

Initially, the barricades outside JNU’s gates were removed and the students were allowed to march. The police later stopped the march around 500 meters from the varsity’s gates.

Former JNU Students’ Union (JNUSU) president N. Sai Balaji said, “Delhi Police stops JNU students peaceful march to parliamentarians! The MHRD is fooling students by forming committee. Why didn’t the committee suspend fee hike till dialogue is happening? We are demanding a rollback of the fee hike.”

Priyanka, another student said, “We are being given a lollipop in terms of the partial rollback. I am the first from my family to reach university. There are many others like me. Education is not the birthright of a privileged few.” Students took out the march carrying banners which read “save public education”, fees must fall” and “ensure affordable hostels for all”.

Another student, who did not wish to be identified, said, “We haven’t seen our vice-chancellor in a long time. It’s time that he comes out and talks to us. Instead of appealing to us through teachers and other methods, he should initiate
a dialogue with us,” the PTI report said.

On November 11 too, the police had brutally attacked the students who were protesting the fee hike and other measures at the convocation of the university.

JNU is one of India’s most renowned universities and its affordable fee has enabled thousands of students from marginalized backgrounds to access higher education. According to the university’s data, 40% of the students come from economically backward backgrounds. The university is also a bastion of left-wing politics. The assault on JNU is part of the far-right wing Narendra Modi’s government’s measures against both public education and left-wing politics in India.

The Coup in Bolivia and Your Computer / TV Screen

Vijay Prashad

When you look at your computer screen, or the screen on your smartphone or the screen of your television set, it is a liquid crystal display (LCD). An important component of the LCD screen is indium, a rare metallic element that is processed out of zinc concentrate.

The two largest sources of indium can be found in eastern Canada (Mount Pleasant) and in Bolivia (Malku Khota). Canada’s deposits have the potential to produce 38.5 tons of indium per year, while Bolivia’s considerable mines would be able to produce 80 tons per year.

Canada’s South American Silver Corporation—now TriMetals Mining—had signed a concession to explore and eventually mine Malku Khota. Work began in 2003, two years before Evo Morales and the Movement for Socialism (MAS) won their first presidential election in Bolivia. South American Silver conducted several studies of the region, all of which found substantial deposits that were poised to make this Canadian firm one of the major players in the mining industry.

A study done by Allan Armitage and others for South American Silver, and delivered to the company in 2011, showed that the Malku Khota mine would produce substantial amounts of silver, indium, lead, zinc, copper and gallium. “The indium and gallium,” the study noted, “are regarded as strategic metals that give the project future upside potential.” Gallium is used for thermometers and barometers, as well as in the testing side of the pharmaceutical industry. There is Fort Knox level treasure to be made from these minerals.

Resource Nationalism

Evo Morales rode to victory in 2006 with the promise of a new day for Bolivia. Key to his agenda was to take control of the country’s resources and use them to improve the quality of life of Bolivia’s deprived populations. One of the great tragedies of Bolivia has been that since the mid-16th century, the indigenous populations have had to work to remove precious wealth from underneath their lands and send that wealth to enrich the people of Europe and later North America. They did not benefit from those riches.

Millions died in the mines of Potosí to bring the silver, and later tin, out of the ground. For the indigenous people who live near and on the hill, everything is upside down—one of the most lucrative hills is known as Cerro Rico (Rich Hill), while in Spanish there is a phrase that toys with the idea that wealth is equivalent to Potosí (vale un Potosí). Morales’ message during his campaign was framed around the concept of resource nationalism—use our resources to better the lives of those who live in deprivation and indignity.

Morales first went after the oil and gas industry. It is important to recall that his opponent in this year’s election—Carlos Mesa—was the president right before Morales won the election in December 2005. Mesa had come to power when his predecessor Sánchez de Lozada resigned in disgrace over the mass demonstrations in 2003 when Bolivians demanded more control over their gas reserves (the state repression was severe, with at least 70 people killed in the demonstrations). In May 2006—just over three months after being sworn in as president—Morales announced that the oil and gas industry had been nationalised. It is important to recall that his approval rating was well above 80 percent.

Nationalisation was not easy, since the Bolivian government could not expropriate assets but only raise taxes and renegotiate contracts. Even here, the government faced
problems since it lacked enough technical skills to understand the opaque energy sector. Furthermore, the problem with the energy sector is that even nationalised oil and gas must be sold to the transnational firms that then process them and market them; they remain in control of the value chain. What Morales’ government was able to do was to ensure that the State controlled 51 percent of all private energy firms that operated in Bolivia, which allowed the State’s coffers to fill rapidly. It was this money that was invested to go after poverty, hunger, and illiteracy.

Revenge of the Mining Companies

Canada’s Fraser Institute—a libertarian think tank that is heavily funded by the energy and mining sector—publishes an annual survey of mining companies. This survey is conducted by asking mining executives their opinions on a range of issues. The 2007–08 survey said that Bolivia is the second-worst country for investment; the worst was Ecuador. In 2010, the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index rated Bolivia at 161 of 183 countries. Heads of mining firms—from Barrick’s Peter Munk to Repsol’s Antonio Brufau—made disparaging comments about the nationalisation program. “If Bolivia keeps on this path,” a Wall Street banker told me at that time, “these companies will make sure that Bolivian natural gas remains underground.” Bolivia might be embargoed; Morales might be assassinated.

Pressure mounted daily on the MAS government, which began a process to write a new Constitution that would both protect nature and insist on resource wealth being used for the people. There was an immediate contradiction here: if the MAS government was going to undo centuries of deprivation, it would have to mine the earth to bring out the wealth. A tragic choice befell the government—it could not both conserve nature and transform the wretched conditions of everyday life at the same level of caution. At the same time, to get its minerals and energy to market, it had to continue to negotiate with these transnational firms; no immediate alternative was present.

Nationalisation

Despite the constraints on it, the MAS government continued to nationalise resources, and insist on State firms being partners in resource extraction. Transnational firms immediately took Bolivia to the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a part of the World Bank system. The ICSID—formed in 1966—is based in Washington, D.C., and shares an outlook toward business that mirrors that of the US Treasury Department.

On April 29, 2007, the leaders of Bolivia (Evo Morales), Cuba (Carlos Lage), Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega) and Venezuela (Hugo Chávez) signed a declaration to create an alternative to the investor-government system institutionalised in the ICSID. Bolivia and Ecuador formally withdrew from this US-dominated system, while Venezuela’s Supreme Court declared that it did not have the power to intervene in Venezuelan sovereign affairs.

On July 10, 2012, Morales’ government nationalised the Malku Khota property of South American Silver. South American Silver’s shares dropped immediately; it had been trading at $1.02 on July 6, and it fell to $0.37 on July 11.

South American Silver took the Bolivian government to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. In November last year, the Court ordered Bolivia to pay South American Silver $27.7 million rather than the $385.7 million that TriMetals (the new name for South American Silver) had demanded.

Coup

In July 2007, US Ambassador Philip Goldberg sent a cable to Washington in which he pointed out that US mining firms had approached his embassy to ask about the investment climate in Bolivia. Goldberg felt that the situation for mining firms was not good. When asked if he could organise a meeting with Vice President Álvaro García Linera, he said, “Sadly, without dynamite in the streets, it is uncertain whether the Embassy or the international mining companies will be able to attain even this minimal goal.”

“Without dynamite in the streets” is a phrase worth dwelling upon. A year later, Morales expelled Goldberg from Bolivia, accusing him of aiding the protests in the town of Santa Cruz. Just over a decade later, it was the “dynamite” that removed Morales from power.

Resource nationalism is no longer on the agenda in Bolivia. The fate of Malku Khota is unknown. The fate of your screen is guaranteed—it will be replaced with indium from the Potosí deposits. And the benefits of that sale will not go to improving the well-being of Bolivia’s indigenous population; they will enrich the transnational firms and the old oligarchy of Bolivia.

(Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist, and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.)
Bernie Sanders has certainly ruffled many feathers during his presidential campaign run. The Vermont Senator is very much still an outsider in Democratic politics, but he has managed to build a huge groundswell of support around key ideas like Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, a federal jobs guarantee and free public colleges for America.

Sanders formally declared his candidacy in February 2019, raising a record $6 million in 24 hours from nearly a quarter-million donors. His supporters tend to come from backgrounds that do not traditionally involve themselves in politics; among the most common professions that donated to his campaign are teachers, nurses, drivers and servers. Starbucks, Amazon and Wal-Mart are the most common employers of his backers, and the average donation to his campaign is only around $27.

This is in complete contrast to many other top candidates. Joe Biden, for instance, began his campaign with an event with 100 or so extremely wealthy donors in Manhattan claiming that billionaires like them were being unfairly “demonised” and promising “nothing would fundamentally change” under his presidency. “I am not Bernie Sanders”, he emphasised to the elite audience, “I need you very badly.

Fact-Checking as a Weapon

Media have also been more subtle in their attacks on Sanders. One method has been to attempt to fact-check him into oblivion, constantly challenging his every pronouncement. However, they have been unable to catch him out on much, often resulting in bizarre, self-contradicting nitpicking. The Washington Post insinuated that he was misrepresenting a booming economy claiming his comment that “millions of Americans are forced to work two or three jobs” was “misleading” because, despite agreeing that 8 million Americans do work multiple jobs, some were only “part time”—as if Sanders were claiming that millions of people have 120-hour workweeks—and that 8 million only amounts to 5% of the workforce. To be a remotely accurate factcheck, one has to believe that 8 million does not count as “millions,” and part-time jobs are not real jobs.

The Post also gave Bernie’s statement that six people (one of whom is its owner, Jeff Bezos) have as much wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population three Pinocchios, the classification just below the most blatant lie. Despite finding that it was completely true, it argued that most of the wealth of the world’s richest was tied up in stocks, which are likely to fluctuate. How this was meant to disprove Sanders’ statement was not explained.

It also attacked the idea that the Vermont Senator was supported by an army of mass donations from ordinary people. The title, headline, “Bernie Sanders Keeps Saying His Average Donation is $27, but His Own Numbers Contradict That,” calculated that the average donation was actually $27.89. What a contradiction! However, the majority of people do not read past the headline, meaning most of those who saw the well-shared article would have no idea how weak the charge was.

CNN has also tried to use fact-checking as a weapon against Sanders, excoriating him for making “the same false claim about health spending for ten years.” It used his quote that said that the US spends twice as much on healthcare as any other country, noting that there were a handful of European states that spent (slightly) more than half of what the US spends (it did not note that those states have vastly better health outcomes). After
an outcry on social media, CNN amended the story, conceding that it is indeed accurate to say that the US spends over twice as much as other economically advanced countries, thus walking back their “factcheck” to a minor technicality.

Worse still, earlier this year CNN itself ran a news piece titled “US Spends Twice as Much on Healthcare as Its Peers,” which accurately described the US as an “outlier,” spending vastly more than others due to the higher cost of drugs, more expensive treatment and exorbitant administration fees. Thus, in its attempts to go after Bernie, it accidentally undermined its own reporting.

Visual Tricks

Meanwhile, the Democrat-aligned network MSNBC has developed a bad habit of forgetting how numbers work—when it comes to Sanders, that is. In July, its graphics team decided Sanders’ 49% support was lower than Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren’s 48%, placing him fourth in a list of Presidential hopefuls. This is far from an isolated incident: one week later it did almost exactly the same thing. It also reported that Sanders’ support had dropped 5 points when, in fact, it had risen the same amount. And when polls show Sanders to be in the lead, media has simply awarded extra support to others to overtake him, or switch Sanders’ numbers with another candidate, ensuring the same outcome on screen. CNN was only slightly less deceitful when it accurately showed Bernie leading Warren by 3 points, but their headline read that there was “no clear leader” and Sanders and Warren were “neck and neck.”

The media has also made a great deal of Sanders’ health problems, constantly emphasising his age and fragility. It was in that context that CNN stands accused of fiddling with their color scale to present his face as a ludicrously dark shade of red-purple (suggesting serious ill-health) when he was discussing his surgery. This “Beetroot Bernie” shade jars with other images and videos from the event, including from the Associated Press.

From Bernie Baiting to Bernie Blackout

In recent weeks, corporate media seem to have moved from anger to denial, appearing to collectively decide Sanders does not exist. The Hill, for example, published the results of an Emerson College survey with the headline “Trump beats Warren, Biden in Iowa Matchups.” But, as many pointed out, the most important news from the poll (buried in the report) was that Sanders was leading Trump in that state. There was no mention of Bernie in a recent New York Times article on the frontrunners. Likewise, the coverage of his enormous New York rally, where he was formally endorsed by rising Democratic star Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other members of “The Squad” was sparse, to say the least.

A new University of North Florida (UNF) poll took the Bernie Blackout to new levels, however. In a poll of Democratic candidates vs. Donald Trump and/or Mike Pence, the UNF did not even include Sanders, despite featuring candidates with far less support, such as Kamala Harris and Pete Buttigieg. When asked why this was, its Faculty Director, Michael Binder, claimed that it was for reasons of “diversity.” Why the Jewish socialist is any less “diverse” than, for instance, Buttigieg, was not explained.

A woman in the lab who ran the test received a very different answer from Binder. When she insisted Sanders was at least a top 3 candidate, he allegedly replied: “not for long.” Thus, those in power have pre-emptively decided Bernie is not a serious candidate and a Buttigieg-Pence election (following a Republican Senate impeachment of Trump) is a more likely scenario than Sanders, one of the most popular and by far the most donated-to candidate, winning the Democratic nomination.

On press bias, Bernie claimed that corporate media’s billionaire owners might be swaying the coverage of his campaign to an overly negative tone. This assertion was indignantly described as “ridiculous” by CNN’s Chris Cillizza and a “conspiracy theory” by Washington Post Executive Editor Marty Baron. Yet the public is far more skeptical. Trust in media has been falling since the 1970s, and particularly in the last few years to the point where less than one-third trust the news media, even most of the time and nearly three-quarters of Americans agree that traditional media consistently report false or purposefully misleading stories. Therefore they are likely ready for the media hysteria to be ramped up to new levels the closer Sanders gets to power.

(Alan MacLeod is a MintPress contributor as well as an academic and writer for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.)

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