

janata

Vol. 75 No. 38 & 39
October 11-18, 2020

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What Swaraj Meant to Gandhi – and Why the Government Wants to Bury that Vision of Freedom

Apoorvanand

Gandhi is past 150 this week. He had wanted to live for 125 years, only to lose the appetite for life in his last years. On the occasion of his 79th birthday, which was to be his last, a well-wisher wrote, "...May I suggest that the present situation should not depress you?"

Gandhi did not agree with him. It was not a state of depression he was in. What he was saying was a plain fact. He was perhaps not the fittest instrument to carry out the divine purpose. Perhaps a more courageous, more far-seeing person was wanted for the final purpose.

"If I had the impertinence to declare my wish to live 125 years, I must have the humility, under changed circumstances, openly to shed that wish," he wrote. "I have done no more, no less. This has not been done in a spirit of depression. The more apt term, perhaps, is helplessness."

The fires of hatred raged around him and he felt helpless, defeated by his own people. His dearest dream of Hindu-Muslim unity lay shattered. The untruth of the claim of Ahimsa had bared itself and he had to admit

that what he and his country people had practised was not non-violence at all. What should he live for? A country or nation without the British but defined by the desire to colonise "the other" was not a land he would have wished to live in.

An innate egalitarianism

Gandhi had nothing against the British. He had in fact wept when he learnt that London was bombed by the Germans. London had shaped him. It had taken him to the Gita and it was here that he understood that vegetarianism was not only a matter of faith, there was a scientific basis to it too. He internalised the poetry of the Bible and developed a unique religious frame in which the Sermon on the Mount could share place with the Gita. What made you truly civilised was your striving and ability to make the other feel equal to you and feel confident to keep her head high in your presence.

London schooled Gandhi in the ideals of hospitality and neighbourliness. A true nation was one where the strangers felt welcome and safe. His understanding of Christianity made him think about

the value of suffering for one's cause and also the value of service.

He welcomed them to live in an independent India as equals. What he despised was the claim of superiority and civilisational arrogance of the British and the justification of their domination in the name of civilising "inferior" masses. He, one of their subjects rebuked them for being un-Christian and claimed the right to teach them true Christianity without leaving Hinduism.

Gandhi felt responsible for the religion he was born into. It was easy to leave it and find a more comfortable abode in some other religion. He could have become a Muslim and a Christian or a Sikh. But to continue to live with the imperfectness of your religion and constantly fight with it requires a mettle only Gandhi had. His religion had some role in making him and he also had a duty to make it human. So, he imagined a different Hinduism and made it a persuasive case. We seldom care to think about his insistence that for him Ram was a fictional character, an imagination and Gita a poetic text. He tried to live religion like poetry. Poetry frees the reader and gives her or him the power to interpret. Similarly a nation has to be like a poem, a long unfinished poem.

The concept of Vaishnav Jan, one who feels the pain of the other is not a novel idea of Gandhi but to make it a political project to work towards making a nation of such Vaishnav Jan was a unique Gandhian invention. The otherness must never be obliterated. The temptation to teach others the 'true path' must be resisted.

The structures of dominance, Gandhi knew and realised after his London days were not only imposed

by the Europeans on India. The structures of internal colonialisms were taken as natural and the making of providence. Caste was one such structure of dominance which bred violence and normalised the ideology of slavery. When you turn others into your slaves, you do not mind living as slaves when faced with a more powerful force. The dominant castes that lorded over the "lower" castes readily prostrated before the colonial sahibs and their disciplinary structures. It is this ideology of high and low which has to be opposed.

Driven by justice

So, Gandhi made it his mission to fight for the rights of the most dispossessed of his land, those who are officially listed as the scheduled castes and tribes. He called them the true people of Hari and said that those who call themselves Savarna do not qualify to be given this title. Gandhi was hated for this fight. He was abused, attacked and finally killed. It is a French feminist Helene Cixous who understands this hatred against Gandhi which ultimately took his life.

"I imagine you believe that he was for the most part adored; in fact he was hated and he is still hated today," she wrote. "Hatred is still alive in India and he died of it. Those who were for mostly from those what is called the scheduled castes, those who belonged to the gutters with whom he had sided. Yet he did not ask anything of anyone; he simply went his own way ... But the simple fact that he lived according to his own law—which was ascetic and demanding of himself was something people could not tolerate."

It was not generosity but justice

which drove Gandhi. Colonialism was unjust, hence immoral. Caste could not thought about without thinking about the dominant and dominated. It was unjust and unethical.

The ideas of justice and the primacy of the individual form the bedrock of the Gandhian world view. It was "swa", self, that is supreme. No power could be allowed to colonise this "swa".

Striving for swaraj

Swaraj for Gandhi was not freedom from the British. He said, very clearly, "Real swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."

The capacity to resist authority and to say no when it oversteps its limits must be retained and renewed.

It is this definition of swaraj the government wants to bury. This definition is under severe stress and needs to be recalled when we marked his birth anniversary on October 2:

"It has been said that Indian swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me Hind Swaraj is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice. Whether, under rule, the ministers were Hindus or Musalmans or Sikhs and whether legislatures were exclusively filled by the Hindus

or Musalmans or any other community, they would have to do even-handed justice.”

“Even handed justice” is what he expected from the India he

helped take shape. It is this which is being denied by all organs of the state today. If we fail to struggle to recover this dream of swaraj, we lose the right to

remember Gandhi.

(Apoorvanand teaches Hindi at Delhi University. Article courtesy: Scroll.in.)

Gandhi's Swadeshi and Our Civilisational Pandemic

Sudhir Chandra

Exceptions apart, ritual bi-annual remembrance of Gandhi is all that is left of him in our lives. This is but a continuation of his periodic rejection during his own lifetime. This rejection was particularly pronounced towards the end of his life, and he was aware of it. For our part, we as a people let the fact lie buried under our protestations of his greatness.

Remembering him on his birthday, let us begin by reflecting on what he said on the only October 2 that he witnessed in Independent India:

Indeed today is my birthday.... This is for me a day of mourning. I am still lying around alive. I am surprised at this, even ashamed that I am the same person who once had crores of people hanging on to every word of his. But today no one heeds me at all. If I say, do this, people say, no, we will not.... Where in this situation is there any place for me in Hindustan, and what will I do by remaining alive in it? Today the desire to live up to 125 years has left me, even 100 years or 90 years. I have entered my 79th year today, but even that hurts.*

This, he knew, was tragic. Tragic not for himself, but for humankind, dukhi jagat as he would say. Just three-and-a-half months before he was killed, he said:

I will be gone saying what I am saying, but one day people will remember that what this poor man said, that alone was right.*

That alone is right. And ‘that’ includes many things. I shall stay with one of those things which, today, demand urgent consideration. It was more than a hundred years ago that Gandhi, in his *Hind Swaraj*, first articulated his fears about the self-destructive character of modern civilisation and proposed a radical alternative to it. As we writhe under the COVID-19 crisis, large numbers of us can see that history has since inexorably realised Gandhi’s fears. We are seized by a civilisational disaster.

But the general tendency still is to see the disaster as unprecedented, unexpected, even unimaginable. That induces two illusions. One, this is a natural disaster. Two, the solution lies in greater control over Nature. That control, as always, science will ensure for us. It will bring a vaccine, hopefully even a cure, rendering the virus ineffectual. As victims of what Gandhi called modern civilisation’s ‘tyranny of temptation’, these people will not see that the solution is the problem. That, like most ‘natural’ disasters, which now erupt with increasing frequency, COVID-19 is a by-product of the never-ending endeavour to conquer Nature.

Gandhi has explained why they will not see the obvious:

Those who are intoxicated by modern civilisation are not likely to write against it.... A man whilst he is dreaming, believes in his dream; he is undeceived only when he is awakened from his sleep. What we usually read are the works of defenders of modern civilisation, which undoubtedly claims among its votaries very brilliant and even some very good men. Their writings hypnotise us. And so, one by one, we are drawn into the vortex.

Gandhi offered an alternative to this irredeemably ruinous civilisation. At the heart of this alternative civilisation is swadeshi: “that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.” Translated into action, he explained, it would mean:

“In the domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting.”

If “reduced to practice,” he affirmed, swadeshi would “lead to the millennium.” His dream was that free India would usher in that

millennium by adopting swadeshi and inspiring the rest of the world to follow its example. That is the way to save humankind from collective destruction.

For long has Gandhi's swadeshi remained misunderstood, causing it to be at the same time celebrated and reviled. It has been – thanks to a misleading narrow understanding of the word *desh* – linked with the country and, by extension, with the nation. As a sequel, depending on how one views nationalism, swadeshi is as fatuously embraced as it is spurned.

This tendency is facilitated by the promiscuous utilisation of nationalism and globalisation so as to make the best of both worlds. Along with the arrogance of being a *vishwa guru*, a particularly insidious illustration of this comes in the call for *atmanirbhar Bharat* with its vacuous coupling of the local and the global.

Though Gandhi is not overtly invoked, there is in this strange *melange* a visceral appeal to his swadeshi. But, in its spirit and intent, it is a violation not just of Gandhi's swadeshi but of everything he stands for. Gandhi does want India to follow swadeshi and inspire the rest of the world to follow suit, so that humans may live happily by being at peace with other humans and with Nature. But that entails no grand entitlement. His swadeshi is not about self-reliant Bharat. It is about self-reliant individuals. For it is these individuals who constitute Bharat. The essence of swadeshi is that "whatever is essential for human life should be individually controlled."

In the civilisation envisaged by Gandhi, the village would be

the basic unit of organised human existence. "I believe," he wrote in his letter of October 5, 1945, to Nehru, "that if India, and through India the rest of the world as well, is to attain real freedom, then sooner or later we would have to live in villages – in humble dwellings, not in palatial mansions. It is simply not possible for millions of city dwellers to live in mansions happily and peacefully, nor by killing one another."

Lest he be misunderstood, Gandhi clarified:

"If you think that I am referring to the village of today you will not be able to comprehend what I am saying. The village of my conception exists in my imagination as of now.... In the village of my imagination, the villager will not be inert – he will exemplify pure consciousness. He will not lead his life like an animal, in squalid darkness. Men and women will live freely and have the confidence to face the entire world. There will be no cholera, plague, or smallpox. Life will neither be slothful nor luxurious for anybody. Physical labour will be a must for everybody."

Gandhi, then, proceeded to say something which deserves particular attention. It will disabuse those who – reading the *Hind Swaraj* as a frozen text and missing the organic nature of Gandhi's thinking – cling to the belief that he was opposed to mechanisation. He wrote:

"Along with all this I can conceive of many things that would be built on a large scale: maybe railways as well as post and telegraph offices. What there will or will not be I can't say, nor do I care. If I am able

to establish the essential idea, the things for our future well-being will follow from it. But if I forsake the essential idea, I forsake everything." *

The civilisational disease

The disease that Gandhi – borrowing from Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* – saw in modern civilisation more than a hundred years ago has since become terminal. Still, convenient blinkers continue to mar people's vision. The impossibility of humble dwellings and palatial mansions coexisting peacefully should not have escaped anyone after the experience of COVID-19. It does. Even after months of the so-called lockdown, not many have quite understood that, except for the super-rich and the better off among the middle classes, it simply meant an impossible situation for the rest, which means the overwhelming majority of Indians. The self-quarantine that the lockdown was meant to ensure, its prerequisite of social and physical distancing was simply unavailable to them. What, and for whom, have they been paying this enormous price? For whom is their immeasurable suffering?

The forced reverse exodus during the lockdown should have served to demonstrate the indispensability of villages. It has, instead, resulted in coercive legislative measures which are designed to sacrifice the local to the global, individual men and women to corporate interests. Gandhi dreamt of individuals – men as well as women – who would exemplify pure consciousness – *shuddha chaitanya* – and live freely. These measures reduce individual men and

women into helpless instruments of a fake atmanirbhar Bharat.

Like never before, the COVID-19 crisis has made imperative the severe limiting of man's violence against Nature and against fellow human beings. It has also, by the same token, underlined, like never before, the urgent need for an alternative, like Gandhi's, to the civilisation of which COVID-19 is an essential fruit.

That precisely is what will not happen. Never in human history has the rightness and justice of something by itself been the reason for its realisation. Something additional, too, is required. This is the centenary year of the historic Non-Cooperation Movement. That was when Gandhi taught Indians that their fear was the basis of Britain's rule over them. The moment they got rid of that fear and learnt to say 'no', British rule would be over. They, he famously said, India would have swaraj within a year.

The root of our enslavement to modern civilisation is our greed. There is no freedom – no future – unless we manage to overcome this greed. Unless we say 'no' to the tyranny of temptation. Otherwise, a solution that requires greater control over Nature and makes life so much more 'fun' will continue to trump one that requires control over ourselves and our fun.

**Translated from the Hindi original by Chitra Padmanabhan.*

[Sudhir Chandra is the author of The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India and Gandhi: An Impossible Possibility (both published by Routledge). Article courtesy: The Wire.]

From Khairlanji to Hathras, Rape Story Repeats Itself for Dalit Women

Smruti Koppikar

The visceral screams of fear and pain, the sense of utter powerlessness, the dread of ominous threats coming true, the sheer brutality—all of it must have been the same for the 19-year-old who was violated in Boolgarhi village in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh as for 17-year-old Priyanka Bhotmange and her mother Surekha in Khairlanji village, Maharashtra.

The two incidents of alleged gang rape and murder of Dalit women are separated by 14 long years, during which India's collective conscience and sensitivity to such crimes was supposedly sharpened by the Nirbhaya case, but the arc of safety and security does not bend any more towards women—especially Dalit women—now than it did in 2006. On the contrary, crimes against Dalit women, especially assault and rape, have increased manifold.

After the Bhotmange women's mutilated bodies were fished out of a canal in Khairlanji, Bhandara district in Maharashtra, along with violated bodies of Priyanka's two teenage brothers, on September 29, 2006, it took public outrage, mainly by Dalit organisations, for the then Maharashtra government to crank up action. The outrage also stirred Mumbai and Delhi's media towards covering the horror that had unfolded that evening. In these respects too, not much changed in the past 14 years.

Maharashtra's then Home Minister had expressed doubts that the victims may have been Maoists. In the Hathras case, Uttar Pradesh officials were crass. They initially

denied the incident, then called it "fake news", and displayed their most impervious side, making the brutalised 19-year-old lie on a bench under the blazing sun, sending her only to a local hospital despite grievous injuries, taking her to Delhi only after she turned critical, according to her family. If this was not enough, they burned her body after locking up her family in their home in the middle of the night and admonishing them "aap se bhi kuch galatiyan hui hai".

Dalit women live with little dignity, it seems they must die without dignity too. From Khairlanji to Hathras lie lakhs of stories—many of them corpses—of brutalised women, especially Dalit and tribal women, all of whom bore the brunt of toxic masculinity along with gender or caste supremacy on their bodies.

From 2006 to 2019, the total number of rapes reported is over 4,00,000; a substantial number of the reported rapes—some estimates say one in every four—is on Dalit women. For every rape reported, several go unreported. And this reporting does not include marital rapes.

The numbers

The National Crime Records Bureau data shows the total number of rapes reported in 2006 was a shade less than 20,000; 10 years later, it was closer to 40,000. Occasionally, a particularly brutal case might catch the nation's attention. Nirbhaya's plight shook the nation in December

2012, the outrage turned public opinion against the incumbent Congress-led governments in Delhi and the Centre. It led to changes in the criminal law on rape and solemn pledges of “no more Nirbhayas”, a fund was set up, and the case exploited by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 general election.

The rise in total rape numbers every year since then was cited as evidence of more women reporting the crime. It might be partly true. The sustained coverage of the Nirbhaya case might have chipped away some of the stigma around reporting rape, but it also established that as many women were being raped. The total number clocking well above 32,000-33,000 every year—2016 was the worst in the past seven years—meant nearly 90 women raped every day.

The large majority are statistics, a few are remembered like the little girl in a Kathua temple, the 12-year-old in Chennai raped over seven months, the Kerala nuns, the Unnao case in which the victim was set ablaze near a court, the young woman in Uttar Pradesh who saw her family wiped out after raising her voice against BJP’s MLA Kuldip Sengar and the young veterinarian in Hyderabad.

However, to read the rape story only through numbers would be to skim the surface of the horror women face every day. Parse the numbers and the relationship between caste and rape, or any crime against women, is inescapable. Overlay this with state-wise data and it is evident that Dalit women in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where toxic masculinity meets caste bigotries, face the worst of sexual crimes. These states

consistently rank high for crimes against women, especially rapes, and of Dalit women. The perpetrators, almost without exception, are men of upper castes.

Crimes against Dalits increased by 6% between 2009 and 2018, according to the National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ) report this year. “Dalit women often bear the brunt of violence at the hand of dominant caste; violence as grave as physical violence, sexual violence and witch branding. In the Covid-19 pandemic also, Dalit women witnessed various forms of atrocities... In the last five years, 41,867 cases or 20.40% were related to violence against Scheduled Caste women,” the report said.

The NCRB confirms the trend of crimes against Dalits. It registered surges in such crimes every year between 2013 and 2018. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of atrocities against Dalits, at 25.6% of all cases reported. In 2017, the agency published data for cases specifically and exclusively registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. There were 5,775 cases; 55% of them related to “intentional insult or intimidation with intent to humiliate” Dalits, other cases pertained to occupation of Dalits’ land, preventing Dalits from using public places and social boycott.

Beyond numbers lies caste

In Boolgarhi-Hathras, the victim’s family was among the few Dalit families in the village and had a running dispute over land with their upper caste—Thakur—neighbour, according to her brother who spoke to the media. His grandfather had lost his fingers while trying to save

himself during an attack some years ago, he added, detailing how shopkeepers sprinkle water on the money they handed out or how they are not allowed to touch merchandise in a shop.

To ignore the context of caste and see it merely as a sexual crime would be meaningless. The young woman, as activists and scholars have pointed out, was assaulted, violated and tortured by the Thakur men to send out a message: stay within your status, don’t mess with us.

In Khairlanji, the story was similar. The Bhotmanges was among the handful of Dalit houses in the village dominated by OBC-Kunbi caste. Most of the local chatter about why the family was heinously attacked and killed centred on the fact that they owned and tilled five acres, Surekha managed the land affairs herself, and was making sure that her children studied well. She had also stood witness for a Khairlanji policeman in an altercation he had had with some villagers. Together, it was seen as an affront by the upper caste men. The family was not allowed to build a pucca house, Surekha was “a mere Dalit woman was thumbing at us” as an accused villager had told this writer.

Surekha was not only raped, she was stripped and paraded around the village, then sexually assaulted by a large group of men such that her skull was broken and an eye was disorged. Her daughter too was paraded naked, raped, and foreign objects were found in her private parts. Her brothers too suffered similar assaults. These were caste atrocities beyond a shadow of doubt. “The entire village was involved, I was in my farm and then I hid behind a bush,” said Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange, Surekha’s husband.

Local cops were suspended and the case investigated by the CBI. The fast-track trial court held eight people guilty of murder and handed out death penalty to six of them. In 2010, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court heard appeals and commuted the death sentence to 25 years imprisonment; it also termed the murders as “revenge killings” and held that the murders were not pre-meditated or motivated by caste prejudices. The SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was ignored—and a justification was found for this too.

Equally shocking was that the guilty were absolved of rape charges. The delay in registering cases and conducting medical examinations, unwillingness of the local police to prevent erasure of evidence, lackadaisical prosecution were all responsible. The judgement makes a reference to how Priyanka’s body bore injury marks all over and that the accused disrobed her “to get satisfaction to their sexual eyes” but the court held the women were not raped. Bhotmange got some compensation and lived elsewhere, he used to go to his house every September 29, to light a lamp. He died three years ago. The appeals are pending in the Supreme Court.

In the Hathras case too, the police reportedly prevented the family from even seeing the victim one last time, held back all villagers, and most insensitively burned her body in the dead of the night. The national outrage ensured that the accused were arrested. But no one is sure that the medical evidence collected will prove the charges of rape in the fast-track court that Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath set up under pressure.

A *savarna* (upper caste) group

already banded together to express support for the accused but the Chief Minister waited out two weeks—and for a nudge from the Prime Minister—before even setting up a Special Investigation Team to probe the case. Even as this was announced, the equally heinous Balrampur case came to light—again a young Dalit woman, breaking boundaries to get educated, raped and murdered allegedly by two Muslim men.

Rape as a ‘Message’ to Dalits

Crimes against Dalits—and tribals—including rape does not happen out of the blue. It often begins with age-old discriminations, each case of insult to and assault of Dalits over months and years on land or water or access to public spaces creates an atmosphere in which Dalits can be attacked—with impunity. The atmosphere when such seemingly minor cases go unrecorded or unpunished is that upper castes can get away because the administration is “on our side”. Small sections of national or local media have recorded minor crimes against Dalits in the past few months; a journalist took note of nearly 18 rapes or gang-rapes in two days after the Hathras incident.

These sustained and heinous crimes are a message, according to Dalit scholar and professor Anand Teltumbde, now accused of Maoist links and imprisoned. Atrocities against Dalits have “a unique mix of sadism and bestiality”, he and S. Anand wrote, 10 years after the Khairlanji shocker, atrocities are “a mode of teaching a lesson to the entire Dalit community”. Teltumbde spoke of how Khairlanji dispelled many myths, including

that economic development does away with casteism or that Dalits in political or administrative power can orient the administration to do justice for the community.

The few Dalit MLAs in the Uttar Pradesh legislature have been unmoved so far about the insults or atrocities. The Assembly from 2017 comprises nearly 45% upper caste MLAs, up 12% from the previous Assembly. Ministers in Narendra Modi’s cabinet who made political capital out of the Nirbhaya case, even Modi himself, have said little by way of consolation or condemnation of the incidents. Former Union Minister of Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi and the incumbent, Smriti Irani, were elected from Uttar Pradesh but the vocal women have not said a word. There is no getting away from the fact that the BJP is heavily weighted in favour of upper castes—brahmins, thakurs and banias—in its election strategies and political capital, never mind the talk about “*sabka saath*”.

In his analytical book, *‘Khairlanji: A Strange and Bitter Crop’*, Teltumbde detailed why such cases of extreme brutality on Dalits, especially women, are not “isolated events” or “just misdeeds of some uncultured barbaric monsters”. Violence against Dalits, especially rape, is a functional and systematic way of enforcing social order which is why it is “performed as a public spectacle by collectives...rape is not a private affair, it becomes a celebratory spectacle. Atrocities involve intricate and devious planning so that they become a ‘lesson’ for the entire Dalit community”, he wrote.

This is why knee-jerk reactions such as “hang the rapists” cries that gathered momentum over Hathras,

hanging the rapists of Nirbhaya, killing the accused in police encounters as in Hyderabad do not address the core issue of continuing and escalating attacks on Dalits. These actions merely satisfy the

revenge motive in an outraged public without in any way addressing the underlying caste issues. That is why, in his book, Teltumbde cautioned, “Every village in India is a potential Khairlanji”.

(The author is a senior Mumbai-based journalist and columnist who writes on politics, cities, media and gender. Article courtesy: Newsclick.)

Hathras Rape – Three Poems

Trigger Warning: Descriptions of Violence, Rape

Meena Kandasamy

In Hathras, cops barricade a raped woman’s home, hijack her corpse, set it afire on a murderous night, deaf to her mother’s howling pain. In a land where Dalits cannot rule, they cannot rage, or even mourn. This has happened before, this will happen again.

What does that fire remember? The screams of satis dragged to their husband’s pyres and brides burnt alive; the wails of caste-crossed lovers put to death, the tongue-chopped shrieking of raped women. This has happened before, this will happen again.

Manu said once, so his regiment repeat today: all women are harlots, all women are base; all women seek is sex, all they shall have is rape. Manu gives men a licence plate, such rape-mandate. This has happened before, this will happen again.

This has happened before, this will happen again. Sanatana, the only law of the land that’s in force, Sanatana, where nothing, nothing ever will change. Always, always a victim-blaming slut-temple, a rapist-shielding police-state, a caste-denying fourth estate.

This has happened before, this will happen again.

(Meena Kandaswamy is a poet and writer. Courtesy: The Wire.)

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For a Young Woman Who Will Not Become Old

Romi Mahajan

Your dreams won’t die
They can’t kill them
They killed you
They brutalized you
They lied
But your dreams won’t die
A people
Who pride themselves
On their spirituality...
What spirits indeed
Invade their
Addled brains?
What opiate
Suggests such acts?
What sickness
Can endure?
Their bodies, their limbs
Are what’s really aflame
Your dreams won’t die
You are with us
Flames — their flames
Burn every pretense
That they present
Your dreams won’t die

(Romi Mahajan is an Author, Marketer, Investor, and Activist)

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Just a Dalit Girl

Sajla Chawla

They said the sky is blue
But I only know the color brown
For I am just a Dalit girl
And I always keep my head down

I sing the songs of lost sisters
When I work in the landlord's fields
And if the landlord comes by
I cover my face silently

We huddle together always
I never walk alone
My sister did that long ago
And she never came back home

My father buried her in the dark
As her broken body bled
No-one asked us where she was
And no-one really cared

A girl I was for silence born
Did the landlord so decree?
Or did the upper caste God
Write my worthless destiny?

I am born so low, they fear
That if I raise my head high
Their Earth might bleed with heinous
sins
And congeal their murky blue sky.

The Move Towards a De Facto Unitary State

Prabhat Patnaik

Federalism is one of the basic features of the Indian Constitution. In the Constituent Assembly Professor K.T.Shah wanted the term "federal", together with the term "secular", included in the Preamble itself, but Dr.Ambedkar rejected it on the grounds that the federal and secular character of the republic was understood and did not need specification. The Constitution in its seventh schedule spelt out the jurisdictions of the Centre and the states in two lists, and areas of common jurisdiction in a third list. Since then the Centre has always tended to encroach on the domain of the states, but this tendency has now acquired a strength where the claim that the country is being pushed towards a de facto unitary State appears to be no exaggeration.

Having persuaded states to give up their Constitutionally-mandated taxing powers by substituting for their main revenue source, the Sales Tax, a Goods and Services Tax, administered by a GST Council dominated by the Centre, with the promise that their revenue shortfall will be made good, the Centre has now coolly reneged on that promise. States at present have no taxing powers (except over just three commodities); and the promised compensation from the Centre has not materialized.

But it is not just control over resources that has been centralized; decision-making too is being centralized against the provisions of the Constitution. Education for instance is in the Concurrent List; but the Centre has recently come out with a New Education Policy,

without any consultation with the states. The states are simply expected to fall in line and implement the New Education Policy. Agriculture belongs to the State List; and yet the Centre has just rushed three bills through the parliament, with no consultation with state governments, making far reaching changes in the country's agricultural arrangements, which, apart from their impact upon the peasantry, would also mean significant revenue losses for states.

It is not just the states' domains that are being encroached upon; their very being can now be unilaterally altered by the Centre. This became clear when the state of Jammu and Kashmir was carved into two separate Union Territories without the consent of the state legislature. The state's consent to this bifurcation was supposed to have been obtained through the consent of the Centre-appointed governor, since the state was placed under governor's rule at the time. With this precedent, any state can cease to exist as a state and can be carved up into any number of fragments any time, by placing it under governor's rule, and taking the consent of the governor who is hand-picked by the Centre as being legally equivalent to the consent of the state legislature. When the very existence of a state becomes a matter of Central discretion, a substantial step has been taken towards a unitary State.

Converting India into a de facto unitary State is the agenda of both the Hindutva forces and the corporate-financial oligarchy integrated with globalized finance capital; it constitutes therefore a

समाजवादी विचार संकल्प बदलाव का समाजवादी समागम

१२-१३ जुलाई, २०१९, दिल्ली
के अवसर पर प्रकाशित

संपादक : कुरबान अली

प्रकाशक : रमाशंकर सिंह

लागत मूल्य : २०० रुपये में उपलब्ध।

संपर्क : जनता ट्रस्ट - ७७३८०८२१७०

(पोस्ट का खर्च अलग)

prominent element on the common agenda of the corporate-Hindutva alliance that is currently dominating Indian politics.

The federal nature of the Indian State follows from the dual national consciousness that characterizes every Indian, the consciousness of belonging to a particular regional-linguistic group, that is, being an Odiya, or a Bengali, or a Malayali or a Gujarati, or a Tamil; and a consciousness that is pan-Indian. Both kinds of consciousness got strengthened during the anti-colonial struggle; the post-colonial State accordingly sought to accommodate both, through a political arrangement that was federal in character. Maintaining this federal character is essential for preserving the delicate balance between the two. The arbitrary prioritization of one over the other disturbs this equilibrium; and that disrupts the country's unity. Excessive centralization for instance, by riding roughshod over the regional-linguistic consciousness, tends to encourage its opposite, namely a tendency towards separatism and secession.

The Hindutva elements however do not understand this complex reality of India. Since they had nothing to do with the anti-colonial struggle, and since for them India is not a nation-in-the-making but a land of the "Hindus" that has constituted a "Hindu nation" from time immemorial, they pooh-poo the regional-linguistic consciousness, and the composite pan-Indian consciousness built upon it; they seek to impose from the Centre a uniformity, such as "one language", and "one culture" on everyone. They assume an immanent, essential, and (philosophically) "idealist" unity from which every deviation

then becomes "anti-national". The negation of the federal character follows from this: federalism on this perception weakens the "nation".

The Hindutva elements in short are for centralization not only for opportunistic reasons (which of course are there and important); but they are also intrinsically and immanently anti-federal, in favour of a unitary State (as indeed all theocratic States tend to be).

Likewise, the corporate-financial oligarchy also favours centralization. The monopoly capital over which this oligarchy presides, represents centralization in the sphere of the economy; and for realizing its ambitions it requires the support of the State that must also be centralized. A centralized State is the weapon that monopoly capital needs to further its ambitions.

There is however an important exception to this. There may be situations where the central government in a federal polity is less benign towards monopoly capital, including metropolitan capital, than the government of some particular regions within the country. In such a case monopoly, or metropolitan, capital (we are using the two terms interchangeably because the contemporary world is not characterized by intense inter-imperialist rivalry) would want a weakening of the Centre and a strengthening of the regions; it would in short want greater devolution of powers, resources and decision-making within the federal structure. Eventually of course it would encourage secessionism on the part of these regions, so that it can use the newly-formed centralized States, through the break-up of the larger federal State, for its own purposes.

The break-up of Yugoslavia is

the obvious example here. German capital encouraged the break-up of Yugoslavia because it had little hope of establishing its hegemony over the central government in a united Yugoslavia, since Serbia with its history of anti-Nazi struggle and deep suspicions about the ambitions of German capital, was a powerful entity in any such united country.

But of course where the central government is itself amenable to furthering the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy, as in India, this oligarchy favours a weakening of the federal structure, and a centralization of powers, resources and decision-making, so that its ambitions are furthered without its having to deal with a range of state-level governments: the latter could have ideas about entrusting projects to local producers, or to the public sector, or about compensation to peasants for lands being taken over from them, which are inconvenient to the corporate-financial oligarchy. The recently-enacted Agriculture Bills which open the way for corporate encroachment on peasant agriculture through contract farming and unregulated markets, would never have been permitted by several state legislatures; they are being thrust down the throats of the states through central legislation whose very legality is suspect. The fact that such legislation is imposed despite suspect legality is of course indicative of the degree to which the judiciary has lost its independence vis-à-vis the central government.

On the question of converting India to a de facto unitary State therefore there is a convergence of views between the Hindutva forces and the corporate-financial oligarchy; the current BJP government at the Centre which represents a corporate-

Hindutva alliance, is engaged, not surprisingly, in carrying this project forward. It is not only in Centre-state political and economic relations that this tendency is manifest. Even in the spheres of culture and education, there is a strong parallel tendency. The subtle attempt to impose Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states in the New Education Policy may have been thwarted for the time being; but it will revive. The curriculum in the New Education Policy is supposed to be centrally prescribed with no consultations with states. All these are pointers to the imposition of the “one culture” idea in the place of the diversity that marks India.

The country however will have to pay a heavy price for this thrusting of a uniformity that ignores and over-rides completely the reality of regional-linguistic consciousness, for it will create its very opposite in ways that are dangerous for our future.

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Press Release, 3 October 2020

Open Letter to the Chief Minister Of Uttar Pradesh

Dear Chief Minister,

Just when we thought that nothing could numb our consciences and brains further, the handling of the Hathras incident by the Uttar Pradesh administration has shown that, as a nation, we are plumbing the depths of depravity and callousness in governance. A young Dalit woman is brutally violated. Almost three weeks after the incident, the police are yet to confirm the crime of rape and are still spinning theories around it, although the video of what amounts to her dying declaration seems to confirm it. Her neck was lacerated, her spinal column was broken and there were cuts on her tongue. Instead of promptly admitting her to a hospital with advanced facilities for dealing with trauma, she was allowed to languish in the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital, Aligarh. She was moved to Delhi only two weeks after the incident, that too on the request of her family, a case of too little, too late. What followed was an even greater travesty of justice and basic human values. After her death, her body was despatched post haste to her village and cremated in the dead of night by policemen. Being a person attached to a persuasion of the Hindu faith, you would be well aware that Hindu customs require the nearest kin to offer agni to the mortal remains. Both the sacred traditions and the family’s pleas that they would perform the cremation in the morning were ignored. To add insult to injury, a policeman is reported to

have told the bereaved family that they were also to blame and the District Magistrate has apparently been captured on video making veiled threats to the family that they should be careful about their statements to the media, because the officials would be around even after the media departs.

It is being touted in the media that the Prime Minister has asked you to “fast track” this case to secure an early conviction. With our experience as erstwhile administrators in different departments of the central and state governments, our group of former civil servants had, in the past, highlighted the brazen violations of the rule of law in the Unnao rape case and in the murder of the police inspector in Bulandshahr. We note with concern that, even after two years, the ghastly murder of a brother officer has not stirred the UP police and your administration to bring the case to closure. In these circumstances, we may be forgiven for viewing UP’s fast track justice system with scepticism.

We are, in fact, concerned with the novel interpretations of fast track justice in the state governed by you. In recent days, we have seen two instances where alleged criminals have met their deaths while being transported by the police to Uttar Pradesh. Even if they were guilty of the offences listed against them, they were entitled, under the Constitution of India and the laws of the land, to a fair trial. Denial of this right amounts to violation of

Article 21 of the Constitution. Your administration has also initiated draconian measures against anti-CAA protesters, including detention and levy of punitive fines. You seem to believe in combining the roles of judge and executioner, as evidenced in a recent interview where you advocated the philosophy of “an eye for an eye.” Equally reprehensible, some months ago, you ordered the withdrawal of cases registered against you in the past. Politicians never tire of saying “the law must take its course”. Why depart from this article of faith for your party and government? .

The Hathras district administration feels it can flout human sentiments at will, apart from rapidly disposing of evidence in cases of offences against the body. All those complicit in these violations of law and tradition must be punished. While it is in the order of things that you have suspended the Superintendent of Police, there are adequate grounds for immediate suspension of the District Magistrate as well; we insist that departmental proceedings against them be started at the earliest. Action under Section 4 of The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 must be initiated against all those officers and men of the district police and the executive magistracy who have wilfully neglected the duties enjoined on them under this Act. We also note with regret that the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police have failed abjectly in exercising control over a highly compromised administration. We urge them to live up to the proud traditions of the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, in whom the people of this country still

repose faith. The meek surrender of the Uttar Pradesh bureaucracy and police, especially its All-India Services, to political diktat has shamed all of us who deem it a badge of honour to belong to these services.

But, ultimately, all responsibility rests with you as the Chief Executive of the state. Your actions over the past three and a half years give us little reason to believe that your actions are motivated by respect for the rule of law. We urge you to conduct your administration in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution of India, to which you have sworn allegiance when you assumed office. In the present instance, we hope you will deliver justice to the victim and her family, without fear or favour, despite the

efforts of specific upper caste groups to interfere with the course of justice. We also hope you will ensure that officers of your administration implement the rule of law in a just and fair manner.

SATYAMEVA JAYATE

Yours sincerely,

Constitutional Conduct Group
(92 signatories; Full list of signatories available on Countercurrents.org.)

(Constitutional Conduct Group is a group of 106 former senior bureaucrats with the government of India, who have organised themselves under this name. Most of them were IAS, and include IPS, IRS, IFS officials. They include top former Secretaries, DGPs and even RAW officials.)

Internationalism or Extinction

Noam Chomsky

Returning to the major crises we face at this historic moment, all are international, and two internationals are forming to confront them. One is opening today: the Progressive International. The other has been taking shape under the leadership of Trump’s White House, a Reactionary International comprising the world’s most reactionary states.

We are meeting at a remarkable moment, a moment that is, in fact, unique in human history, a moment both ominous in portent and bright with hopes for a better future. The Progressive International has a crucial role to play in determining which course history will follow.

We are meeting at a moment of confluence of crises of extraordinary

severity, with the fate of the human experiment quite literally at stake. The issues are coming to a head in the next few weeks in the two great imperial powers of the modern era.

Fading Britain, having publicly declared that it rejects international law, is on the verge of a sharp break from Europe, on the path to becoming even more of a U.S. satellite that it already is. But of course what is of the greatest significance for the future is what happens in the global hegemon, diminished by Trump’s wrecking ball, but still with overwhelming power and incomparable advantages. Its fate, and with it the fate of the world, may well be determined in November.

Noam Chomsky’s keynote speech at the inaugural summit of Progressive International. Janata carried an article on Progressive International in its Sept 27-Oct 4 issue.

Not surprisingly, the rest of the world is concerned, if not appalled. It would be difficult to find a more sober and respected commentator than Martin Wolf of the London *Financial Times*. He writes that the West is facing a serious crisis, and if Trump is re-elected, “this will be terminal.” Strong words, and he is not even referring to the major crises humanity faces.

Wolf is referring to the global order, a critical matter though not on the scale of the crises that threaten vastly more serious consequences, the crises that are driving the hands of the famous Doomsday Clock towards midnight—towards termination.

Wolf’s concept “terminal” is not a new entry into public discourse. We have been living under its shadow for 75 years, ever since we learned, on an unforgettable August day, that human intelligence had devised the means that would soon yield the capacity for terminal destruction. That was shattering enough, but there was more. It was not then understood that humanity was entering a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, in which human activities are despoiling the environment in a manner that is now also approaching terminal destruction.

The hands of the Doomsday Clock were first set shortly after atomic bombs were used in a paroxysm of needless slaughter. The hands have oscillated since, as global circumstances have evolved. Every year that Trump has been in office, the hands have been moved closer to midnight. Two years ago they reached the closest they had ever been. Last January, the analysts abandoned minutes, turning to seconds: 100 seconds to midnight.

They cited the same crises as before: the growing threats of nuclear war and of environmental catastrophe, and the deterioration of democracy.

The last might at first seem out of place, but it is not. Declining democracy is a fitting member of the grim trio. The only hope of escaping the two threats of termination is vibrant democracy in which concerned and informed citizens are fully engaged in deliberation, policy formation, and direct action.

That was last January. Since then, President Trump has amplified all three threats, not a mean accomplishment. He has continued his demolition of the arms control regime that has offered some protection against the threat of nuclear war, while also pursuing development of new and even more dangerous weapons, much to the delight of military industry. In his dedicated commitment to destroy the environment that sustains life, Trump has opened up vast new areas for drilling, including the last great nature reserve. Meanwhile, his minions are systematically dismantling the regulatory system that somewhat mitigates the destructive impact of fossil fuel use, and that protects the population from toxic chemicals and from pollution, a curse that is now doubly murderous in the course of a severe respiratory epidemic.

Trump has also carried forward his campaign to undermine democracy. By law, presidential appointments are subject to Senate confirmation. Trump avoids this inconvenience by leaving the positions open and filling the offices with “temporary appointments” who answer to his will—and if they do not do so with sufficient fealty to the lord, are fired. He has purged

the executive of any independent voice. Only sycophants remain. Congress had long ago established Inspectors General to monitor the performance of the executive branch. They began to look into the swamp of corruption that Trump has created in Washington. He took care of that quickly by firing them. There was scarcely a peep from the Republican Senate, firmly in Trump’s pocket, with hardly a flicker of integrity remaining, terrified by the popular base Trump has mobilized.

This onslaught against democracy is only the bare beginning. Trump’s latest step is to warn that he may not leave office if he is not satisfied with the outcome of the November election. The threat is taken very seriously in high places. To mention just a few examples, two highly respected retired senior military commanders released an open letter to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, reviewing his constitutional responsibility to send the army to remove by force a “lawless president” who refuses to leave office after electoral defeat, summoning in his defense the kinds of paramilitary units he dispatched to Portland Oregon to terrorize the population over the strong objection of elected officials.

Many establishment figures regard the warning as realistic, among them the high-level Transition Integrity Project, which has just reported the results of the “war gaming” it has been conducting on possible outcomes of the November election. The project members are “some of the most accomplished Republicans, Democrats, civil servants, media experts, pollsters and strategists around,” the Project co-director explains, including prominent figures in both Parties.

Under any plausible scenario apart from a clear Trump victory, the games led to something like civil war, with Trump choosing to end “the American experiment.”

Again, strong words, never before heard from sober mainstream voices. The very fact that such thoughts arise is ominous enough. They are not alone. And given incomparable U.S. power, far more than the “American experiment” is at risk.

Nothing like this has happened in the often troubled history of parliamentary democracy. Keeping to recent years, Richard Nixon—not the most delightful person in presidential history—had good reason to believe that he had lost the 1960 election only because of criminal manipulation by Democratic operatives. He did not contest the results, putting the welfare of the country ahead of personal ambition. Albert Gore did the same in 2000. Not today.

Forging new paths in contempt for the welfare of the country does not suffice for the megalomaniac who dominates the world. Trump has also announced once again that he may disregard the Constitution and “negotiate” for a third term if he decides he is entitled to it.

Some choose to laugh all this off as the playfulness of a buffoon. To their peril, as history shows.

The survival of liberty is not guaranteed by “parchment barriers,” James Madison warned. Words on paper are not enough. It is founded on the expectation of good faith and common decency. That has been torn to shreds by Trump along with his co-conspirator Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has turned the “world’s greatest deliberative body,” as it calls itself,

into a pathetic joke. McConnell’s Senate refuses even to consider legislative proposals. Its concern is largesse to the rich and stacking the judiciary, top to bottom with far right young lawyers who should be able to safeguard the reactionary Trump-McConnell agenda for a generation, whatever the public wants, whatever the world needs for survival.

The abject service to the rich of the Trump-McConnell Republican party is quite remarkable, even by the neoliberal standards of exaltation of greed. One illustration is provided by the leading specialists on tax policy, economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman. They show that in 2018, following the tax scam that was the one legislative Trump-McConnell achievement, “for the first time in the last hundred years, billionaires have paid less [in taxes] than steel workers, school teachers, and retirees,” erasing “a century of fiscal history.” “In 2018, for the first time in the modern history of the United States, capital has been taxed less than labor”—a truly impressive victory of class war, called “liberty” in hegemonic doctrine.

The Doomsday Clock was set last January before the scale of the pandemic was understood. Humanity will sooner or later recover from the pandemic, at terrible cost. It is needless cost. We see that clearly from the experience of countries that took decisive action when China provided the world with the relevant information about the virus on January 10. Primary among them were East-Southeast Asia and Oceania, with others trailing along, and bringing up the rear a few utter disasters, notably the US, followed by Bolsonaro’s Brazil and Modi’s India.

Despite the malfeasance or indifference of some political leaders, there will ultimately be some kind of recovery from the pandemic. We will not, however, recover from the melting of the polar icecaps, or the exploding rate of arctic fires that are releasing enormous amounts of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, or other steps on our march to catastrophe.

When the most prominent climate scientists warn us to “Panic Now,” they are not being alarmist. There is no time to waste. Few are doing enough, and even worse, the world is cursed by leaders who are not only refusing to take sufficient action but are deliberately accelerating the race to disaster. The malignancy in the White House is far in the lead in this monstrous criminality.

It is not only governments. The same is true of fossil fuel industries, the big banks that finance them, and other industries that profit from actions that put the “survival of humanity” at serious risk, in the words of a leaked internal memo of America’s largest bank.

Humanity will not long survive this institutional malignancy. The means to manage the crisis are available. But not for long. One primary task of the Progressive International is to ensure that we all panic now—and act accordingly.

The crises we face in this unique moment of human history are of course international. Environmental catastrophe, nuclear war, and the pandemic have no borders. And in a less transparent way, the same is true of the third of the demons that stalk the earth and drive the second hand of the Doomsday clock towards midnight: the deterioration of democracy. The international

character of this plague becomes evident when we examine its origins.

Circumstances vary, but there are some common roots. Much of the malignancy traces back to the neoliberal assault on the world's population launched in force 40 years ago.

The basic character of the assault was captured in the opening pronouncements of its most prominent figures. Ronald Reagan declared in his inaugural address that government is the problem, not the solution—meaning that decisions should be removed from governments, which are at least partially under public control, to private power, which is completely unaccountable to the public, and whose sole responsibility is self-enrichment, as chief economist Milton Friedman proclaimed. The other was Margaret Thatcher, who instructed us that there is no society, only a market in which people are cast to survive as best they can, with no organizations that enable them to defend themselves against its ravages.

Unwittingly no doubt, Thatcher was paraphrasing Marx, who condemned the autocratic rulers of his day for turning the population into a “sack of potatoes,” defenseless against concentrated power.

With admirable consistency, the Reagan and Thatcher administrations moved at once to destroy the labor movement, the primary impediment to harsh class rule by the masters of the economy. In doing so, they were adopting the leading principles of neoliberalism from its early days in interwar Vienna, where the founder and patron saint of the movement, Ludwig von Mises, could scarcely control his joy when the proto-fascist government violently destroyed

Austria's vibrant social democracy and the despicable trade unions that were interfering with sound economics by defending the rights of working people. As von Mises explained in his 1927 neoliberal classic *Liberalism*, five years after Mussolini initiated his brutal rule, “It cannot be denied that Fascism and similar movements aimed at the establishment of dictatorships are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has for the moment saved European civilization. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history”—though it will be only temporary, he assured us. The Blackshirts will go home after having accomplished their good work.

The same principles inspired enthusiastic neoliberal support for the hideous Pinochet dictatorship. A few years later, they were put into operation in a different form in the global arena under the leadership of the U.S. and UK.

The consequences were predictable. One was sharp concentration of wealth alongside of stagnation for much of the population, reflected in the political realm by undermining of democracy. The impact in the United States brings out very clearly what one would expect when business rule is virtually uncontested. After 40 years, 0.1% of the population have 20% of the wealth, twice what they had when Reagan was elected. CEO remuneration has skyrocketed, drawing general management wealth along with it. Real wages for non-supervisory male workers have declined. A majority of the population survives from paycheck to paycheck, with almost no reserves. Financial institutions, largely predatory, have

exploded in scale. There have been repeated crashes, increasing in severity, the perpetrators bailed out by the friendly taxpayer, though that is the least of the implicit state subsidy they receive. “Free markets” led to monopolization, with reduced competition and innovation, as the strong swallowed the weak. Neoliberal globalization has deindustrialized the country within the framework of the investor rights agreements mislabeled as “free trade pacts.” Adopting the neoliberal doctrine that “taxation is robbery,” Reagan opened the door to tax havens and shell companies—previously banned and barred by effective enforcement. That led at once to a huge tax evasion industry to expedite massive robbery of the general population by the very rich and the corporate sector. No small change. The scale is estimated in tens of trillions of dollars.

And so it continues as neoliberal doctrine took hold.

As the assault was just beginning to take shape, in 1978, the president of the United Auto Workers, Doug Fraser, resigned from a labor-management committee that was set up by the Carter Administration, expressing his shock that business leaders had “chosen to wage a one-sided class war in this country—a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society,” and had “broken and discarded the fragile, unwritten compact previously existing during a period of growth and progress”—during the period of class collaboration under regimented capitalism.

His recognition of how the world works was somewhat belated, in

fact too late to fend off the bitter class war launched by business leaders who were soon granted free rein by compliant governments. The consequences over much of the world come as little surprise: widespread anger, resentment, contempt for political institutions while the primary economic ones are hidden from view by effective propaganda. All of this provides fertile territory for demagogues who can pretend to be your savior while stabbing you in the back, meanwhile deflecting the blame for your conditions to scapegoats: immigrants, blacks, China, whoever fits long-standing prejudices.

Returning to the major crises we face at this historic moment, all are international, and two internationals are forming to confront them. One is opening today: the Progressive International. The other has been taking shape under the leadership of Trump's White House, a Reactionary International comprising the world's most reactionary states.

In the Western Hemisphere, the International includes Bolsonaro's Brazil and a few others. In the

Middle East, prime members are the family dictatorships of the Gulf; al-Sisi's Egyptian dictatorship, perhaps the harshest in Egypt's bitter history; and Israel, which long ago discarded its social democratic origins and shifted far to the right, the predicted effect of the prolonged and brutal occupation. The current agreements between Israel and Arab dictatorships, formalizing long-standing tacit relations, are a significant step towards solidifying the Middle East base of the Reactionary International. The Palestinians are kicked in the face, the proper fate of those who lack power and do not grovel properly at the feet of the natural masters.

To the East, a natural candidate is India, where Prime Minister Modi is destroying India's secular democracy and turning the country into a racist Hindu nationalist state, while crushing Kashmir. The European contingent includes Orban's "illiberal democracy" in Hungary and similar elements elsewhere. The International also has powerful backing in the dominant global economic institutions.

The two internationals comprise a good part of the world, one at the level of states, the other popular movements. Each is a prominent representative of much broader social forces, which have sharply contending images of the world that should emerge from the current pandemic. One force is working relentlessly to construct a harsher version of the neoliberal global system from which they have greatly benefited, with more intensive surveillance and control. The other looks forward to a world of justice and peace, with energies and resources directed to serving human needs rather than the demands of a tiny minority. It is a kind of class struggle on a global scale, with many complex facets and interactions.

It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the human experiment depends on the outcome of this struggle.

[Noam Chomsky is a US political theorist and activist, and institute professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).]

Julian Assange's Extradition Hearing: The Only Just Outcome Is His Freedom

Margaret Flowers

The testimony portion of the extradition hearing of Julian Assange, taking place in the United Kingdom, concluded after four weeks. Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who presided over the hearing, will not announce her decision until January. Until then, Assange will remain in detention in Belmarsh Prison.

Under conditions that violated Assange's rights and his ability to

defend himself, his legal team made a clear case that for multiple reasons the only just solution is to free Assange. However, Judge Baraitser has not ruled favorably for him in her past decisions or even in this hearing.

At the start, Assange's lawyers requested a delay until January because they had not been able to meet adequately with him. Their

request was denied. During the hearing, Assange was forced to sit in a glass box without access to his lawyers.

Over the past four weeks, people demonstrated their support for Julian Assange outside Old Bailey, where the hearing was held, and around the world. Almost 200 lawyers and politicians from 27 countries, including 13 past and present heads

of state, demanded his immediate release. We must continue to raise awareness and public pressure to free Assange.

Press Freedom Under Attack

The persecution of Julian Assange matters to all of us because this is bigger than Assange. He is being targeted and tortured for doing what every honest journalist and publisher does – reporting the truth and informing the public about what is being done by their governments and corporations.

Many media outlets, especially if they conduct investigative journalism, provide tools and information for people to leak information to them. The difference with Assange is that he created a tool, Wikileaks, that could be used by everyone around the world to leak information anonymously and to read information that had been leaked. Wikileaks verified the information and redacted portions that could result in personal harm, but other than that the information was freely available to the public. Assange is a strong believer in transparency and our right to know.

This is what outraged the power structure. They could not control access to information. They could not stop people from learning about their war crimes and corruption. So they have been waging a war on Assange ever since in multiple nefarious ways and so far he has survived. But this is too much for one person to have to bear. That is why we need to rally around Assange. One way to do that is to support the fund created by his partner, Stella Morris.

Kevin Zeese, the now-deceased co-director of Popular Resistance,

was a supporter of Julian Assange. He served as an adviser to the board of the Courage Foundation, which runs Defend Wikileaks. In this 2018 interview with Elizabeth Lea Vos, Kevin explains why Assange's case is critical:

Julian Assange's case is the John Peter Zenger case of the twenty-first century. John Peter Zenger was a publisher who was prosecuted before the American Revolution because he published articles that were critical of the British-appointed governor of New York. They weren't false, they were just critical. In those days, there was no defense to slander as far as telling the truth goes. You say something bad about the government or the king, you get punished for it. Zenger's lawyers decided to use a defense that had not been used before, which was to go right to the jury, avoid the judge and show that Zenger was publishing the truth. Zenger was found not guilty by the jury very quickly after having been held in jail for eight months and undergoing abuse. People see that case as where a lot of our freedom of the press rights come from and the concept that truth is a defense. Julian Assange is revisiting that issue now in the twenty-first century when we have a lot of different technology that allows for truth to be told. Wikileaks is a major breakthrough in how journalism works and what information we are allowed to see. It is unacceptable that the most important publisher in this century is silenced. Whether or not you like Assange personally, the work he has done is critical to our future."

Why Julian Assange Must be Freed

During the extradition hearing, multiple reasons for freeing Assange and dropping the charges against him were explained. Any one of them should be enough to stop this persecution, but taken together, they demonstrate undeniably that extradition to the United States would violate Assange's rights and that he has not committed a crime.

1. Julian Assange has been denied his right to a fair trial.

While in prison, Assange had limited access to his lawyers. They were only able to speak occasionally over the phone and with a bad connection. Assange's lawyer, Mark Summers, argued that Assange "alone has the knowledge to build a defense." And, Assange had not been able to read new charges made against him nor had his lawyers had time to prepare a defense to those new charges. And his hearing was structured so the public and press had extremely limited access. This is unacceptable for a case of such significance. Similarly, Assange would not have a fair trial if he were extradited to the US.

2. Assange did not commit a crime.

The United States argued that Assange was not a journalist and therefore not protected under the First Amendment, but experts testified that he was engaged in 'journalistic activity,' and that is what matters. Journalists routinely ask sources for access to private information and publish such information. This is all that Assange did. If he is found guilty, then other journalists and media outlets that published material from Wikileaks should also be found guilty. Finding Assange guilty of publishing the truth would have a chilling effect

on the willingness of journalists anywhere in the world to similarly expose war crimes and corruption.

3. Assange's case is political, not criminal. Testimony exposed that the case against Assange is purely political. The judge admitted it herself by stating that she would issue her decision after the election. A witness revealed that the Trump administration, acting through former Congressman Dana Rohrabacher and German Ambassador Richard Grenell, offered to not prosecute if Assange would reveal his sources. When Assange refused, the administration started the process of investigating and charging him. Also, the United States directed the Ecuadorian government to turn Assange over to police.

4. The United States violated Assange's privacy. In the final week of the hearing, employees from US Global, a Spanish security firm that was spying on Assange through video and audio while he was living in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and providing it to the CIA, testified that they were pushed to do more. One witness said the company wanted to install live stream that would be fed directly to the CIA but he stopped it. The witnesses added that their company was pushed by the CIA to leave a door open at the embassy so Assange could be kidnapped and to poison him.

5. Extradition to the United States puts Assange's health and safety at great risk. The United States has no regard for Julian Assange's life. Doctors and experts testified that Julian is in poor health and suffers depression and suicidal thoughts. If he were extradited to the United States, where he faces 175 years in prison, not only would he have a unfair trial but he would be

held in torturous conditions, in a tiny isolation cell, which would worsen his condition and risk his life. It is illegal to extradite a person to a place that endangers their life. That is why Assange originally sought asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy and it was granted by the Correa government.

The United States lawyers tried to paint Assange as a different person than what he is and bullied and degraded the defense witnesses. They did that because the facts are not on their side. A major argument by the US is that Assange helped Chelsea Manning get the data from a computer, but a cyber security expert demonstrated that was false. The only just solution is to free Julian Assange now.

The Fight to Free Assange Continues

The extradition hearing is over but the fight is not over. This is the

time to escalate our pressure to free Assange. Public opinion matters and influences courts, whether they admit it or not.

We need to continue to raise awareness of the injustice and unconstitutionality of what the United States is doing to Assange, the illegality of risking his life and the impact this extradition and prosecution in the United States will have on press freedom and our right to know around the world.

Continue to talk about this, write about this, speak about this, organize web forums, write letters of solidarity, and protest for Julian Assange. The only way we will surely lose is by not trying.

(Margaret Flowers is Co-Director of Popular Resistance, National Co-ordinator of the Health Over Profit for Everyone campaign, and Co-chair of the Green Party US. Article courtesy: Popular Resistance.)

US Refuses to Recognize Cuba's Medical Efforts As it Will Show Socialist System Works

Daniel Kovalik

As clamor grows for Cuban doctors to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for their international work during the pandemic, the US continues to oppose their efforts. It cannot be seen to endorse the idea that the socialist system works.

In his book, *In Cuba*, the late Liberation Catholic priest Father Ernesto Cardinal of Nicaragua relates that, upon visiting Cuba in the mid-1970s, he witnessed an entire country which resembled a Franciscan Christian community – a set of people living in simple, austere circumstances sharing what little they had with each other.

And, of course, Cuba has become renowned for sharing the little it has – little, because of a US embargo which has been strangling its economy for nearly 60 years – with the rest of the world.

The most significant contribution Cuba has made has been its international medical solidarity, which has benefited scores of countries, mostly, but not solely, in the developing world.

Cuba began offering such assistance very shortly after the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro. Echoing Father Cardinal's reflections about Cuba, Johns

Hopkins University Professor Piero Gleijeses describes Cuba's outreach to Algeria shortly after the Cuban Revolution in the following words:

“It was an unusual gesture: an underdeveloped country tendering free aid to another in even more dire straits. It was offered at a time when the exodus of doctors from Cuba following the revolution had forced the government to stretch its resources while launching its domestic programs to increase mass access to health care. ‘It was like a beggar offering his help, but we knew the Algerian people needed it even more than we did and that they deserved it,’ [Cuban minister of public health] Machado Ventura remarked. It was an act of solidarity that brought no tangible benefit and came at real material cost.”

Cuba has only increased such solidarity over the years. For example, it sent doctors 4,500 miles to Western Africa to successfully fight the deadly Ebola virus. In addition, as *The New York Times* begrudgingly acknowledged, Cuban doctors were in the forefront of the recent fight against cholera in Haiti. After the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Cuba took in thousands of children suffering from the fallout to be treated. Many of those individuals still live in Cuba, years after the collapse of the USSR. Cuba has even sent doctors to help in the United States – specifically, to fight infant mortality in Chicago.

Most recently, during the Covid-19 crisis, Cuba has sent doctors to both developing countries, such as Venezuela, Suriname, Jamaica and Grenada, as well as to developed nations, such as Italy, to assist in fighting the pandemic.

To acknowledge Cuba's global efforts to fight Covid-19, there is

an international movement afoot lobbying for its medical team, known as the Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade, to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. A petition lobbying for this honor has garnered 30,000 signatures from around the world, including from such notables as the former president of Ecuador Rafael Correa, actors Danny Glover and Mark Ruffalo, and writers Alice Walker and Noam Chomsky.

However, quite shockingly, the US, standing nearly alone in the world, has opposed the efforts of Cuba to fight the global pandemic from the very beginning. As the *Asia Times* explains:

“The US government has continued attacking Cuban medical internationalism right up to the current pandemic, making wild allegations against the program that disparage the medical workers. Paul Hare, a former British ambassador to Cuba who teaches in the United States, told Reuters recently that the US is “almost totally isolated” when it comes to its Cuba policy. Each year since 1992, the United Nations General Assembly has voted to end the US-imposed embargo on the island. In 2019, 187 countries said the embargo must end, while the US stood with two of its closest allies, Brazil and Israel. Ambassador Hare's phrase “almost totally isolated” is an understatement.”

This begs the question of why the US would oppose such international solidarity. Certainly, part of the animosity to Cuba and its global efforts flows from the fact that it has partnered closely with countries, like China, with which the US is at odds.

However, the truth is that Cuba's close ties with China, just as its prior close ties with the USSR, have

largely been necessitated by the US' aggressive economic blockade of the island nation, as well as its incessant military threats. As Noam Chomsky has often pointed out, the US intentionally acts in ways towards fledgling revolutionary nations which push them into the arms of the Communist superpowers, and then points to this as justification for more intensified aggression.

In my own view, the real reason the US is pushing against Cuban medical solidarity is its fear of what some, including Oxfam International, have referred to as “the threat of a good example.”

That is, countries like Cuba threaten the hegemony of the US and global capitalism by its very successes in building a socialist model which shows that people's needs, both domestically and abroad, can be fulfilled better in the absence of the profit motive. Such examples must be destroyed, lest they demonstrate to other developing countries that they can do better if they leave the clutches of the predatory capitalist system.

Moreover, such examples even threaten to show the people of the US – the country which, despite its unique riches, has one of the worst Covid-19 rates in the world – that there is a better way to organize an economy and a society.

At a time when the US electorate's support for socialism is greater than it has been in decades – in part because of the inequities and failures exposed by the pandemic – Cuba represents an example which the powers-that-be must destroy, and they are acting aggressively to try to do so.

(Daniel Kovalik teaches International Human Rights at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. Article courtesy: RT, an autonomous, non-profit news organization.)

Postal Registration No. MCW/275/2018-2020.

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Published on Sunday, Combine Issue, October 11-18, 2020 & Posted on Wednesday, October 21, 2020 at Mumbai Patrika Channel, Mumbai GPO-1



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