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DECEMBER 2023

Rs. 25

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TO THE SEA,
PALESTINE WILL
BE FREE



STOP THE GENOCIDE



In Prime Minister's Own Constituency: Sexual Assault and Silencing of Demand for Justice in BHU

▲ SUCHETA DE

On the night of November 1st, a female student was subjected to horrific sexual violence in the IIT BHU campus. On her way from her hostel, she was held hostage by three men on a motorcycle who molested, groped and gang-raped her. They disrobed her while taking photos and videos and when she tried to resist, they threatened to kill her. Soon after the 1st November incident, BHU students rose up in protest demanding justice for the survivor and accountability for the BHU administration's criminal apathy.

While it was the task of the BHU administration to take all necessary steps to aid the survivor's quest for justice, we instead find the authorities leaving no stone unturned to crush the peaceful demonstration in solidarity with the survivor. The BHU administration stooped lower when it shamelessly invited the UP Police into its premises and gave it complete authority to unleash barbaric violence on the protesting students. Till now the accused roam free while charges under grave provisions have been filed against 17 protesting students including AISA activists and leading face of the protest Chanda, Roshan, Anurati and Rajesh.

Interestingly, the ABVP which had so far been completely absent from the protest, arrived at the protest the same day as the UP Police. And in a shameless display of complicity with the BHU administration's agenda to sabotage the movement for gender justice, the UP Police and the ABVP together attacked the peacefully protesting students.

The series of incidents that have unfolded since November 2nd, draw a close parallel to another incident that happened in the same campus in 2017. In the last six years, the BHU administration has remained stubbornly orthodox and regressive. The ICC has consistently failed to ensure even basic gender sensitisation, leave alone ensuring a safe and secure campus for its women students.

The standard operating procedure for the BHU administration, whenever complaints of sexual harassment and assault have come to light, have remained the same. Rather than ensuring justice for the survivor, the BHU administration has always resorted to survivor blaming and crackdown on students demanding justice. If after the incident of 2017, the then proctor of the University had asked the complainant as to why she was outside of her hostel in the evening, in the present incident, the administration has filed FIRs against protesting students. The blatant discrimination against women students in BHU reminds us of the core ideology of the present regime that runs the country. Being a central university, BHU comes directly under the Ministry of Education of the central government. While clear guidelines of ending all forms of discriminatory practices against women students have been given by the Saksham Guideline of UGC in 2013, universities like BHU openly violate those guidelines under protection from the central government. While discriminatory curfew timing for women hostels are already in place, the BHU administration is preparing to build up walls surrounding the premises of IIT BHU so that students can not unite to protest when incidents of sexual harassment come to light. After the 2017 protest against sexual harassment in the campus, the BHU administration built up massive walls near the women's hostels and installed CCTV cameras directing to the entrance of the women's hostels to monitor entry and exit of the students. It is indeed hard to believe that in the 21st Century, in the constituency of the Prime Minister himself, such regressive moral policing on women continues unabated.

AISA and AIPWA observed national protest against the horrific incident of sexual assault and crackdown on protesting students. The need of the hour is to unite and demand end to the culture of protecting sexual assaulter, survivor blaming and punishing women for facing sexual harassment by building walls around their mobility and freedom. ■



New Series Vol. 29 No. 09
DECEMBER 2023

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36 pages including covers

Annual Subscription Rates

India Rs. 300

Abroad US\$ 60

Digital Subscription Rs. 200

Online Payment: liberation.org.in

Pay By Bank transfer:

Account Name: Liberation Publications

Account No.: 90502010091855

IFSC Code: CNRB0019050

MICR Code.: 110015388

Bank: Canara Bank

From Election Campaign to Cricket World Cup: Growing Desperation of Modi and Shah



@ Gareth Copley

For the dominant Indian media, the first three weeks of November 2023 have been all about two campaigns: elections to Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan State Assemblies and the 46-day-long ODI Cricket World Cup which started on 5 October and ended on 19 November, both matches played in Ahmedabad at the erstwhile Sardar Patel Stadium which the Modi government renamed after Narendra Modi. The continuing genocide of children, women and other unarmed Palestinians in Gaza of course never really became news in the Modi media. Even the news of the tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand which has trapped forty one workers for more than a week now has received little attention.

There are of course double standards in the election campaign coverage. Ahead of the Chhattisgarh polls on 7 November there was big breaking news attributed to the ED which alleged that the incumbent Congress CM Bhupesh Baghel had received 500-odd crore rupees in a betting app scam. The reports that followed the screaming headlines of course said that the allegation remained to be investigated. The betting app in question has been a subject of an ongoing probe by the state government for quite some time and several arrests have already been made. The timing of the 'breaking news' was clearly aimed at affecting the public perception and voting choice of the electorate in Chhattisgarh. The weaponisation of the ED reached an altogether new level in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

Around the same time there were two major news stories presenting a different picture. Two ED officials were captured redhanded in Rajasthan by the state anti-corruption bureau while taking bribes, but the story quickly disappeared from the media. More recently videos of Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar's son Devendra Singh Tomar went viral on social media where the junior Tomar could be seen having telephonic conversations about settling commissions worth crores of rupees. Two such videos, the first talking of Rs 100 crore and the second mentioning a first monthly instalment of Rs 250 crore, were followed by a third video showing one Jagmandeep Singh from Abbotsford, Canada claiming to be the man talking to Devendra Singh Tomar about the financial transactions in the previous videos. The first two videos are possibly from an earlier period when Narendra Singh Tomar was the mining minister in Modi 1.0 before being handed the agriculture ministry in Modi's second term.

Jagmandeep Singh has invited investigative agencies to approach him for more details. The version coming from him suggests a very intricate plot involving some 10,000 crore rupees accusing the Tomars of being involved in collecting commissions and investing money in marijuana cultivation in Canada. Narendra Singh Tomar is one of the seven MPs who have been fielded by the BJP as MLA candidates in the ongoing MP elections. Considering the gravity of the allegations there should have been a prompt response from the BJP central leadership, the central investigative agencies and the Election Commission, yet all of them maintained a deafening silence and the dominant media altogether blacked out the story. The contrasting media response to the Baghel and Tomar corruption allegations is a most telling testimony to the complete transformation of the dominant media into a propaganda instrument and political weapon of the powers that be.

Meanwhile, Narendra Modi's election speeches reveal both political desperation and progressive degeneration

in the BJP's election campaign. Following the Amit Shah and Anurag Thakur template of election speeches in the February 2020 Delhi Assembly elections when Shah had asked voters to send electric shock waves to Shaheen Bagh and Thakur wanted the 'traitors' to be shot down, Modi asked voters to press the Lotus button on EVMs in the spirit of sending the Congress to the gallows! The Election Commission continues to turn a deaf ear to such open incitement to violence and other brazen violations of the code of conduct in the BJP's poll campaign. The BJP election campaign plans around the cricket world cup of course suffered a setback with the Indian team's shock defeat at the final after a string of ten successive victories through the league stage and the semi-final.

The politicisation of cricket has assumed an unprecedentedly ugly level in the Modi years. After letting Lalit Modi, the key accused in the BCCI IPL scam who was known as the super-chief minister in Rajasthan during the earlier tenure of Vasundhara Raje, flee the country, the BJP has ensconced Amit Shah's son Jay Shah at the helm of the BCCI and Anurag Thakur's elder brother Arun Singh Dhumal as the chairman of the IPL. The coterie virtually converted the recent cricket world cup where ten countries from the cricket world participated for nearly seven weeks into an India-centric, nay Ahmedabad-centric, spectacle. The India-Pakistan match and the final match were both played in Ahmedabad and the Pakistan team was subjected to loud communal and jingoistic sloganeering and heckling. Even in the final match, the entire show was designed in anticipation of an Indian victory with almost no courtesy or appreciation shown to the victorious Australian team and its players. If India wants to let the world pay some serious attention to its bid to host the 2036 Olympics, the cricket world cup has been a disastrous and shameful advertisement of India's sporting culture or utter lack of it. ■

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Now to Move from Reality Check to Real Transformation: Signs of Hope from Fighting Bihar

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The publication of Bihar's caste-based population figures and socio-economic survey report has come as a massive reality check not just for Bihar, but for much of North India as well. We now have a much clearer idea about the caste configuration of Bihar and also about the scale of poverty and unemployment that continues to persist despite the relentless rhetorical celebration of development in the state. We now know, for example, that despite the 'Modi guarantee' of universal housing by 2022, Bihar still has more than thirty percent households living in huts and non-pucca houses. The report should now lead to a reorientation of Bihar's development priorities, policies and plans; it also provides a template for the entire country, especially all backward regions.

The caste survey has revealed that the OBC/EBC population has all along been underestimated. When the SC/ST population is included, the 'bahujan samaj' or SC-ST-OBC sections account for nearly 85 percent of Bihari society. Reservation in government jobs has been the primary plank of social justice to address the issue of acute social inequality, but only 1.57% of the people have government jobs. Even with reservation, the proportion of EBC/SC/ST population with government jobs is way lower than the average (0.98, 1.13, 1.37 respectively) while the general category is better placed with 3.19% coverage which is double the overall ratio. Clearly a lot needs to be done to improve the efficacy of reservation as an instrument of social justice. Increasing the cap is certainly a first step and the Bihar government and Assembly have already taken that first step. Equally important is the issue of filling up of all vacancies, creation of more jobs and extension of reservation to the private sector. But we must remember that according to the survey private sector jobs in both organised and unorganised sectors cover only a little more than 3% population. So to reach the remaining 95% population, we have to look beyond reservation and focus on the neglected arena of land and agrarian reforms.

Data from Caste Census Conducted by Bihar Government

Caste Wise Data				
S. No.	Caste		Total Number	Percentage
1	Backward Castes		3,54,63,936	27.1286%
2	Extremely Backward Castes		4,70,80,514	36.0148%
3	Scheduled Caste (SC)		2,56,89,820	19.6518%
4	Scheduled Tribe (ST)		21,99,361	1.6824%
5	(1) General Category	2,01,09,207	2,02,91,679	15.5224%
	(2) Other Reported Castes	1,82,472		
Total			13,07,25,310	100%

Total Monthly Income of Family From All Sources			
S.No.	Income (Per Month)	Number of Families	Percentage
1	Rs 6000 or less	94,42,786	34.13%
2	More than Rs. 6000 & Upto Rs. 10,000	81,91,390	29.61%
3	More than Rs. 10,000 and Upto Rs. 20,000	49,97,142	18.06%
4	More than Rs. 20,000 and Upto Rs. 50,000	27,20,870	9.83%
5	More than Rs. 50,000	10,79,466	3.90%
6	Not Applicable (Information not provided)	12,37,276	4.47%
Total		2,76,68,930	100%

Caste Wise Data of Families Under Poverty				
S.No	Caste	Total Number of Families	Number of Families Under Poverty	
			Number	Percentage
1	General Category	43,28,282	10,85,913	25.09%
2	Backward Castes	74,73,529	24,77,970	33.16%
3	Extremely Backward Castes	98,84,904	33,19,509	33.58%
4	Scheduled Caste (SC)	54,72,024	23,49,111	42.93%
5	Scheduled Tribe (ST)	4,70,256	2,00,809	42.70%
6	Other Reported Castes	39,935	9,474	23.72%
Total		2,76,68,930	94,42,786	34.13%

Housing Data			
S. No.	Details	Number of Families	Percentage
1	Pucca House (2 or more than 2 rooms)	1,01,72,126	36.76%
2	Pucca House (1 room)	61,89,507	22.37%
3	Tin/ Tarpaulin Shed	73,44,361	26.54%
4	Shanty	38,99,096	14.09%
5	Homeless	63,840	0.24%
Total		2,76,68,930	100%

Employment Data			
S.No	Details	Number of Person	Percentage
1	Employment in Government Sector	20,49,370	1.57%
2	Private Employment: Organised Sector	15,97,680	1.22%
3	Private Employment: Unorganised Sector	27,97,039	2.14%
4	Self Employed	39,91,312	3.05%
5	Farmer	1,00,70,827	7.70%
6	Craftsman, Labourer Etc	2,18,65,634	16.73%
7	Begging	33,818	0.03%
8	Rag Picking	28,355	0.02%
9	Housewife, Student etc	8,82,91,275	67.54%
Total		13,07,25,310	100%

The survey presents an alarming picture of poverty in Bihar. Even taking a very low monthly household income of Rs 6,000 as the benchmark of poverty, the survey finds nearly ten million families trapped below that line of extreme poverty. In percentage terms that is 34.13 or every third household in Bihar. If the extreme poverty line is raised to 10,000 rupees a month, we have another 29.61% families. In other words, almost two out of every three households in Bihar have to make do with an overall income of less than 10,000 rupees a month. The incidence of this poverty is not caste-neutral, it is visibly more pronounced among OBC/EBC sections than the upper caste population, and much more so among SC/ST segments.

How does Bihar tackle this poverty? The impact of this poverty cannot be fully measured by lack of income alone. In a situation where the poor have very little resources with no land and often no house, at least not a house of one's own, and have to depend on the market for all services, with very little state support for even education and healthcare, low income which means eroded purchasing power invariably leads to more acute poverty. We should remember that the income here refers to combined earning from all available sources which includes income from agriculture, any

Facts from a 2014 CPI(ML) Survey on Bihar's Rural Reality

The CPIML conducted a survey under the campaign 'gaon ka sach, logon ka hak' (the rural reality and the state of people's rights) between July and October 2014 to get a better grasp of the prevailing socio-economic conditions and the administration of various welfare legislations and schemes. The sample chosen for this survey was predominantly from among the rural and urban poor. The data were collected in 23 districts from a total of 200,106 rural households spread over 1314 villages in 826 panchayats in 168 blocks and 6634 urban households spread over 45 wards of 9 towns on the basis of a detailed questionnaire.

More than 60 per cent of the rural families surveyed were absolutely landless and a little more than another 30 per cent had marginal land holdings of one acre or less. In caste terms, nearly 45 per cent families belonged to various dalit castes, another 25 per cent were from among extremely backward castes, and 15 per cent from other backward castes and a little more than 10 per cent were from the Muslim community.

Here are some major findings of that survey:

Landlessness and Deprivation

The biggest chunk of population in Bihar is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Of the 200,106 rural families surveyed, 60.74% were landless on the basis of agricultural land; i.e. these families do not own any land for farming. If the number of families owning up to 1 acre of farming land is added, then this percentage goes up to 92.2%. These families come under the direct ambit of land reforms, but the families benefiting from land reforms are a mere 5.58%. Of these beneficiary families, 24.9% have not yet got possession on the parcha lands.

This survey showed that 66% farmer families were sharecroppers and 56.31% sharecroppers in this survey paid arbitrarily fixed cash or crop rents. Animal husbandry is an important part of the income generated by a large portion of the agricultural population.

For families engaged in agriculture and allied sectors, easy access to affordable and adequate agricultural credit is a far cry. Merely 2.49% families covered in the survey had managed to access some agricultural credit.

Non-agricultural Rural Employment

Large sections of population of Bihar are seeking livelihood outside agriculture. Millions of non-agricultural labourers are working in construction and other unorganized sectors. The survey found only 40.52% to have got job cards whereas the MNREGA is designed to be universally inclusive for all rural households.

[Contd...]

other source of earning from either government or private jobs or self-employment and any assistance from the state. To raise the level of this abysmally low income, attention will obviously have to be paid to all these income-generating sources.

For example, MNREGA could be used to raise a household's monthly income if jobs become more regularly available and wages are increased from the current sub-minimum level. Midday meal workers get only 1650 rupees per month, almost all scheme workers get less than this below-poverty level remuneration - any increase in the remuneration of scheme workers and unorganised sector workers and enhanced pension for elderly people can surely help increase the combined household earning of the poor. Bihar government has made a welcome announcement of one-time financial assistance to all poor families, but the real issue is to assure sustainable increased income. And we must also remember that Bihar is still predominantly rural and agrarian. The need to make agriculture more viable, especially for the unrecognised and neglected share-croppers and land-leasing tenants, remains a core imperative for any vision of sustainable agrarian and economic development.

Another pressing concern for Bihar is the acute crisis of housing. The survey tells us that only a third of Bihar households have access to brick houses with at least two rooms. More than 40% households reside in huts or houses without pucca roofing. The unresolved housing question is inextricably linked to the land question with millions of households not having their own homestead land. Education remains another major area of concern and challenge. The literacy rate is now close to the 80% mark, but half of the people still do not complete school and the proportion of graduates is only a little above 6%.

Nine years ago, the CPI(ML) had conducted a sample survey to study the socio-economic conditions of the toiling people of Bihar. Between July and September 2014, our survey teams had covered 2,00,016 rural and 6,634 urban poor households. That survey had identified landlessness as a key feature and cause of rural poverty. More than 60% of the households surveyed had no land whatsoever while another 30% had less than one acre. Another feature of poverty that had come up through the survey was heavy indebtedness leading to a veritable debt trap. Even though the socio-economic survey done by the Bihar government does not cover these two crucial dimensions of poverty, it gives us an otherwise fairly comprehensive and analytical picture of chronic poverty that continues to retard Bihar's socio-economic advance.

The caste-based socio-economic survey and the subsequent announcement of increased reservation and financial assistance and the sizable recruitment of teachers indicate a welcome direction for Bihar. In a period of massive corporate loot, mounting inequality and social oppression and aggressive privatisation leading to unprecedented unemployment and job insecurity, these Bihar developments are surely hopeful signs. It is the sustained struggle and assertion of Bihar's poor that has brought about this reality check. Now that the survey has given us the latest X-ray report, the treatment for betterment must begin in real earnest and once again we need a powerful people's movement and mobilisation to take us forward. ■

27.23% of job card holders did not have their cards in their own possession, their cards were kept illegally by the concerned mukhiya or rozgar sewak. 64.38% of job card holding families had not got even a single day's work in the year of this survey. 15.21% families got 1-7 days' work and 11.08% families got 8-15 days' work.

Migration

The survey clearly revealed that MNREGA had failed to make any dent into the phenomenon of migration. Contrary to official claims of declining migration, the survey showed that members from 40.07% families had been forced to migrate for survival or remunerative livelihood.

Housing and Homestead Land

29.74% of rural poor families were deprived of ownership papers for their homestead land. 51.01% families had no more than bare one-room houses.

BPL Entitlement

Survey shows that 45.69% deserving families were outside the BPL list and hence deprived of all benefits meant for BPL families. Over 80% families in Bihar are meant to be covered under the Food Security Act but a good number of them are still deprived of it.

Education

The survey found that 16.16% of children did not cross the threshold of a school. Another disturbing aspect was violation of Right to Education reservations provision by private schools. Out of 27086 enrolments in private schools, only 28 students were admitted under RTE reservation, a shocking 0.1% of the total.

Debt Trap

73239 families holding negligible assets were indebted to private moneylenders and there was an average debt of Rs 34346 on them. Usury was found flourishing in the villages at interest rates ranging from 60% to 120%.

Social Exclusion:

Even today there are many temples in Bihar where entry is barred for dalits and mahadalits. The dominant sections have control over pasture lands and water bodies like ponds.

Disenfranchisement

Names of the poor were deleted even from voters' lists and they were not given voter ID cards. The survey found that about 23.09% adult members were not on the voters' list.

[The detailed survey report was published in Liberation, December 2014 issue.] ■

The Fight over the Working Day

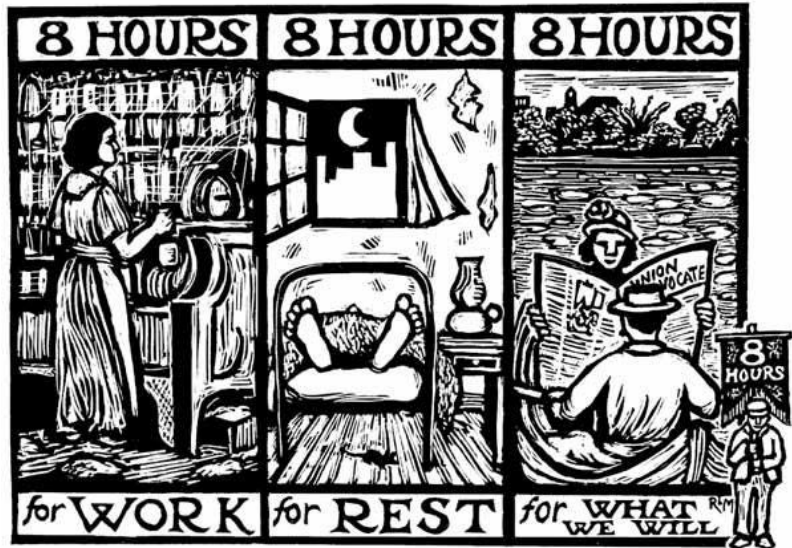
▲ CLIFTON D' ROZARIO

Co-founder of Infosys Narayana Murthy recently stated that in order to increase work productivity in the nation and increase India's competitiveness, young Indians should put in up to 70 hours a week of labor. Naturally, this comment has caused a stir. However, it is not surprising that business titans like Bhavish Aggarwal of Ola, Sajjan Jindal of Jindal Steel Works Group, and Chairman Emeritus AM Naik of L&T have publicly supported the proposal for a 70-hour work week, citing the nation's low productivity. Congress Leader Manish Tewari, jumped in, suggesting that if "India has to truly become a great power," then one or perhaps two generations must adopt a 70-hour work week "work ethic."

The regurgitating of the debate of the length of the working day highlights the capitalist ruling class's relentless effort to take away the eight-hour workday, one of the main victories of the decades-long working class struggles of the 19th century.

Unending conflict between capital and labour

Attacks on the working day's duration that have been revived (and renewed) show the capitalist class's never-ending quest to impose its rule and control over employees' time. Marx teaches us that absolute surplus value (exploitation) increases proportionally to the increase in working hours and days. Thus, if a worker produces output to the value of his wages in 4 hours, then the remaining 4 hours she expends her labour (in an 8 hour working day) constitute



surplus value for the capitalist, which increases as the working day is extended. This, however, cannot be limitless as workers have finite working capability, and overwork would result in the destruction of labour power. Yet Marx had warned that "...Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society. To the out-cry as to the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over-work, it answers: Ought these to trouble us since they increase our profits?". And there is always the "reserve army of labour", which can quickly replace a fallen worker.

Marx further argues that the lower the price of labour, the greater must be the quantity of labour, or the longer must be the working-day for the labourer to secure even a miserable average wage i.e. "the lowness of the price of labour acts here as a stimulus to the extension of the labour-time".

Thus, capital will seek to expand the

working day for as long as feasible. "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him", said Marx.

The battle over the working day

Whether or not Mr. Murthy's proposal is shocking, it is definitely an illustration of how business magnates covertly attempt to mask their greed for wealth by promoting virtue while citing duty, discipline, and patriotism. History, has shown, time and again, that the length of the working day is a product of the struggle between capital and labour, between the capitalist class and the working-class.

However much capital would like to increase the time spent by a citizen as a "worker"; however much capital tries to reduce human beings to

machines, it has to contend with the workers' need and desire for a larger social role, as a citizen, parent, lover, friend, intellectual, romantic among others. Because they are driven by a desire to maximize their profits, capitalists will do everything in their power to extract the maximum surplus labour from the workers, but their ability to do so is limited by the relative strength of the working class.

Struggles across the world since the 1850s brought out the eight-hour day as prominent concern of labor. The historic May Day struggles on this demand was preceded by the declaration of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions at its Pittsburgh Convention in 1884 that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886". Ofcourse, it was commonly asserted that the contemplated reform was not a complete solution to the problems faced by workers, but was definitely a step in the right direction – towards more leisure, better standard of living and better wages. Writing in the late 1900s, Samuel Gompers, a key trade unionist in the United States, declared, in regard to the movement for 8 hour working day, that in its "magnitude and grandeur . . . will, while benefitting us immediately, be written in golden letters of praise and reverence in time to come. We are making history."

Indeed, the glorious struggles of the working class compelled the declaration of the 8 hour working day as the norm, one of the basic labour entitlements. A slew of legislations were introduced in various countries mandating the 8-hour working day. The first International Labour Organization (ILO) Director Albert Thomas reported that, "during the years 1918-19 the eight hour day has, either by collective agreements or by law, become a reality in the majority of

industrial countries". The stage was set for the ILO's first International Labour Standard – the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No.1) .

India's legalised 8 hour working day came with the 1946 Amendment to the Factories Act of 1934 – a result of the Bill introduced by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar as Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Yet, now we have Mr. Narayana Murthy's proposal for a 70-hour week almost a century later, epitomising the relentless assaults carried out by the capitalist ruling class globally against this hard-earned right of the working class.

This attack has been two pronged. Firstly, de facto increase the number of working hours in the name of overtime or otherwise. Secondly, repeated efforts to dilute the law. This has picked up post the Modi government coming to power. During Covid various governments issued notifications relaxing the number of working hours from 8 to 12 hours – UP, HP, MP, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The Union Labour Ministry issued a communication dated 05.05.2020 to all State governments to do "labour reforms" including increasing daily working hours to 12 hours. Then came the Modi government's Labour Codes specifically the Code of Wages, 2019 which allows for the work day to be 12 hours including rest period and overtime. This has every potential of being misused by employers to make the workers work beyond the stipulated eight hours. These Labour Codes are currently on hold owing to the opposition from the Trade Unions. More recently the previous BJP government in Karnataka and the present DMK government in Tamil Nadu passed legislations amending the Factories Act, 1948, to allow for extending the working day up to 12 hours a day. These labour changes,

it is argued, is necessary if India is to compete with China and become the world's new manufacturing hub. Interestingly the previous BJP government in Karnataka frankly concedes it has been done at the behest of Foxconn to bring labour conditions in line with the competitive sweatshops operating in China, Vietnam and Taiwan. Even so, bowing to Trade Union pressure, the DMK government has kept the amendment on hold.

Working longer does not ensure increased productivity!

Inevitability, like Mr. Murthy has done, a correlation is sought to be drawn between longer working hours and productivity. Incidentally this argument was refuted as far back as during the First World War, when nations such as the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and others, who were eager to boost armaments industry production, commissioned studies which proved that the returns from overworked and exhausted laborers quickly decreased. Famously, in 1918, the Ford Motor Company acted on these findings and reducing the working day to 8 hours while increasing workers' wages, to find that production increased and profits doubled.

India already has one of the most hardworking workforce in the world. The International Labour Organization reports that, in 2023, Indians will have the longest average workweek among the world's ten largest economies. Only Qatar, Congo, Lesotho, Bhutan, Gambia, and the United Arab Emirates have higher average working hours than India, which comes in at number seven in the world. Productivity is low, though. Evidently, the productivity problem persists despite the already lengthy workweeks. Meanwhile, several

other countries like Norway, Finland, Switzerland, etc. which have lower working hours have achieved higher labour productivity.

It is clear that longer workdays will not increase labour productivity, which instead calls for significant capital infusion, technological advancements, more R&D, and better production techniques.

Leaving aside Murthy's false claim that extended working hours in Germany and Japan have resulted in their advancement, it is incredulous that he chooses to place the onerous burden of increasing productivity on the already exploited shoulders of the workers. It is a known fact that advanced countries have witnessed a continuous decline in working hours per worker during the past 150 years. According to reports, the two nations that Mr. Murthy specifically mentioned also exhibit the same pattern. In 1870, there were 68 hours of work per week in Germany; by 2017, that number had dropped to less than 28 hours, or roughly 59% less. In the meantime, the working week in Japan has decreased from 44 hours in 1961 to 35 hours in 2017.

Running workers to the ground

One of the serious impacts of long working hours is on the health of the workers. Several studies have linked long working shifts to negative impact on general health, including problems with cognitive anxiety, musculoskeletal disorders, sleep disturbance, and stress. There is also the associated fatigue created by excess working hours that "also spreads to other organs affecting the neuromuscular mechanism leading to reduced sensory perception, less attention, reducing the ability of discrimination, weakening the muscles, reducing the gland secretions, reducing the heartbeat or irregular heartbeat, and dilating

the blood vessels". There is enough evidence now that that longer working hours badly affect the occupational health of workers.

Moreover in a country like ours, where the workforce is already overworked and underpaid, and also undernourished, Mr. Narayana Murthy's proposal of a 70-hour working week is nothing but a recipe for disaster.

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In effect Mr. Murthy is asking for the State to effectively wash its hands of the workers, and turn them into machines for the capitalist class to exploit.

No need to race to the bottom

Working hours tend to decrease when incomes rise and people can afford more things that they enjoy, including more leisure. In fact, in more productive economies, workers work less, while in the less productive poorer economies, workers have to work more to compensate for lower productivity.

Enough data confirms the obvious – shorter working days and better pay improves productivity and even profits. As such, Mr. Murthy's 70-hour prescription comes at a time when there is a growing demand for reducing working hours to 6 hours per day.

Moreover, it is the obligation of the State to ensure that the workers enjoy such working conditions so to ensure their participation as citizens in a democracy.

In effect Mr. Murthy is asking for the State to effectively wash its hands of the workers, and turn them into machines for the capitalist class to exploit. What are the consequences of such a deregulatory policy? Dr. B. R. Ambedkar clarified that the argument that minimisation of state intervention would mean liberty, must be tempered by asking to whom and for whom is this liberty? He argued as follows: "Obviously this liberty is liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rate of wages. This must be so. It cannot be otherwise. For in an economic system employing armies of workers, producing goods en masse at regular intervals some one must make rules so that workers will work and the wheels of industry run on. If the state does not do it the private employer will. Life otherwise will become impossible. In other words, what is called liberty from the control of the state is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer."

Mr. Murthy, a capitalist, does what capitalists do – fight any legal protection that the workers enjoy so that they can be taken back 200 years to the Industrial Revolution era. What is required though is better wages, lesser working hours, job, wage and social security and socialisation of profits. Workers are not just workers – they are citizens with a role to play in a democracy (and not limited to voting once a few years), and a larger role to play in the revolution. ■

Mohan Bhagwat's 2023 Vijayadashami Address

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Every year the RSS observes Vijayadashami as its foundation day with an annual address by the Sangh supremo. Since 2014 with the rise of the Modi government the RSS has of course acquired an unprecedented level of prominence and power in India and the Vijayadashami address of Mohan Bhagwat is seen as a key text throwing light on the unfolding Sangh-BJP project. This Vijayadashami being the last one before the next Lok Sabha elections, this year's address by the Sangh supremo became an out and out election call with the Sangh amplifying the loud propaganda of the Modi government.

Bhagwat portrays India as an emerging global power, viswaguru in the Sangh-BJP parlance, which the world is looking to for leadership to solve today's multiple crises. From the G20 Delhi summit to the hundred-plus Indian medal tally in the recent Asian games, everything is showcased as a pointer in this direction. He also tells us that there is a foreign conspiracy to destabilise and damage India. Manipur to him is a burning example of such a foreign conspiracy. He however keeps mum about the Modi government's abject failure and complete abdication of responsibility in dousing the Manipur fire which has traumatised the people and shattered their lives.

Soon after the G20 summit Canada alleged Indian involvement in the assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar. While India has reacted by halting visa services with Canada, the western world has by and large sided with Canada and asked India to cooperate with the probe. In the ongoing

Israeli genocidal war on Gaza, Modi government has alienated India from the Arab world and global public opinion by siding with the US-Israel axis and refusing to support a UN resolution for an urgent humanitarian cease-fire. And now eight former veterans of the Indian Navy stand sentenced to death by Qatar on charges of spying for Israel. The propaganda manufactured around Narendra Modi's so-called global stature is getting punctured with every passing day.

Endorsing the Modi government's desperate vendetta against political opponents, independent media and progressive intelligentsia, Bhagwat links up voices of domestic dissent with alleged foreign conspiracy. We have already seen the Modi government's attack on NewsClick journalists in the name of Chinese funding which conflates journalism with terrorism and criminalises powerful people's movements like the farmers' movement as a conspiracy against the state. Bhagwat has added two new categories - cultural Marxists and woke elements - to the Modi government's lengthening list of internal enemies, accusing them of spreading intellectual confusion and social anarchy! This lie is being invented only to hide India's institutional and social reality where the RSS has planted its people in positions of control over every Indian institution and educational campus to stifle academic freedom and unleashed its thug squads to terrorise people and regiment their lives in every sphere of personal choice.

Marxists of course do not compartmentalise themselves as

economic, political or cultural Marxists. 'Cultural Marxism' has been a term used by the fascists and other far-right forces internationally since 1920s to target Marxists (it also had a strong antisemitic connotation in this period) and Bhagwat has just applied it in India to intensify the witchhunt against progressive academics and writers. Bhagwat accuses Cultural Marxists of having forgotten Marx since the 1920s. Does he then uphold the Marxist legacy till 1920 which will include most prominently the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848 and the victorious Russian Revolution of 1917? Perhaps the RSS is worried about the growing resistance it faces in the arena of culture where the forces of diversity, justice and democracy are rising against the Sangh's attempt to bulldoze its model of social regression and regimentation in the name of 'cultural nationalism'.

'Woke' or the awakened ones, the other term used by Bhagwat along with Cultural Marxists, is a more recent American rightwing usage against the Left and other progressive forces fighting for social justice and equality. Being awakened or woke has been used as a positive term in the protracted battle against racism in America, but the white supremacist supporters of Trump started using it as a pejorative term much like the Sangh-BJP distortion of the term 'secular' in India. As the quest for social justice gets stronger in India with increasing assertion for gender justice and equal rights for the LGBTQ community including Trans people, alarm bells are ringing among privileged and conservative sections. While Bhagwat sometimes tries to inject political pragmatism among these sections, for example by asking them to accept reservation for two hundred years, in this address he has sought to instigate the forces of social reaction by

targeting Cultural Marxists and Woke elements.

Bhagwat has also made an intriguing reference to Ambedkar in his address asking his audience to read Ambedkar's speeches at the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar's last speech on the eve of the adoption of the Constitution remains a most insightful warning on the challenges before India's Constitution. This is where he insists on taking liberty, equality and fraternity as an integrated whole and warns about the equality of vote losing all meaning in the face of mounting social and economic inequality. It is in this address that Ambedkar identifies bhakti in politics - hero worship and personality cult - as a sure way to degradation of democracy and eventual rise of dictatorship.

We do not yet know the reasons that prompted Bhagwat to invoke Ambedkar's last address at the Constituent Assembly. But we have not forgotten the fact that when the Constitution was being adopted, the RSS was busy rubbishing and rejecting it for not drawing on the inheritance of Manusmriti. Indeed, years before Ambedkar developed the blueprint of the Constitution of modern India, he had publicly burnt the Manusmriti as a code of slavery and injustice for India's oppressed. Let us also remember that a few weeks before his untimely demise, Ambedkar had exercised the constitutional right to choose one's religion by publicly embracing a new version of Buddhism along with half a million of his comrades. The occasion was the Vijaydashami of 1956, and the venue was Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS. Sangh's dream project of fascism will never be able to steamroll democracy in the India of Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar's dreams. ■

EB-ED Raj And the Growing Mockery of India's Electoral Democracy

EB (Electoral Bonds) and ED (Enforcement Directorate) have emerged as the two biggest sources of power for the Modi government. In the ongoing elections to Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the ED has actually become the star campaigner for the BJP. The ED has been in existence for a long time, but what the Modi government has done is to weaponise it to target its opponents. The electoral bonds have been invented and introduced by the Modi government to facilitate unbridled and anonymous corporate funding for the BJP. This has led to unprecedented use of money power in elections and gives the BJP a massive advantage over all its opponents. The two weapons, ED and EB, are however used in contrasting ways: every ED raid is executed as a spectacle while the EB is shrouded in secrecy.

The excessive use of the ED in the Modi era has made ED a household name. It has perhaps now even overtaken the CBI in the infamous list of weaponised central agencies. Legally mandated to monitor the enforcement of laws related to financial crime like the PMLA or the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002; FEMA or the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999; and FEOA or the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, ED is now mostly in the news for raiding the residences and offices of non-BJP leaders. The ED now has extraordinary powers to arrest under non-bailable sections and attach properties of the accused, and statements secured by it from the accused are treated as admissible evidence!

Despite such extraordinary powers and excessive use, the rate of actual progress in ED cases is however very low. Since 2005 the ED has registered nearly 6,000 cases, but charges have been filed in less than 20 percent of cases and only 25 cases have been concluded. The ED has been used in an absolutely selective and one-sided manner. Cases against several former opposition leaders have been dropped after they joined the BJP or crossed over to the NDA camp. From Himanta Biswa Sarma in Assam and Suwendu Adhikari in West Bengal to BS Yediyurappa in Karnataka and Narayan Rane, Bhavana Gawali, Yashwant and Yamini Jadhav to most recently Ajit Pawar and Chhagan Bhujbal in Maharashtra, the list of the BJP's ED-regulated political acquisitions is quite long and diverse.

No less long and diverse is the list of Opposition leaders being targeted and harassed by the ED. Several leaders are languishing in jail, quite a few others are being targeted now as the campaign of vendetta intensifies in the run-up to the crucial 2024 elections. Vindictive raids are going on in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh even as election dates have been announced and the poll code of conduct is in place. While the Sangh-BJP propaganda machinery uses the ED raids to malign the opposition and boost the Modi regime's anti-corruption claims, the anti-corruption bureau of the Rajasthan government has caught two ED officials red-handed taking bribes. In Chhattisgarh, the ED is busy waging a malicious campaign against the incumbent Congress CM by publicising whatever unverified information it has got from approvers even before carrying out any investigation. Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel has rightly demanded that vehicles used by central agencies like ED and CRPF should be searched thoroughly to rule out possibilities of misuse.

If ED is being used as a lethal frontline election weapon by the Modi regime, Electoral Bonds are the invisible means for accumulation of money power. The bonds have been introduced by amending an entire series of acts, from the Companies Act to the Representation of People Act, to guarantee absolute anonymity to the corporate donors. There is no restriction on who can donate (foreign powers and shell companies are now free to influence Indian elections) and how much (there is no limit to the amount a company can donate) - electoral bonds have become the easiest and surest way to render black money white with guaranteed secrecy and impunity. In the Supreme Court hearing over the petition challenging the constitutional validity of the EB scheme, the government even said that the electorate had no right to know the source and nature of a party's poll funding.

The Electoral Bond system is the most brazen example of the business-politics nexus and corporate power grab in India. The Reserve Bank of India and the Election Commission had both raised major objections to the scheme, expressing serious apprehension about its impact and implications. Yet, the Modi government overrode all objections and imposed this shadiest of schemes on India's electoral system. Centralisation of power in the hands of the Modi government, record concentration of wealth and profit-making opportunities in a few chosen corporate hands and in reciprocation, complete centralisation of political funds for the BJP through an absolutely opaque process - India's electoral democracy has been reeling under this three-pronged attack. The fascist project of the Sangh brigade is being executed on the basis of this brazen mockery of parliamentary democracy and manipulation of the electoral system. Some political observers have termed it electoral autocracy. The ED-EB combine works as the fulcrum of this system. The SC hearing has exposed the real purpose and nature of electoral bonds, it now remains to be seen if the SC will still let the bonds survive as a sacrosanct executive policy! Perhaps only an emphatic defeat of the Modi regime in the coming elections will overturn the EB-ED raj. Let the ongoing Assembly elections in five states pave the way in this direction. ■

India of My Dreams

▲ VINOD MISHRA

[Towards the 25th Memorial Day of Comrade Vinod Mishra - 18 December - we are reproducing this article, originally appeared in The Telegraph and from Liberation, January 1999.]

Other than politics which to me means the medium revealing the intricacies of society, I take a great deal of interest in cosmology where the universe unfolds itself in infinite space and time; where galaxies fast recede into the ever-disappearing frontiers of universe away from each other; where stars emerge, glow and explode to death; and where, quite apparently, motion is the mode of existence of matter.

Motion, i.e., change and transformation — always from a lower to a higher order — also, incidentally, forms the mode of existence of human society. No idea is absolute, no society is perfect. Whenever a society has been conceived as the embodiment of the absolute idea, shock waves emerging from deep within have shaken its very foundations. And then amidst the despair all around new dreams arise. Some dreams never come true as they are wild fantasies of the human mind, the 'mind-in-itself'. The few which are realized are essentially abstract creations of the human mind, the 'mind-for-itself'. Nonetheless, dreams, whether wild or plausible, have remained the source of human endeavour since perhaps the origin of humanity itself.



India of my dreams is essentially an integral India where a Pakistani Muslim won't have to procure a visa in search of the roots of his evolution; where, likewise, for an Indian the great Indus Valley Civilisation does not fall in a foreign country; and where a Bengali Hindu refugee will finally shed the bitter memories of Dacca and a Bangladeshi Muslim will not be hounded as a foreign national in India.

Sounds like BJP? But then the BJP has only thrived upon the great division of the country — between a Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India, albeit not so 'pure'. As BJP continues to stretch this division to extremes with all the disastrous consequences, great thinkers will surely arise in all the three countries and remould the public opinion for a brotherly reunion. And, be sure, that will be the doomsday for the forces like BJP.

In the India of my dreams, a Ganga and a Cauvery, and a Sindhu and a Brahmaputra, will freely flow into each other and the morning shall dawn to the jugalbandi of great musical tunes of India. Some statesman will then compile his notes into a "Re-Discovery of India".

India of my dreams shall rise in the community of nations as a country which the weakest of neighbours shall not fear and which the most powerful country in the world shall not be able to threaten or blackmail. This India will rank among the first five countries of the world in economic prowess as well as in Olympic tallies.

India of my dreams shall have a secular state which shall rest upon the principle of 'Sarva Dharma Varjite' rather than 'Sarva Dharma Sambhav'. While not interfering with an individual's faith, the state shall actively cultivate the scientific and rational world outlook.

Religion, as has rightly been said, is the expression of man's powerlessness

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*India of my dreams
is built upon the
fundamental
processes at work
within the Indian
society and for whose
realization many like
me are committed to
the last drop of their
blood.*

towards his environment. Its abolition therefore demands a thoroughgoing change in the material and spiritual conditions of life where man can stand up to acquire mastery over his environment. Whenever the conservative philosophical systems have burdened the people as deadweights, there have always come up in India great reformation movements. And thus I dream of a great resurgence of rational ideas where the human essence alienated in the form of God shall retrieve itself. This great reformation of human minds shall accompany a social revolution where the producers of wealth shall also be the masters of their produce.

In India of my dreams, glorification of pariahs as dalits will end and dalits will cease to be a category. Castes shall dissolve into classes with each of their members having individualized expression.

In India of my dreams, women shall constitute 50% of representative assemblies. Love marriages will be the rule and the divorce easier to obtain. Children will not know any misery and looking after them will be more the responsibility of the state than parents.

In India of my dreams, every town will have its cafeterias

where intellectuals shall have hot discussions over cups of cold coffee! There, some anguished souls can gaze through the plumes of rising smoke conjuring up images of their heart-throbs while many insatiable hearts can be captivated by the interpretations of varied works of art and literature. While no work of art and literature will be subjected to state censorship, smoking shall be strictly prohibited everywhere, except, of course, the coffee houses!

To return to the original theme, in India of my dreams, an Indian spaceship will wade through the deep space while Indian scientists and mathematicians will be working out equations integrating into a whole the fundamental forces of nature.

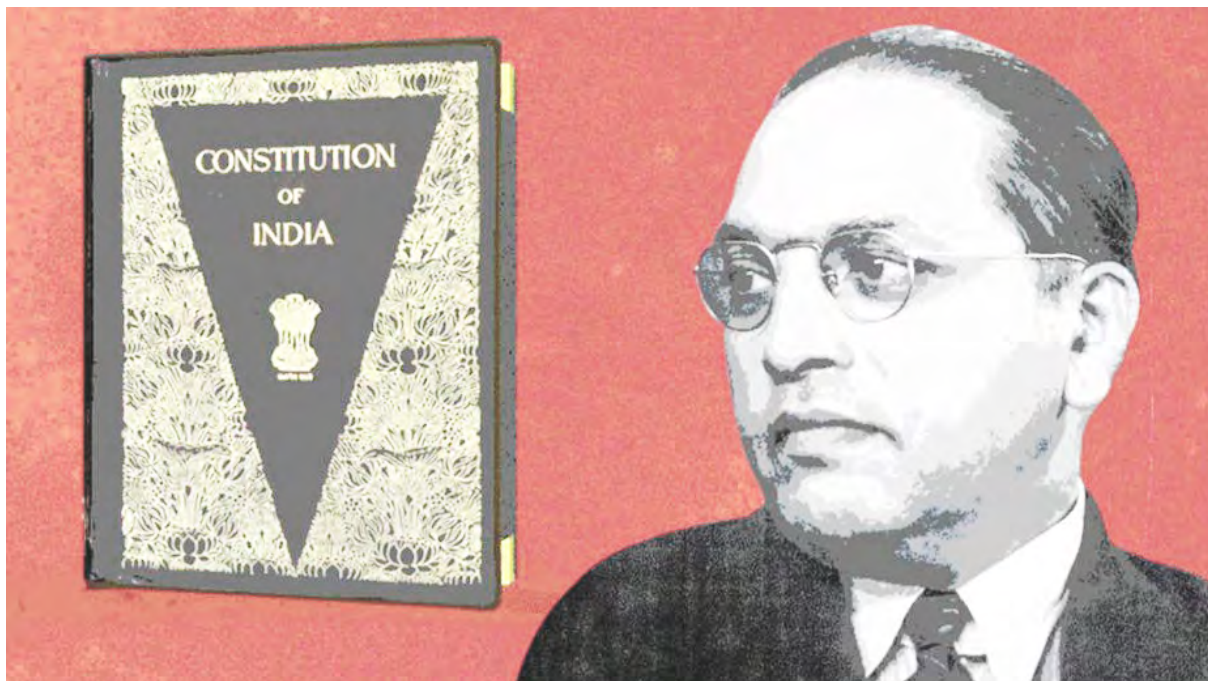
Finally, for me the mother of all dreams is a motherland where political liberty of each of its citizens will be valued most; where dissent will be considered legitimate and where Tiananmens of the system will be handled by the morally strong statesmen and unarmed forces of people's militia.

India of my dreams is built upon the fundamental processes at work within the Indian society and for whose realization many like me are committed to the last drop of their blood. ■

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Revisiting Ambedkar's Radical Democratic Legacy on the 74th Anniversary of the Adoption of Constitution of India



▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Democracy in India is facing a growing assault. “It is being killed by a 1000 cuts”, as Professor Tarunabh Khaitan who teaches Public Law in the London School of Economics said in a recent interview to journalist Karan Thapar. The Constitution of India, which the Drafting Committee Chairman Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had famously described as a top dressing of democracy on an undemocratic soil, is bearing the brunt of this attack. The RSS which had rejected the Constitution right at the time of its adoption as an un-Indian document has mounted a renewed offensive attacking the Constitution from all corners. Thought bubbles calling for a new Constitution for India after

seventy-five years of Independence are already afloat. The principal economic advisor of the PM, Bibek Deb Roy floated one such balloon through a newspaper article even as India was observing the seventy-fifth anniversary of independence.

Yet the Modi government has been busy invoking and manipulating the Constitution to claim constitutional legitimacy for all its conduct. It was this government which in 2015 started observing 26 November as the Constitution Day in memory of the adoption of the Constitution on 26 November 1949. It keeps reminding us that the epithets ‘socialist’ and ‘secular’ were inserted in the Preamble through

a subsequent amendment and continues to propagate and pit the original version against the current version. After shifting Parliament to the new building, it promptly named the earlier building as the Constitution Bhawan. And in his latest RSS foundation day address, Mohan Bhagwat asked his audience to read Ambedkar’s addresses at the Constituent Assembly. Indeed, now that the Constitution of India is facing this combination of a renewed attack reminiscent of the rightwing conservative reaction during its formative phase and early years and simultaneous attempts to appropriate and misrepresent it, it is instructive to revisit Ambedkar’s enunciation and explanation of the fundamental constitutional principles and perspective.

Apart from Ambedkar's historic address of 4 November 1948 while presenting the draft constitution before the Constituent Assembly and the one delivered a year later on 25 November 1949 at the time of adoption of the final text of the Constitution we should also revisit "States and Minorities", the memorandum that Ambedkar had prepared for submission to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. The latter gives us a blueprint of the kind of constitution that Ambedkar actually wanted and which informed his vision while discharging his role as chairman of the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar was pleasantly surprised to have been elected the chairman of the drafting committee and he shouldered that heavy responsibility by presenting the draft at the seventh session of the Constituent Assembly (4 November, 1948 – 8 January, 1949) and finalising it by the eleventh and concluding session (14–26 November, 1949).

In his 4 November, 1948 address presenting the draft constitution, Ambedkar discussed the special features of the Indian constitution and answered the criticisms then being levelled against it. He began with a discussion on the form of government preferred and prescribed in the draft – parliamentary democracy as opposed to a presidential system. Ambedkar argued that a democratic executive must satisfy two conditions – stability and responsibility, adding that "unfortunately it has not been possible to devise a system which can ensure both in equal degree." He then told us that the draft considered responsibility (accountability) more important than stability in the Indian context and hence the conscious preference for a parliamentary system. The executive in a parliamentary system, Ambedkar

emphasised, is subject to both daily and periodic accountability – daily accountability to Parliament and other institutions through parliamentary procedures and other norms of democratic functioning and periodic accountability to the people through elections. If an executive loses majority support between two elections, it has to quit office and face the people.

This defining feature of the Indian Constitution, this fundamental premise of Indian democracy as explained by Ambedkar in his address, is now being daily overturned through the relentless centralisation of power in the hands of the PMO and now through the move towards 'one nation, one election' which will effectively convert India's parliamentary democracy to a US-style presidential system. Ambedkar also discusses the specific features of Indian federalism. He calls India a dual polity with a flexible federal system where the idea is to combine federalism with certain unitary features like a single all-India citizenship, a single judiciary and an all-India civilian bureaucracy. The growing centralisation of power and the systematic undermining of the federal system, of the separation of powers and the system and spirit of daily accountability of the executive to Parliament and to the public mark the 1,000 cuts Professor Khaitan mentioned in his interview which are killing the Constitution.

Ambedkar then goes on to rebut the criticism about the alleged lack of 'originality' and 'Indianness' of the Constitution. Every written modern democratic constitution, he asserted, should reflect common or universal features and the efficacy of the Indian constitution should be assessed in terms of adapting those basic democratic features to the diversity and particularities of the Indian context. There were strong opinions that the Constitution

should uphold the democratic heritage of the ancient Indian polity and base itself on India's so-called self-sufficient village republics. Ambedkar refuses to romanticise the so-called 'village republics' and boldly declares that he is "glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit." He also responds to the allegation that the Constitution had borrowed heavily from the 1935 Government of India Act in matters of administrative details. While acknowledging the scope for future amendments and administrative evolution, he emphasised the role of developing an administration compatible with the Constitution and ensuring that the legislature could not pervert the administration and make it inconsistent with and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution. It is in this context that Ambedkar highlights the need to cultivate constitutional morality as the guiding spirit and reminds us so prophetically that democracy in India is a top-dressing on an essentially undemocratic Indian soil.

The inference that inevitably follows from Ambedkar's warning is the need to democratise the Indian soil, deepen and firmly uphold the spirit of constitutional morality in every sphere and not allow the legislature to ride roughshod over the system of administrative checks and balances. But today we are faced precisely with the danger of executive tyranny subjugating the institutional system of monitoring and accountability. Laws are being made and even judgements are being delivered in the name of satisfying an imaginary 'collective conscience' and 'majority opinion' in brazen violation of what Ambedkar considered the litmus test of 'constitutional morality'. In the same address Ambedkar underlined the importance of the rights and safeguards for minorities and

reminded the majority of the need to 'realize its duty not to discriminate against minorities'. Whether and how long the minorities need special rights and safeguards depends on when 'the majority loses the habit of discriminating against the minority'. For Ambedkar, stopping discrimination against the minority was the point of departure, but today the discourse has been turned on its head – it is now all about satisfying the majority that the minorities are not being 'appeased'. Instead of the reality of discrimination against the minorities, the focus has been shifted to the fiction of 'minority appeasement'. This is nothing but unmitigated majoritarianism going berserk, which is bent upon crushing the minorities in the society, targeting the opposition in the political arena and silencing every dissenting voice in the academic, media and the wider cultural world.

The eleven sessions of the Constituent Assembly consumed 165 days in all out of which the last 114 days were spent in considering and finalising the draft constitution. Considering the volume of the Constitution – it was eventually adopted with 395 Articles and eight schedules after considering no less than 2,473 amendments – the finalisation of the Constitution happened fairly quickly. Yet Ambedkar had to respond to the criticism of the drafting committee having taken too long in discharging its functions. He made it clear that he had joined the Constituent Assembly with 'no greater aspiration than to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes' and was pleasantly surprised to be eventually entrusted with the key responsibility of chairing the Drafting Committee to write the Constitution itself. Like his November 4, 1948 address explaining the main features of the Draft Constitution at the time of its placement, Ambedkar took the

opportunity to use his concluding address on the eve of the adoption of the Constitution to respond to major criticisms and explain some core principles guiding the constitution.

In his November 4, 1948 address Ambedkar had referred to the rightwing conservative and reactionary criticism. Without naming the Hindutva brigade's constant invocation of the Manusmriti he had addressed their charge of neglecting the framework of ancient India and defended the idea of taking the free individual as the basic unit of the constitutional republic. Early on in his public life Ambedkar had consigned the Manusmriti to flames in the course of the Mahad Satyagrah on December 25, 1927. There was no way he could use this code of caste oppression and patriarchal violence as the guiding spirit of the Constitution of modern India. In his concluding address of November 25, 1949 Ambedkar dealt with criticisms coming from other quarters including Communists and Socialists. Ambedkar said the communist criticism revolved around the class nature of parliamentary democracy while the Socialists advocated nationalisation or socialisation of private wealth without any compensation. It is instructive to note that Ambedkar did not reject the communist and socialist ideas per se, he only referred to the balance of forces within the Constituent Assembly to defend the Constitution as the opinion of the drafting committee and the constituent assembly.

It is instructive to read Ambedkar's exact response in full: 'I do not say that the principle of parliamentary democracy is the only ideal form of political democracy. I do not say that the principle of no acquisition of private property without compensation is so sacrosanct that there can be no departure from it. I do not say that Fundamental Rights can

never be absolute and the limitations set upon them can never be lifted. What I do say is that the principles embodied in the Constitution are the views of the present generation or if you think this to be an overstatement, I say they are the views of the members of the Constituent Assembly. Why blame the Drafting Committee for embodying them in the Constitution? I say why blame even the Members of the Constituent Assembly? Jefferson, the great American statesman who played so great a part in the making of the American constitution, has expressed some very weighty views which makers of Constitution, can never afford to ignore. In one place he has said: "We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of the majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country.""

This clearly means Ambedkar did not ideologically reject these debates but left these possibilities open for the political wisdom and choice of a future generation. Indeed, if we read the memorandum "States and Minorities" which Ambedkar had prepared on behalf of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, we get a clearer picture of Ambedkar's own political preferences. In this memorandum Ambedkar describes India as United States of India, and promises for all its citizens a set of fundamental rights with comprehensive judicial protection against executive tyranny, unequal treatment, discrimination and economic exploitation. It promised the minorities effective remedies against social and official tyranny and social boycott and provided scheduled castes with due safeguards to ensure proper representation in all spheres. The memorandum wants the state to organise the main spheres of economic life including

agriculture on socialist lines through comprehensive nationalisation and collectivisation, but it wants this to happen within the framework of parliamentary democracy. To lend stability to state socialism it wanted the Constitution to guarantee it in a way that every government would have to abide by it. This explicit combination of state socialism and parliamentary democracy could not be enshrined in the eventual text of the Constitution, but a closer look at the fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy clearly indicates such a direction.

We should also recall that the All India Scheduled Caste Federation was preceded by Ambedkar's experience with the Independent Labour Party. Formed in 1936, the ILP fought simultaneously against caste and capital. In 1937, ILP won 14 of the 17 seats it contested in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. This was when Ambedkar wrote his famous monograph on Annihilation of Caste, organised a 20,000 strong march of tenants from the Konkan region to Bombay with the support of the Congress Socialist Party and joined hands with the communists to organise Bombay textile workers against the Industrial Disputes Bill. From 1942 to 1946 Ambedkar also served as de facto Labour Minister in the Viceroy's Executive Council and pioneered the beginning of labour legislations in terms of an eight-hour working day and collective bargaining rights. Today when the government is pushing for indiscriminate privatisation and unbridled corporate power while rendering labour increasingly insecure and devoid of rights, it is important to revisit Ambedkar's radical legacy of socialist economics and fighting worker-peasant unity.

In this address Ambedkar beckons us not to be content with just 'political democracy' but to strive for 'social democracy'. Social democracy

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Today Ambedkar the radical democrat and champion of social equality would have found himself languishing in prison under UAPA in a fabricated Bhima-Koregaon type case. And yet the fascists also have the audacity to try and appropriate Ambedkar. Defenders of democracy and social justice will have to uphold the radical legacy of Ambedkar and turn it into a powerful weapon to defeat this fascist conspiracy. To use Ambedkar's own words, we must not be tardy in recognising the evils that lie across our path or weak in our initiative to remove them.

or democracy in society means recognition of liberty, equality and fraternity as core principles of life. Ambedkar tells us to look at liberty, equality and fraternity not as three separate items in a trinity, but as a union where one cannot be divorced from another. Divorcing one from the other defeats the very purpose of democracy, affirms Ambedkar. Without equality, Ambedkar warns us, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many, whereas equality without liberty, he argues, would kill individual initiative. And fraternity would ensure that liberty and equality will become a natural course of things and will not have to be enforced by a constable. But Ambedkar reminds us that the Indian social reality is far removed from this ideal state of affairs. With the adoption of the Constitution India entered a life of contradictions – while the Constitution will ensure the political or electoral equality of one person one vote, India remains mired in massive economic and social

inequality. If this contradiction is not resolved at the earliest, it will blow up the structure of political democracy, warned Ambedkar.

Ambedkar then goes on to tell us how there can be no fraternity in a caste-divided society. Caste is a system of graded inequality and as such it is an impediment to India becoming a nation. He tells us why the drafting committee chose the expression 'the people of India' over 'the Indian nation' – declaring caste-ridden India a nation would be 'cherishing a great delusion'. Ambedkar compares the Indian situation with the racial divide in America and tells us that caste marks an even greater obstacle to the development of real fraternity without which India could not possibly emerge as a cohesive nation. The anti-colonial struggle surely created the environment and laid the foundation, but the freedom movement remained predominantly about winning political independence and not gaining social equality. With the BJP trying to redefine Indian nationalism on an aggressive Hindu supremacist basis, the fault-lines have only widened in recent years. Here again we are reminded of another prophetic warning Ambedkar had issued in the early 1940s while discussing the Pakistan question: Hindu Raj will be the greatest calamity to befall on India and must be avoided at all costs. The Partition could not be avoided, but the Constitution ensured that India managed to avert that calamity despite the trauma of Partition by proclaiming a social compact based on comprehensive justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all citizens without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, language and culture.

This emphasis on complementing political democracy with social democracy by establishing liberty, equality and fraternity as principles of social life and on

achieving national unity through annihilation of caste has become all the more pertinent in the face of the Hindutva bulldozer of the Sangh-BJP establishment. The fraternity or solidarity that Ambedkar emphasised presumed liberty and equality as its inseparable companions and is therefore diametrically opposite to the 'samrasta' or 'harmony' that the RSS now advocates under the overarching umbrella of a regimented Hindu identity. For Ambedkar, national unity could not be achieved as a conglomeration of castes, he wanted liberty, equality and fraternity to prevail in society by annihilating the caste-based order of social slavery and injustice.

Ambedkar was keenly aware of the threats to India's fledgling constitutional democracy. He wanted the Constitution to be the supreme arbiter in governing independent India's political and social life, he wanted the people to stick to constitutional modes of protest and reject what he called the grammar of anarchy. The underlying assumption here was of course that the Constitution would be implemented by people who could be trusted with it. At the outset of his concluding address he had said, "however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. ... It is, therefore, futile to pass any judgment upon the Constitution without reference to the part which the people and their parties are likely to play." He therefore placed utmost reliance on the vigilance of the people, reminding them of John Stuart Mill's advice not "to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions". He knew that "in India,

Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world" and he had no doubt that "in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship".

For Ambedkar, the adoption of the Constitution marked the advent of responsible and accountable governance. The concluding remarks of his final address before the Constituent Assembly summed it up in the following words: "By independence, we have lost the excuse of blaming the British for anything going wrong. If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame except ourselves. There is great danger of things going wrong. Times are fast changing. People including our own are being moved by new ideologies. They are getting tired of Government by the people. They are prepared to have Governments for the people and are indifferent whether it is Government of the people and by the people. If we wish to preserve the Constitution in which we have sought to enshrine the principle of Government of the people, for the people and by the people, let us resolve not to be tardy in the recognition of the evils that lie across our path and which induce people to prefer Government for the people to Government by the people, nor to be weak in our initiative to remove them. That is the only way to serve the country. I know of no better." The ideology that threatens the Constitution in today's India is the good old fascist ideology which had been waiting in the wings for so long and is now desperate to dump and kill the very Constitution which allowed it to come to power.

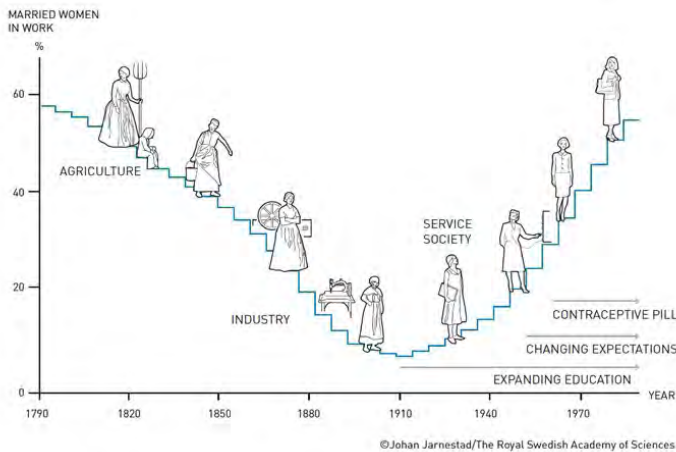
Ambedkar lived for only seven years after the adoption of the Constitution. It did not take long for Ambedkar to get into a debate with

the people who were entrusted with the responsibility of administering the Constitution. The Hindu Code Bill brought him in conflict with the conservative political majority, and unhappy with Nehru's pragmatic incremental approach deferring and diluting Ambedkar's radical reform agenda, he resigned from the cabinet and functioned as an independent Rajya Sabha MP from 1952 till his death on 6 December 1956. By September 2, 1953 we could see Ambedkar tell the Rajya Sabha, "Sir, my friends tell me that I have made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody. But whatever that may be, if our people want to carry on, they must not forget that there are majorities and there are minorities, and they simply cannot ignore the minorities by saying, 'Oh, no. To recognise you is to harm democracy.' I should say that the greatest harm will come by injuring the minorities." The anger of Ambedkar then was directed at the well-entrenched conservative and reactionary social elite of India. A few weeks before his demise, Ambedkar used his constitutional right to choose his religion to embrace Buddhism with hundreds of thousands of his followers.

Today Ambedkar the radical democrat and champion of social equality would have found himself languishing in prison under UAPA in a fabricated Bhima-Koregaon type case. And yet the fascists also have the audacity to try and appropriate Ambedkar. Defenders of democracy and social justice will have to uphold the radical legacy of Ambedkar and turn it into a powerful weapon to defeat this fascist conspiracy. To use Ambedkar's own words, we must not be tardy in recognising the evils that lie across our path or weak in our initiative to remove them. ■

A Nobel Way to Look at Capitalist Patriarchy

▲ KB



Professor Claudia Goldin of Harvard University won this year's Nobel Prize in Economics (formally called the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2023), for “having advanced our understanding of women’s labour market outcomes”. The prize throws light on a fundamental aspect of discrimination in capitalist labour markets which is often invisibilised – there are disparities in outcomes between men and women. While this is a fundamental theme of Marxist analysis starting from Engels to later Marxist Feminists, it has often been deliberately ignored or underplayed by votaries of capitalism. In that sense, the choice of this year’s prize is surprising because Nobel prizes apart from bringing fame to the winner also puts a spotlight on the research theme. Goldin’s long term research work actually uncovers the invisibilisation of differential gendered outcomes by using evidence (most specifically relating to the United States) to show that labour market outcomes are different for women and that there exists no linear relation between economic growth/

development and women’s labour force participation.

Her work fits the standard stage-ist theories of capitalist development but brings out the differential impacts on women by theorising a U shaped relationship between economic growth and women’s labour force participation. Simply put, at lower level of economic growth (typically called underdevelopment) women’s participation is higher in the labour force and as economic growth picks up it reduces women’s participation in the labour force. In the typical development literature, the shift is sectoral, i.e. from agriculture to industry. So women are largely employed in agriculture when there is low levels of development and when economic growth entails a shift to manufacturing and industrial jobs their participation is found to be lower. In economics this is termed the income effect, i.e. when the household or family income increases there is a withdrawal of women from the labour force.

Political economic analysis posits this as the forced sexual division of labour or what Maria Mies had termed

“housewifisation”. Silvia Federici analysed the role of the witch hunts in early stages of capitalism, which were used to subjugate and force women to withdraw from the labour force and become imprisoned inside the households. This violent history of capitalism, the institution of private property rights and the primacy of the nuclear family could be expected to lead to such differential gender outcomes over time. Goldin’s work uses innovative techniques to bring to light this evidence of differential labour market outcomes, especially since US labour force data mostly collected data on men but falls short of linking it to the broader processes of capitalist accumulation.

The other interesting insight from Goldin’s work is that when economic growth increases further and there is a sectoral shift to services from industry, women’s participation again increases in white-collared jobs. But there is a catch – when service sector starts expanding, especially in finance and corporate jobs, then men find more employment in these kind of jobs. These jobs are what Goldin terms “greedy jobs” and they typically involve irregular hours of work and extremely flexible work schedules and hence higher pays. These kind of jobs are typically cornered by men as there is a disproportional burden of care work shouldered by women and they do not get access to these jobs. This again shows that women are forced to withdraw from the workforce even in white-collar jobs because of household duties especially care work. Again “greedy jobs” read in a political economic context shines light on a very important aspect of capitalist production which is the role of reproductive labour.

Reproductive labour in fact is the source of capitalist accumulation and keeps up the process of production. However care work is often unpaid and this is the gendered division of labour and contemporary capitalism.

Goldin's work throws light on the statistical evidences, but her analyses shies away from pinning these on capitalist accumulation. What one can only hope is that the Noble prize in 2023 will spur interest in research into these very processes of capitalist accumulation that keep women shackled. It also brings to light one of the crucial aspects that capitalism does not want us to see, which is that capitalism is not blind to identities. Goldin's work most importantly points to the fact that capitalism uses identities and differences to expand profit shares and power. From wage gaps in the same job, to disallowing women to rise within an organization of sector which is called "glass ceilings", or the keeping down of women in certain jobs otherwise called "sticky floors" – these are regular and recurring features of contemporary capitalism. Most importantly, that the labour market under capitalism actually discriminates and the statistical data enterprise invisibilises this by refusing to count women's contribution in the economy since it is mostly unpaid.

What it hides however is the forced nature of this transaction in which women are forced to accept jobs which are unpaid or have to undertake work which is expanding on their reproductive capacities like care work and domestic work, i.e. household work most of which is unpaid. So Mr. Breadwinner actually does not exist without Mrs. Housewife. The horrific witch hunts of the early stages of capitalism in fact point to the fact that primitive accumulation actually dispossesses women from participating in the labour force needs to be highlighted even further. Additionally, the institution of private property rights and the social construction of the nuclear family was designed to keep women in such a situation.

That this sexual division of labour is not natural and actually a social construct which is necessary for capitalist accumulation needs to be given far more attention and this will hopefully open up new vistas of research and give new impetus to movements which want to bring about an alternative world. After all shackling half the workforce to accommodation techniques of patriarchy and capitalism will not lead to a better world and one can only hope that this year's Noble prize keeps alive the dream of liberation. After all, women have nothing to lose but their chains. ■

'Voh subah kabhi toh aayegi'

▲ SOMENATH GUHA

[A Review of Sudha Bharadwaj's book 'From Phansi Yard: My Year with the Women of Yerawada' (Juggernaut Publication, 2023)]

'So Madam, what exactly is your case?', asked the bewildered police constable sitting cozily in the room of the person who was under house arrest. After all it's very unusual that the person you and your colleagues from the local thana are watching over accommodates you in her spare bed room. One begins to wonder how such an amicable person could be hounded by the law! But then Sudha Bharadwaj is no ordinary person. The very fact that the respected social worker, trade-union karyakarta, human rights activist, people's lawyer is most comfortable when she is among the people, made her a suspect in the eyes of the law. It was only natural that this kind of a person would realize from the very beginning of her imprisonment that it was only by watching, learning and trying to understand the numerous women around her that she would be able to cope with her incarceration.

She was a high-security prisoner, locked up in the Phansi Yard of the impregnable Yerawada jail in Pune almost for the entire day with barely any opportunity to interact with the other prisoners. But that didn't deter her. She found out ingenious ways to talk to and learn about the other women, be it in the lock-up, mulakat room, or in the van on the way to the court. In this way she documented the lives of seventy-six women, the many heartbreaks, betrayals they faced, their many loves that turned sour, the dear ones who at some point deserted them. Her portraits of these women were by no means complete, for she only had the opportunity to view some fragments of their lives. Whatever she came to know she jotted down meticulously and gradually the book 'From Phansi Yard' took shape.

What she saw in the prison didn't as such shock her. Having been a lawyer to the downtrodden of Chhattisgarh she was already aware of the various prejudices that plagued the judicial system. She was also aware of the pitiable conditions under which people lived in the jails of states like Odisha and Chhattisgarh. But viewing a system from the outside and becoming a part of it is entirely different. When she herself was incarcerated, she began to realize the sheer enormity and the depth of the problem. Various aspects of the prisoners' lives simply astounded her. She began to understand first-hand the crippling effect of patriarchy on the inmates' lives, the temporary relief that religion and festivals brought, the distorted ways in which laws are implemented.

If one were to choose one single aspect that most shocked her, it was the all-encompassing effect of patriarchy on the lives of these women. International Women's Day is celebrated with much fanfare in the jail. But there is no discussion on patriarchy or the many struggles women have waged to strive for equality and dignity. There are only cultural activities, mostly of the very crass type. The rehearsals and the actual performance provide some relief for the prisoners. But sometimes the message rendered by these activities is deplorable. For instance the

message of a play seems to be saying, 'all that we suffer is because of the sins of our past lives. And if you are a woman, you must have been a very oppressive man in an earlier life.'

She relates incident after incident in which women martyr themselves to save the men in the family. So many women are willing to sacrifice themselves for their husbands, sons, boy-friends or brothers. There is the instance of an elderly bageechewali (who works in the garden for a pittance) whose daughter-in-law died in a fire. The author writes that maybe she was a nagging, harassing mother-in-law but the fact is she and her son were not at home when the incident happened. And even the Bahu didn't name her Saas in her dying declaration but the son, to save himself, blamed his mother for the crime. He was acquitted but her mother is rotting in prison! She narrates another incident of a woman who had an affair with a married man. When the wife was murdered, she, the husband and his two friends were arrested. These three men conspired to put the entire blame for the murder on the woman. When she was informed about it she was nonchalant and repeatedly murmured, 'but I love him!' Reflecting on the impacts of patriarchy, the author also describes the Maratha girl who so endearingly describes her relationship with a Tamil boy and the way they had eloped and married. The author couldn't believe it when she came to know that the same bubbly young woman had abetted the rape of the ex-girlfriend of her brother for having cheated him of a few lakhs of rupees. How could such a free-spirited woman abet the rape of another, she wondered.

Being free of the clutches of men, women can openly air their opinions in prison. They speak out against the oppression at home. It is revealing when someone exclaims: 'We are very blessed here. Just think – not having to work, only washing one's own clothes and vessels. No husband to order us

around. No mother-in-law to nag us if we nap in the afternoon. No stream of guests to feed and serve endless cups of tea to....' Family life is so patriarchal that even prison is preferable for many women!

Fights are a way of life in jail. Fights occur every day on the flimsiest of issues. The prisoners are rarely at fault though. The jail is overcrowded; its capacity is 129 but the total number of inmates fluctuates between 250 to 300. So there is a shortage of facilities, and lines for everything --- 'to piss, to shit, to get food, to cut your nails....' It's a wonder that more terrible incidents do not occur every day. In this context one remembers Justice Madan Lokur's comments after the death of Father Stan Swamy. He had said that conditions in Indian jails are abominable due to three factors. Jails are overpopulated, almost bursting at the seams; the surroundings are very unhygienic and filthy, and thirdly the paucity of toilets leads to choking and utter uncleanness. Significantly he had said that these conditions amounted to 'soft torture' of the prisoners.

On the other hand there is friendship as well, but any intimacy is risky when it develops into solidarity. You cannot stand up for your friend. The moment one does that, there is every possibility that she will be banished to a different barrack. A large number of women are implicated in cases of violence. If one delves a bit deeper then one will find that the woman herself had been a victim of domestic violence for years. She had been so tortured day in and day out that after a certain period her patience snaps and she strikes back. Our judicial system doesn't take into account this persistent violence she has suffered but punishes her for her retaliation. Indian criminal law also has other serious loopholes which the author highlights. Firstly it is often found that entire families are picked up on the death of a daughter-in-law. In one instance a girl who had

been married into the family for only fifteen days was also incarcerated. How could such a new entrant in the family be a part of the conspiracy, the author wonders. Secondly, while the law was amended to counter domestic violence, it is often found that the women of the 'offender' family are also jailed though there is scant evidence against them. Thirdly, patriarchy is so embedded in the system that there is absolute apathy and indifference to the numerous complaints of beatings and torture. Only when there is a death of the daughter-in-law, or of someone else due to her retaliation, does the system begin to stir.

The author says that the only culture allowed in jail is religion. Indeed jail life is more syncretic than outside life. There is hardly any distinction made between the three main religions. The logic is, what's the harm in worshipping a god if he helps me in getting released. As a result many non-Muslims observe roja, many non-vegetarians look forward eagerly to the chicken meal during Id. Christianity is also very popular. During Christmas inmates are allowed to purchase cakes baked in the bakery. Christian organizations often come to hold prayers and sing carols. Inmates look forward to their visits because these organizations distribute warm clothing, cakes and soaps for the children. Diwali and Ganesh Chaturthi are also celebrated with much fanfare. One is allowed to purchase laddoos and other sweets during these festivals. Except religion no other collective activity is allowed in the jail. Any kind of togetherness or efforts at organization is swiftly scuttled. Looking back the author wonders if we have regressed as a nation. During the British period stalwarts like Gandhi, Nehru, Lokmanya Tilak were imprisoned here. They held political meetings inside the jail premises but now in independent India one cannot even think of it. What's more now political 'crime' is considered more heinous

than general crime. Political cases are dealt with most sternness but all types of privileges may be allowed to the regular prisoners.

Being a lawyer, one of Sudha Bharadwaj's most frustrating experiences was to find many women not being able to get release even after getting bail. Either they are unable to pay or unable to provide sureties. Usually it is difficult to get a surety, who has to be from the same district and possess property. Most inmates are poor and in many cases their families have deserted them. They work in the jail but the wages they get are very low. With that meager amount they are unable to procure bail, leave alone starting a new life after release. But the author's greatest disappointment was to find that many women hardly get proper legal help. Their families cannot afford the fees to engage proper lawyers. So in such cases legal counsel is provided by the Legal Services Authority. But the author finds that such lawyers are not accountable to the prisoner. The lawyer doesn't know anything about her case, even her next court date, the charges against her etc. These lawyers, themselves poorly paid, do not consider it their duty to keep the prisoner informed.

Reading the above account it would be wrong to conclude that a prisoner with UAPA hanging over her head passes a comfortable time in jail documenting the lives and experiences of her co-prisoners. We have no idea about the ordeal of passing long hours in an isolated single cell. Inevitably one becomes overly anxious. All the health problems seem to become more amplified. Patches on the plaster of the stone walls evolve into many shapes and become eerie faces or animals. Sleep eludes her and late into the night she writes. A favourite kitten snuggles up to sleep next to her. Perhaps then the author remembers the searching question by that lady constable, 'so madam, what exactly is your case?' Having spent almost a year in prison she isn't too sure of the answer still now. In fact she isn't much worried about that. When she was transferred to Byculga jail, on someone's request she sang some lines composed by Sahir Ludhianvi, the poet: 'Voh subah kabhi toh aayegi.' She is convinced that some day that morning will dawn. When she came to the lines, 'Jailon ke bina is duniya ki, sarkar chalayi jayegi', not a single prisoner's eyes around her were dry. ■

The politics of Australia's Failed Constitutional Referendum for First Nations Recognition

▲ PETER BOYLE

[On October 14, 2023, a constitutional referendum was carried out across Australia on the following proposal: "To alter the Constitution to recognize the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice [a representative body]". The proposal was rejected. Comrade Peter Boyle, a member of the Socialist Alliance national executive and has been an activist for First Nations rights since the early 1970s explains what the referendum meant for the First Nations people of Australia and why it failed to materialise]

Most First Nations people in Australia (who comprise 3% of the population) would have felt the result of the October 14 constitutional referendum as a slap in the face. An extremely modest proposal for token federal constitutional recognition and a First Nations advisory body was voted down in every state and territory, except the Australian Capital Territory. However, nearly all previous constitutional referendums have failed and the result of this referendum was predicted by all the polls in the lead-up to this referendum. So the result was not a surprise.

The polls also showed that the Yes campaign started up with close to 60% of the vote, but steadily fell to less than 40%, demonstrating that the Yes side lost ground over the course of the campaign.

The conservative No campaign played to fear, ignorance and entrenched racism from the start. The steady decline of support for Yes, despite a multi-million dollar campaign from many of the largest corporations, cannot be entirely explained by the conservative No campaign, racist and dishonest as it was.

The Yes campaign was initiated and designed by conservative First



Invasion Day rally in Adelaide, South Australia. JORDAN ELLIS

Nations “leaders” to be minimalist and conservative in the hope of getting the support of the major capitalist parties of government, which it failed to get. Consequently, its arguments were contradictory and its promises did not match its minimalist proposals.

It proposed token federal constitutional recognition (already inserted into every state constitution over the last few years) and the establishment of a First Nation’s advisory body which was somehow supposed to close the yawning gap on income, health, employment and other social conditions between First Nations communities and the rest of the population.

The First Nations average life expectancy is 9 years shorter for males and 8 years for females, unemployment is more than twice as high, average indigenous household incomes are more than 20% lower and First Nations people are 17.3 times more likely to be arrested than non-Indigenous people. The over-representation of First Nations people in prisons flows on to higher rates of indigenous deaths in police and prison custody.

Clearly it would take much more than a First Nations advisory body, which governments could still ignore, to close this gap.

On the other hand, many of the most militant First Nations activists argued for a progressive No vote, based on demands for sovereignty, truth telling, treaties and rights-based measures to close the gap between First Nations communities and the rest of the population. These militants have mobilised tens of thousands of mostly younger people in numerous and growing demonstrations against Black deaths in custody and to recognise January 26 (the official “Australia Day” commemorating British colonisation in 1788) as Invasion Day.

The militants argued that a new First Nations advisory body, bureaucratically dominated by self-appointed conservative First Nations “leaders”, could be used to demobilise grassroots struggles for real First Nations rights.

Meanwhile, the Yes campaign was sponsored and funded by some of the biggest corporations, including the biggest mining companies (including Rio Tinto, which continues to destroy indigenous heritage sites), the biggest banks, the telecommunications companies and the retail oligopolies.

Revealingly, Noel Pearson, a leader of the Yes campaign, told the elite King’s School in Sydney, just before referendum day: “Frankly, the voice is a proposal so pathetically understated that I’m amazed most Indigenous people are settling for it. After all, I helped design it as something so modest that no reasonable non-Indigenous Australian could reject it. More fool me.”

Pearson admitted that he had devised the proposal in discussion with conservative former Liberal prime minister John Howard and spent all his energy trying to win the support of conservatives.

Until recently, Pearson was the darling of the right. Pearson became famous for attacking the left for allegedly “inculcating a sense of victimhood” in First Nations people and making them dependent on welfare. Not surprisingly, he was feted and given platforms and funds by the right and their media empires. Another conservative leader of the Yes campaign was Marcia Langton, who has continued to disgrace herself even after October 14 by attacking militant First Nations activists for supporting the Palestinian people amidst Israel’s latest genocidal war on Gaza.

First Nations people in Australia are

right to feel like they have been kicked around like a political football by the major parties and the corporate interests they loyally serve.

Liberal leader Peter Dutton’s naked appeal to racism was despicable, but Labor’s decision to proceed with a campaign that was tailored to succeeding only with bipartisan support deserves deeper scrutiny.

Internal Labor party polling must have shown that the referendum would fail, yet Labor persisted with it, ostensibly as costly “proof” that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese “keeps his election promises”.

Albanese also promised to implement the Statement From The Heart agenda in full; we will see if his government now proceeds with Treaty and Truth-telling.

However, his government does not deserve the confidence of First Nations people because, even as it was promising to close the gap, his own ministers were supporting mining company interests against the objections of local First Nations communities.

During the Voice campaign, the Queensland Labor government legalised the incarceration of (mainly Indigenous) youth in adult lock-ups and the Western Australian Labor government back-flipped on Indigenous heritage protection laws it made after Rio Tinto legally destroyed the 46,000-year-old Juukan Gorge rock shelters.

Recognising that most of the people supporting the Yes campaign were motivated by solidarity with First Nations people, the Socialist Alliance and other socialist groups took a critical Yes position in the referendum, while sharing and voicing the skepticism by the militants in the progressive No camp about what an unlikely Yes win could achieve.

After October 14, the socialist left

acknowledged the sadness and anger in First Nations communities which in large majority had voted Yes.

Independent First Nations Senator Lidia Thorpe - a prominent progressive No campaigner - said after the referendum, the movement needs to look forward.

“To all the grassroots mob, activists, and allies who have built up networks, Yes or No, in the name of advancing the rights of First Peoples: We must look beyond the division that the referendum has caused and come together to demand the justice necessary to rebuild, and nurture the strength and power of our communities.

“Do not let this be the last time you engage with our struggle. Pour your time, energy and passion into understanding our history and Lore, amplifying our voices and standing with our grassroots communities.

“We must continue to pressure the federal government to begin Treaty-making, implement the [United Nations] Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people and implement in full the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Bringing Them Home report that have been ignored for decades.”

The referendum results had a silver lining: they confirmed significant minority support for the ongoing struggle for First Nations rights especially among younger people.

Conservative ideas dominate most of the time under capitalism, because the ruling class has ample means to keep people depoliticised, confused and divided.

However, minorities can swiftly turn into majorities, especially if they are on the right side of history.

“Don’t agonise, organise!” should be our catch cry. ■

In our thousands, In our millions, We are all Palestinians!

*A report from Britain on the movement
against the Gaza genocide*

▲ KALPANA WILSON

Since Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza began with the full support and active collusion of the US, the UK and other western powers, these and other countries across the world have seen the growth of a powerful movement against the war and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. The scale of protest has been unprecedented since the massive protests against the war on Iraq in 2003 and in many ways surpasses them in scope, breadth as well as the depth of political engagement and growing anti-imperialist consciousness. People continue to pour onto the streets in ever larger numbers in the face of repressive state responses and an entrenched pro-Israel dominant narrative which has long misrepresented and weaponized the notion of antisemitism to suppress all criticism of the Israeli state.

In Britain, despite the pro-Israel bias of the mainstream media, in which Palestinian voices and those of their allies are harassed and sought to be silenced with bullying and dehumanising demands to ‘condemn Hamas’ before they are allowed to speak of the ethnic cleansing underway in Palestine, ordinary people are more than ever before seeing a genocide happening in real time before their eyes, through the direct reports of Gazan journalists which are accessible on social media and also broadcast on more critical channels like Al Jazeera. Further, the bankruptcy of the political leadership has been starkly visible with not only Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the ruling Conservative Party but Labour opposition leader Keir Starmer and those around him defending Israel’s war crimes and refusing to even call for a ceasefire, fuelling anguish and rage among many who are seeing the death toll rising daily as hospitals, schools, and refugee camps are relentlessly bombarded and even those who have left the North of Gaza following Israeli instructions to flee are bombed in their new places of refuge in the South.

The Palestine solidarity movement in Britain is currently taking several forms. Since 14th October, almost every Saturday has seen national demonstrations which have progressively grown in size with 11 November seeing almost a million people taking to the streets to demand a ceasefire. These marches were called by a coalition of organisations, led by the long-established Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Stop the War Coalition formed in 2001, Friends of Al-Aqsa, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and others. At the same time, they were attended by a much broader range of people including many first time protestors, many old and many more very young, from diverse backgrounds. There is a massive presence of young people on these protests, and particularly young people of colour - including but not limited to the many from various Muslim communities. While there are a range of positions and slogans, there is a definite anti-imperialist consciousness which recognises Israel as a settler colonial, Apartheid state and the struggle for a free Palestine

as inseparable from, and essential to, those waged in Britain against racism and capitalism. In this context, a resurgent anticolonial politics among communities of colour, especially the youth, in the belly of the beast of imperialism, is increasingly visible.

Protestors have defied the (recently dismissed) far-right Home Secretary Suella Braverman's attempts to ban the Palestinian flag and the iconic chant 'From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free!' by misrepresenting both as antisemitic. In fact, ahead of the 11 November march, Braverman ended up even alienating the notoriously racist and misogynistic Metropolitan Police, when she incredibly accused them of being biased in favour of pro-Palestinian and Black Lives Matter protestors. This was after the police pointed out that they would be legally and practically unable to enforce the ban she had called for on a march of up to a million people on Armistice Day – when there is an official ceremony at the Cenotaph war memorial. Ultimately the demonstration did not pass the Cenotaph or coincide with the ceremony, instead marching to the US Embassy, and fascist thugs responding to Braverman's calls to defend the Cenotaph ended up in their own brawl with the police guarding it.

In between these weekly marches, there have been a wide range of other protest actions taking place almost continually. Mass occupations of major railway stations during rush hour have often been led by Jewish organisations and activists. Jewish anti-Zionist activists, many of whom have long been at the forefront of analysing and exposing Israel and of Palestine solidarity work, facing extensive harassment from Israel's supporters, have effectively challenged the dominant narrative around antisemitism. In fact as they point out, the British state's narrative (adopted from Israel) which equates Jews with Zionism, is itself antisemitic, as is the relentless weaponisation of the Holocaust to justify support for Israeli policy. Many Jewish activists engaged in solidarity work with Palestine also invoke a Jewish left/communist tradition which always rejected the notion of a Jewish homeland in Israel, rather fighting for the right to equal citizenship in Europe.

There have also been numerous local protest in towns and cities across Britain and different areas of London. Most recently after the parliamentary vote on a motion calling for a ceasefire, in which Labour leader Keir Starmer threatened front bench MPs who voted in favour with dismissal, many Labour MPs who failed to vote for a Ceasefire found themselves being held to account by vocal demonstrations in their constituencies, particularly those with significant numbers of Muslim voters. Notably many of these involved school pupils walking out of their schools en masse to join the marches. These students highlighted

the fact that they were banned from discussing Palestine in school, or even from expressing solidarity by drawing Palestinian flags on their hands, and could be excluded from school or even reported to the police under the notorious 'Prevent' anti-radicalisation programme for doing these things. They pointed out the contrast with the government's treatment of the war in Ukraine where school pupils were asked to come to school wearing the colours of the Ukrainian flag!

Another significant form of solidarity has been direct action targeting Israeli-owned factories and those supplying Israel, in which activists block entrances, chain or lock themselves to buildings, occupy rooftops, prevent the transport of goods and other similar disruptive strategies. In particular in Britain the targeting of one of the biggest Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems, (which supplies drones which are also bought from Israel by India and used in Kashmir) has been going on for several years, succeeding in forcing one factory in Oldham to shut down and regularly disrupting the operation of another in Leicester. This campaign has been further stepped up against the backdrop of the current genocidal war in Gaza, and has also expanded to mass blockades by trade unions and others, while elsewhere in Europe, for example in Barcelona, dock workers have refused to handle shipments of arms to Israel responding to calls from Palestinian trade unions. All of these forms of protest and solidarity can only be expected to further grow and expand in the coming days. ■



@Wiktor Szymanowicz

Palestine Solidarity Movement in the US

▲ SURYA AND TAMARAI

Support for the people of Palestine has grown substantially amongst the US population in the recent past. Historically, this has not been the case. Everything changed after the October 2023 Israeli bombing and military attack of Gaza with the full support of the imperial powers of United States of America (USA) and Europe.

A large and diverse coalition of groups are shutting down highways, organizing major protests and rallies, mobilizing students, and conducting numerous civil disobedience actions.

On November 4th, a national protest march was organized for the liberation of Palestine. It demanded an immediate ceasefire, end to the US funding of apartheid Israel, and an end to the occupation. The 300,000 strong march was the largest demonstration for Palestinian freedom ever held in the US. It was organized by several Palestinian organizations and the ANSWER coalition. After rallying, protesters marched to the White House to tell Joe Biden, rightly referred to by many in the crowd as “genocide Joe.” In San Francisco, 50,000 took to the streets on this day.

At the end of October, Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) led an occupation of Grand Central station in New York, where thousands of people participated in the largest sit-in protest in more than two decades. The participants included elected officials, rabbis and academics.

A massive rally in support of the Palestinian people was organized in Boston on November 12th where more than 10,000 protesters demanded “Stop the genocide in Gaza!” and “End all US aid to Israel.” The 30 organizations, which comprise

the Boston Coalition for Palestine, walked over a major bridge to show solidarity with students who are being targeted at universities such as Harvard, MIT and Brandies.

Israel has been the largest recipient of military aid from the US. In the last 75 years, Israel has received \$130 billion to become one of the most advanced militarized states in the region. In addition to the military aid, the US has supported Israel’s economy with the total foreign aid amounting to \$263 billion (from 1946-2023).

The annual bilateral trade between US and Israel reached \$50 billion in 2022. Since October 7th, the U.S has moved advanced Navy warships to the Eastern Mediterranean. Earlier this month, the US House of Representatives passed a military package amounting to \$14.5 billion.

Human Rights Watch has verified that white phosphorus has been used in some densely populated areas in Gaza. Chemical warfare with this agent has been shown to cause horrific burns leading to long term excruciating pain and suffering.

Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), which are student groups in major Universities, that are coordinating with Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) actions such as

the November 17th International Day of Student Struggle called Shut It Down for Palestine. Organizers in Seattle will protest Amazon’s Project Nimbus, which is a contract providing Israel with advanced cloud and AI technologies that aid Israeli apartheid. SJP is a rainbow coalition of African, Latinx, European and Asian American students.

Native Americans have also been joining the protests with the demand of decolonization and land back as the only forms of justice for the crimes of settler colonialism.

The Unite All Workers for Democracy caucus (UAW), which is part of the United Auto Workers (UAW), amid a fierce strike, called for a boycott of Israel. Several human rights, racial justice, faith-based organizations, and labor unions are supporting the demand for a ceasefire such as Rabbis for Human Rights, American Postal Workers Union, Chicago Teachers Union, Restaurant Workers United, Unemployed Workers United, Massachusetts Teachers Association, American Federation of Teachers - Oregon and more.

In the latest Data for Progress survey shows that 66% of likely voters agree that “the U.S. should call for a ceasefire and de-escalation of violence in



Gaza.” A small fraction of US Congress has backed this demand.

On October 16, 2023, Congresswomen Cori Bush and Rashida Tlaib, along with André Carson, Summer Lee, and Delia C. Ramirez, introduced House Resolution 786, the Ceasefire Now Resolution. This resolution urges the Biden Administration to call for an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire as well as to send humanitarian assistance to Gaza. One month later, this resolution has 18 cosponsors and has served as a springboard for a growing coalition of 34 members of Congress, including a United States Senator, across 21 states.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib is the only Palestinian American member of Congress. The House voted to censure Rep. Tlaib on Nov. 7th for supporting a free Palestine. She had mentioned this slogan in her tweet “From the river to the Sea, Palestine will be free.” This slogan calls for a free Palestine where everyone, no matter their religion or background, has equal rights and privileges. All Palestinians, who have been violently displaced, have the right to return. This was one year after she was elected for a third term to represent her many African American, Latinx, Arab and other constituents in Metro Detroit. Her censure had the backing of 22 Democrats and all but four Republicans.

On November 16th, the first legislation to block \$320 million guided bombs to Israel was introduced by Rep. Ilhan Omar, a member of the US House of Representatives from the Democratic party.

In November, Rabbis for Ceasefire organized a week of protests. The founding co-chair of Jewish Voice for Peace and Rabbis for Ceasefire, Rabbi Alissa Wise, said “You know, there has been an effort over the past number of years to conflate critique of Israel with antisemitism. ... There is nothing inherent in critiquing the Israeli state as antisemitic. The thing that we have to remember is that states must be held accountable when they violate human rights.”

Protesters also continue to organize civil disobedience actions against weapons companies that produce weapons for Israel. Recently, they spoured red paint at the offices of Elbit Systems, an Israeli defense electronics firm.

The demand for an immediate ceasefire, cutting all aid to Israel, and lifting the siege on Gaza is growing fast. The US establishment is getting increasingly concerned that this might grow into a major movement to end complicity with war crimes and demand for a free Palestine. ■

Protests against Israel’s Genocidal War in Gaza

People have been protesting in all states of India in large numbers braving police highhandedness and right wing propaganda to express solidarity with the people of Palestine and Gaza. Repression on protestors is severe in BJP ruled states but the people are coming out holding various programmes. CPIML gave a call for countrywide protests on 7 November which was observed in all places at district and village level. The Modi government’s pro-Israel stand is vehemently been criticised through these protests.

Delhi

As part of the four-day (November 7-10, 2023) call by Left parties demanding immediate cease-fire in Gaza, a public meeting in solidarity with Palestine was held on November 7 at HKS Surjeet Bhawan, Delhi. Palestinian Ambassador to India also addressed the meeting along with leaders of the Left parties.

Speaking at the convention, Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary, CPIML said that India’s freedom struggle against the 200 years of British colonial rule teaches and inspires us to stand with the people of Palestine and their struggle for liberation. Standing with Palestine is standing with values of India’s anti-colonial freedom struggle - liberty, equality, solidarity and justice.” He further added that Israel’s intentions are to repeat the Nakbha of 1948 and carry out another ethnic cleaning of the Palestinians from their homeland. And it’s a shame and matter of grave concern that at this juncture Modi government is standing with Israel, throwing away the historic foreign policy of India which always stood with Palestinian people and their cause. Today, Indian government is complicit with the crimes committed by Israel against Palestinians. We need intensify our movement to end this genocide against people in occupied Palestine and also the complicity of Modi-BJP regime, by strengthening our country-wide and village level campaigns. We also need to counter the attempts by BJP and Godi media to portray the struggle by people of Palestine as terrorism.

The Palestinian Ambassador to India, Adnan Abu Alhajja expressed his gratitude to the people of India for their steadfast solidarity with the people of Palestine. Explaining the Israel’s war on Gaza, he also added how the apartheid policies of Israel against the Palestinians, despite the Oslo



DELHI

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY DAY
November 7, 2023

**CEASE
FIRE
IN GAZA, PALESTINE
NOW!**
END ISRAELI MILITARY OCCUPATION

Stand In Solidarity With
The People Of Palestine

CPI(ML) LIBERATION



BIHAR



WEST BENGAL

peace agreement are taking away rights, dignity and lives of people of Palestine. From land to water to food, everything is controlled by the Israel to harass and intimidate Palestinians.

Sitaram Yechury, General Secretary of CPI(M), D Raja, General Secretary of CPI, G Devarajan, General Secretary of Forward Bloc, R.S. Dagar, Central Committee Member of RSP, Prakash Rao of the CGPI and

Prakash Karat of CPI(M) addressed this Convention. The meet called for countrywide protests against the visit of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin who are coming to secure India's support for the US-Israel genocidal campaign in Gaza and asked the Modi government not to accept the shocking and disastrous proposal of exporting Indian construction workers to Israel to replace Palestinian workers.

Across the country, CPI(ML) and mass organisations, along with other left parties and several progressive organisations have been intensifying their campaign in solidarity with the people of Palestine and to mount pressure on the Modi government and the US-Israel axis to stop the genocide.

Bihar

In a joint rally in Patna on November 7 was held at Buddha Smriti Park, Patna. The leaders of the left parties strongly opposed the policies of American imperialism, which is funding, arming and supporting Israel said that the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank must be stopped immediately. The world must unite against the attempt by Israel to wipe out the existence of people of Palestine. Unanimously condemning the pro-Israel policy of Modi government, the leaders at the protest said that Modi's support to Israel is about importing the tools and tactics of repression against the people. The BJP is trying to draw a false parallel between terrorist attacks in India and the present Hamas offensive. Yet again, the Modi government and the BJP have turned a blind eye to the occupation and crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians, and are seeking to instrumentalise this situation to further fan the flames of hate against India's own Muslim community. The speakers asserted that the only

acceptable role for India is to help seek a political solution upholding the Palestinian right to a sovereign homeland, which is the only possible route to peace.

On November 6, the CPI(ML) MLAs Mahboob Alam, Sandeep Saurav, Manoj Manzil, Mahanand Prasad, Rambali Singh Yadav, Amarjeet Kushwaha and Sudama Prasad held a demonstration inside the Bihar State Legislative Assembly calling for an end to Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza and for immediate ceasefire during the beginning of Winter Session of the Assembly.

On November 2, on the martyrdom anniversary of Comrade Shah Chand, the legendary CPI(ML) leader of Arwal, a massive anti-war meeting was organised in his memory in Arwal and condemned the Modi government's shameless refusal to back the UN resolution for peace.

West Bengal

On November 8, a massive march was taken out from Mahajati Sadan by the left parties in Kolkata. The march witnessed thousands rallying against the on-going Israel's genocidal war on the people of Gaza and called for immediate ceasefire. Condemning the war, the protest expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine and their struggle against Israel's settler colonial policy and military occupation. CPIML Politburo member Abhijit Mazumdar said that the Israel's war is nothing but ethnic cleaning of Palestinians and it is attempting another Nakba on the people of Gaza. Hundreds of people, including children are being killed by Israel on daily-basis in Gaza and this needs to stop now.

On November 1, a joint protest march was organised from college street in Kolkata. Indrani Datta, AIPWA state Secretary said that thousands of women and children have been killed in massacre against people

of Palestine, the complicity of the US and other western countries is shameful and immediate steps needs to be taken to stop this genocidal war. The Indian government must also stand with the people of Palestine.

CPIML also organised Protest demonstrations in Jadavapur and Krishnanagar among other places in West Bengal.

Odisha

AICCTU Odisha state unit organised a protest at Gunupur, Rayagada on November 7 where Mahendra Parida, AICCTU state secretary condemning the massacre of Palestinians said that India government should carry forward anti-colonial legacy and put pressure on Israel and Western countries to immediately put an end to the war and work on a solution for a sovereign state of the people of Palestine.

Andhra Pradesh

Palestine Solidarity rally was organised by CPIML in Tenali, Guntur district on November 7. The march, expressing solidarity with the people of Palestine and their struggle for liberation was organised from the CPIML district office (Jamia Majid) at Shivaji Chowk to Chinaraavur Park demanding immediate ceasefire in Gaza and end to Israel's genocidal campaign. A poster exhibition was held as part of the protest depicting the brutality of the Israel's war on Palestinians.

CPIML Liberation State Secretary Nainalashetti Murthy speaking at the protest called for implementation of the resolution of the United Nations for ceasefire in Gaza and to establish and recognize an independent Palestine.

Jharkhand

Palestine solidarity protest demonstrations were organised by all district units of CPIML in Jharkhand up to village level. On

November 8, Dhanbad witnessed a protest at Randhir Verma Chowk calling for Ceasefire in Gaza and end to Israel's occupation of Palestine. CPIML District Secretary Karthik Prasad expressing solidarity with Palestine noted that silence of western countries like the US and UK is shameful and clearly these country are complicit in the genocide against Palestinians that is being perpetuated by Israel.

A joint rally of Left Parties was organised on November 7 in Ranchi's Albert Ekka Chowk expressing solidarity with the people of Palestine protesters demanded Indian government should stop its alliance with the US and Israel and stand with cause of justice and with the people of Palestine.

A demonstration was organised in Haldwani, Uttarakhand on November 8 as part the joint call calling for ceasefire in Gaza and end to Israel's genocidal war.

Uttar Pradesh

In the state, protests were organised in dozens of cities by CPIML independently as well as part of the joint left call. Memorandums addressed to the President of India were sent from all districts through these demonstrations. A march with massive participation of people was held in Ballia district headquarters by all left parties on 10 November where people recalled strong Indo-Palestine ties and criticised Modi government for pro-Israel policies. Demonstrations were also organised in other districts including Gorakhpur, Gazipur, Ayodhya and Azamgarh. Allahabad, Varanasi, Basti, Mau, Jalaun also witnessed protests where concerns regarding non-availability of adequate aid to Palestinians in Gaza were also raised. ■

Uttarkashi Tunnel Collapse

Trapping 41 Workers Is A Result of Criminal Negligence

More than 200 hours have passed since 41 workers were trapped hundreds of feet below the surface following a part of under-construction Silkyara-Barkot tunnel in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district collapsed on November 12. The 4.5 km long planned tunnel is part of the controversial Rs. 1200 crore Char Dham Highway project in the fragile Himalayan region.

What is alarming is that the part of the tunnel which collapsed, around 260 metres from the Silkyara portal entrance, was the completed section and not under-construction.

Expressing serious concern in delay in the rescue operation, Indresh

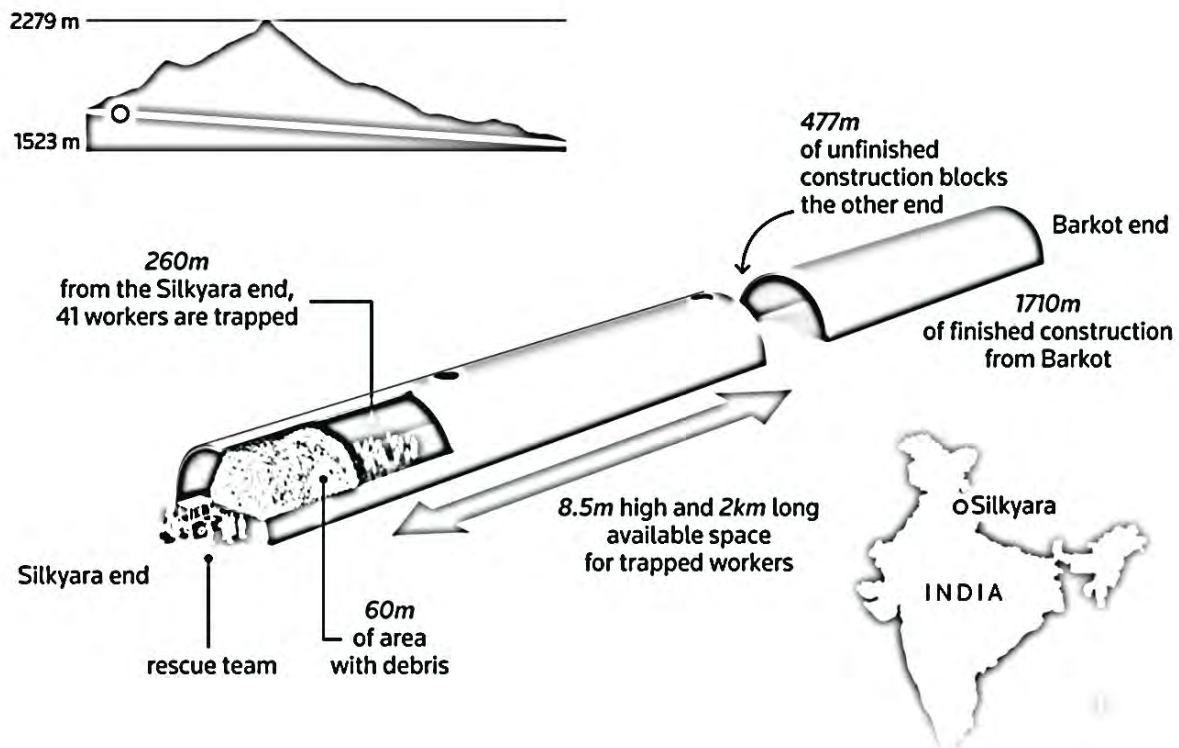
Maikuri, Uttarakhand state secretary of CPIML said despite warnings by experts regarding the adverse impact of the entire project on the stability of landslide and earthquake prone region, the Prime Minister and BJP led central and state governments pushed ahead with the construction.

"The National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), the implementing agency of the project and Navayuga Engineering Company Limited, which was constructing the tunnel are responsible for endangering the lives of workers by flouting safety norms," added Indresh. "The incident is clearly a case of criminal negligence that

completely disregarded the scientific and safety norms."

The standard operating procedure mandates that all tunnels over 3 km long are supposed to have an escape route to rescue people in case there is an emergency. According to various news reports, the reinforced humpe pipes used for emergency escape route were removed by the company just a few months before the incident. Furthermore, workers employed in the project were not insured and nor were they registered with the labour department.

When BJP leader and Minister of Road Transport and Highways of India Nitin Gadkari was asked by the journalists about the lack of escape mechanism in the tunnel, he refused to answer the question. It's a matter of grave concern that while the government has given crores of rupees for the project, it seems that no attention has been paid towards the disaster management.



Source: Sudev Kiyada, Reuters & PIB

Even after the collapse, the carelessness by the company didn't end. The initial report by the company said that 40 workers were trapped, and a few days later the number increased to 41, showing complete lack of proper management by the company. Majority of the labourers are migrant workers from 7 different states including Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Himachal Pradesh.

This is not the first case of negligence by NHIDCL and various construction companies contracted under PM Modi's ambitious Char Dham project. On 21 December 2018, seven workers, from Baramulla district of Jammu & Kashmir were killed by a landslide that took place in Banswara area on the Rudraprayag-Gaurikund stretch of the under-construction 'all weather road'. In the investigation by the authorities, it was found that the company contracted for the work was carrying out the construction without following the basic safety standards for the workers.

Incidentally, about a week before the Rudraprayag landslide incident, the District Magistrate has also

found significant negligence and substandard work being carried out by the contracted company in cutting the hill slopes. In another incident in July 2020, a retaining wall constructed by the company collapsed in Kheda village of Narendranagar in which three children were killed.

Atul Sati, state committee member of CPIML and Convenor of Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti said that the Silkyara-Barkot tunnel collapse is not the first incident that has exposed the adverse impact of unabated and unplanned constructions in the region. The recent land subsidence in Joshimath, a town roughly 190 kms from Silkyara has already highlighted the signs of an impending disaster in the region, that is increasingly witnessing unplanned heavy constructions and burrowing and cutting of the hills. In Joshimath, already several hundred houses have been damaged and many people are left homeless.

Experts had warned against the 'all weather highway' project, which involved doubling the width of the existing roads and cutting and


running through the hills. Despite the warnings, including from some members of the Supreme Court appointed High Powered Committee (HPC), the government went ahead with the project under the grab of defence requirement.

Furthermore, to evade the requirement of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the government divided the entire 899 km long highway plan into 53 individual projects of less than 100 km each.

The Supreme Court, while approving the project had directed the authorities to employ available engineering and scientific practices during the execution of project, but the project has been marred by substandard work and unscientific practices. During the 2023 floods in Uttarakhand, several parts of the 'all weather highway' were completely washed away.

"The double engine government of BJP is playing with the lives of the workers engaged in these projects and the local population in the region by ignoring the warnings of the experts," added Atul Sati. ■

Bihar State Conference of AIARLA

 On November 5, the 7th Bihar State Conference of All India Agricultural & Rural Labour Association (AIARLA) was organised in Bettiah, Champaran with a massive anti-war rally calling for an end to Israel's genocidal War against Palestinians. The rally marched from the Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar statue to conference auditorium and witnessed participation of thousands of rural workers and locals called for an immediate ceasefire.

Conference started with flag hoisting by AIARLA vice president and leader of CPIML Legislative Group in Bihar

comrade Mahboob Alam and paying tribute to martyrs. The Conference began after garlanding the statue of Dr. BR Ambedkar and taking a pledge to strengthen the fight against fascism to protect democracy and the constitution. Md Afsar Imam, president of West Champaran Mukhiya Sangh welcomed the delegates and guests.

Inaugurating the conference in Bettiah's Bapu auditorium full of delegates from every corner of Bihar, CPIML General Secretary General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya called for the organization to

establish its strong presence in every village among rural and farm workers of the country.

Speaking about the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank, Com. Diapankar said the Israel's attack is not a war but a massacre. This should be stopped in all circumstances. While inaugurating the conference, Com. Diapankar added that today policies of Modi-BJP regime is posing a big threat to democracy, diversity and Ganga-Jamuni legacy of unity in the country. He said that the country has gone into huge economic crisis under Modi regime. In the latest Global Hunger Index, it is ranked 111th out of 125 countries. Most of the children are

malnourished and women suffer from anaemia. But Modi government and its ministers are denying this and instead provide jumla of 'India as World Leader' to the people.

He said that it was Vajpayee government in 2004 when agrarian crisis deepened and farmers' suicides escalated that people refused the Shining India slogan and that government was. Now its Modi government's turn to go, which has curtailed all welfare schemes and pro-people legislations ranging from MNREGA to forest rights, food security and right to education. We should not forget Ambedkar's teaching of educate, organise and struggle in our struggle for our rights and protecting the Constitution. The Modi government tried to defame Farmers' movement and CAA-NRC movement by calling it foreign funded, also conspiring and persecuting journalists and independent media. We must remain vigilant against

BJP's conspiracies and attempts to spread riots and communal tension before the next general elections. Just like farmers of Nuh in Haryana demolished BJP's conspiracy of perpetrating riots, Bihar's poor having history of victorious anti-feudal struggles also have to smash the feudal fascist forces led by Sangh-BJP raising heads in Bihar.

While addressing the inaugural session, economist and professor Vidyarthi Vikas gave a detailed description of the deteriorating economic, social and educational condition of the country and emphasised on the need for complete land reforms. Dharendra Jha General Secretary of AIARLA, Rajaram Singh, General Secretary of AIKM, AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari among several other leaders of CPI(ML) were present in the anti-war rally and the opening session of the conference which was conducted by AIARLA Bihar President Virendra Prasad Gupta.

Shatrughna Sahni presented the report in the delegate session which was unanimously passed. Shriram Chaudhary was the central observer for the conference. The conference elected Manoj Manzil as President, Virendra Gupta as Honorary President and Shatrughna Sahni as Secretary along with a 151 member State Council and other office bearers.

The conference resolved to struggle for five guarantees which includes housing as constitutional right, land entitlement to homesteads for poor, increase in PM Awas Yojana money to rupees five lakhs, stop bulldozing poor homes, distribute 6 decimal land to all landless, 200 unit free electricity to all, to increase old age and widow pensions to rupees 5000 pm, and minimum 200 days work and 600 rupees daily wage in MNREGA. ■

Rasoiya Workers Embark on Massive Protest in Bihar



Hundreds of Rasoiya Workers (Kitchen Workers under Mid Day Meal Scheme) under the banner of Bihar State School Rasoiya Association

(affiliated to AICCTU) and other unions embarked on a protest march in Patna, Bihar on October 31 for their working class rights. Com.

Saroj Choubey General Secretary of Rasoiya Association, we demand that the Bihar government should immediately take steps to address the demands of the Rasoiya, who have been working for years on pittance. Ours is a just demand for rights and dignity, we will not bow down until our demands are meet.

"If the government doesn't address the demands, we will go on a strike in November," Com. Saroj added.

The Rasoiya Workers has put forwarded a 13 point demands, including: government employees status to all Rasoiya Workers, increase the honorarium for Rs 1650 to Rs. 10,000, Rs. 3000 pension and retirement package, bring MDM scheme implementation under government and not NGOs, honorarium should be paid for all 12 months (from current 10 months). ■

Mid-Day Meal workers protest in Lucknow



The Eco Garden of Lucknow again became witness to a strong protest by Rasoiya (part time honorarium cooks at government schools) workers of Uttar Pradesh who are struggling against paltry wages, which are also

not paid on time. Earlier in September, similar protest of ASHA workers was organized at same venue against the government apathy towards the workers who are backbone India's welfare scheme system.

AICCTU State President Vijay

Vidrohi addressing the protestors said that Modi and Yogi governments are anti-workers. They are snatching away hard earned labour laws. Dignified living and wages are our right and to struggle for them workers should unite to oust BJP out of power.

Rasoiya are paid only Rs 1,500/- per month and are made to work for five-six hours. Their state is like of slave workers. They demanded that Rasoiya should be paid Rs 21,000 wages, along with social security benefits entitled for workers like PF, gratuity and ESI facility. Comrade Premalata organizer of Rasoiya said government is attempting to suppress workers' movement and trying dividing workers on communal lines, but workers are united in their struggle for rights. ■

Dwindling Campus Democracy in Allahabad University

Protests were held in many districts of Uttar Pradesh on 16 November against the attack on campus democracy in Allahabad University and the brutal assault on a dalit student by the university Chief Proctor Rakesh Singh. The protests also condemned the increasing violence against women under Modi-Yogi regime and demanded dignity and justice for dalits and instituting GSCASH as well as SC-ST cells in universities in the state.

On October 17, Allahabad University Chief Proctor Rakesh Singh brutally assaulted AISA AU unit president and dalit student Comrade Vivek for standing up for the rights of the students. Along with Comrade Vivek, other students who were also protesting against the curtailment of student rights and for democratic campus have been abused with casteist slurs and attacked.

Earlier on October 31, AISA wrote a letter to the President of India Droupadi Murmu regarding student's protest in Allahabad University and issue of attack on campus democracy and misuse of administrative authority by the University Proctor. Expressing the deep sense of concern and anguish, the letter noted "We all know, that Allahabad University has been rightly recognised in the world as the 'Oxford of the East' due to its academic excellence. But what made the academic excellence of Allahabad University distinguished & significant was its accessibility and inclusiveness for the common people of India, especially students coming from marginalised sections of the society. To make the campus democratic and vibrant so that the interests of students remain not just merely protected but the students themselves inculcate the constitutional values before going

into society and contribute to its overall development, the student union of Allahabad University has also made a significant contribution. Unfortunately, all these great achievements of Allahabad University are rapidly being diminished as the present university administration continues to undermine all the principles of democracy and inclusiveness."

AISA has put forwarded following demands in the letter for urgent consideration:

1. Release all the student leaders under imprisonment who were involved in the fee hike protest.
2. Suspension and campus entry restriction orders against all the student leaders must be revoked.
3. Strict legal action must be taken against Chief Proctor Rakesh Singh under SC/ST Atrocities Act for brutally assaulting a Dalit student and he must be removed from his position. ■



Adieu Comrade Meena Rai

We are deeply shocked by the sudden demise of Comrade Meena Rai on the morning of November 21, 2023. She passed away of brain haemorrhage at a hospital in Allahabad where she was admitted around midnight. She was perfectly healthy till previous evening.

Comrade Meena Rai was the managing editor of Samkaleen Janmat and Vice President of Jan Sanskriti Manch, Uttar Pradesh. She retired a couple of years ago from her teaching job.

She worked as a committed social, political and cultural activist throughout her life. Her vibrant presence will be missed in cultural events and political programmes where her bookstall used to be a quintessential feature. She had dedicated her life towards furthering progressive and democratic ideas and values.

Her widely read and appreciated memoirs 'Samar na jite koi' being published serially at the Janmat portal will sadly remain incomplete.

Red Salute Comrade Meena Rai.

POSTING DATE : 27-28 OF EVERY MONTH
PUBLISHED ON 26TH OF EVERY MONTH

R.N.I. NO. 55777/93
P. R. NO. DL(E)—11/5156/2021-23
POSTING AT NEW DELHI G.P.O.



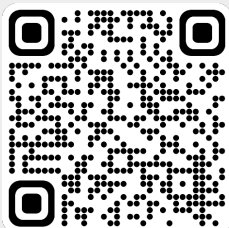
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EDITORIAL OFFICE

CHARU BHAWAN, U-90, SHAKARPUR, DELHI - 110 092

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY

Dipankar Bhattacharya for the Central Committee, CPIML
from Charu Bhawan, U-90, Shakarpur, Delhi - 110 092

PRINTED AT

Divya Offset, B-1422, New Ashok Nagar, Delhi - 110 096

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