

APRIL 2020

Rs.15



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**Modi's Response
To The Coronavirus Pandemic Is
Making The Crisis Much Worse**

**Delhi Violence:
Ensure Justice & Rehabilitation
Amit Shah Must Resign**

Ranjan Gogoi: CJI Yesterday, Partisan Politician Today

Speaking to an Assam news agency Pratidin, Gogoi defended his nomination citing his “strong conviction, that the legislature and the Judiciary must at some point of time work together for Nation-building”, and claiming that his “presence in Parliament will be an opportunity to project the views of the Judiciary before the legislature and vice versa.” It could be said that even as a part of the Judiciary, Gogoi “projected the views of the legislature”, something he will now continue to do in Parliament.

As a Supreme Court judge and then as Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi delivered a series of judgements favouring the Modi Government. These included a “clean chit” on the Rafale deal; delaying the hearing of the petition challenging the Constitutionality of the Electoral Bonds scheme till after it was a fait accompli; justifying the Kashmir lockdown; a judgement handing over the Babri Masjid to the fascists who demolished it; and many judgements and remarks bolstering the narrative of “illegal immigrants” needing to be identified via an NRC, summarily deported to Myanmar even if they were Rohingya refugees who do not enjoy citizenship rights there, or incarcerated in detention camps. Four months after his tenure on the SC ended, he was nominated by the ruling party to the Rajya Sabha (upper house). This is by far the most blatant and shameless display of conflict of interest in the history (admittedly stained and not spotless) of India’s Supreme Court and Rajya Sabha nominations.

The time-gap between Gogoi the judge and Gogoi the politician is little more than the blink of an eye. There has been no “cooling off period”. This naturally raises the question, if the judgements delivered by Ranjan Gogoi were coloured by the interests and views of Ranjan Gogoi the partisan politician.

The remarks of the newly-minted MP Gogoi are especially disturbing, since they remind us that this

openly partisan man using vocabulary coined by right-wing TV anchors and politicians to diss political critics, till just the other day, held the most sensitive non-partisan post in the country.

Soon after being sworn in as MP, Gogoi spoke to TV channels known to have coined the terms “The Lobby” and “Urban Naxal” for all individuals and parties critical of the Modi regime. Speaking to Republic TV for instance, he said he hoped the Supreme Court would initiate contempt proceedings against those questioning the independence of the judiciary in light of his nomination. Gogoi’s words are reminiscent of Henry II, the king of England, asking about the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket, “Will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?” This rhetorical question was famously read as a hint to the king’s loyal knights to assassinate Becket. The former CJI is dropping broad hints to his former colleagues in the Supreme Court that they should punish those criticising his appointment!

In an interview to Times Now, another propaganda channel for the BJP, Gogoi said that those questioning his nomination represented a “lobby” - that term so dear to the propaganda channels to delegitimise all critics of the regime. We may recall that Gogoi infamously sat in judgement on allegations of sexual harassment against his own self while he was CJI, denouncing the allegations from the Supreme Court bench as manufactured by a “lobby”. He in turn made allegations against the complainant which resulted in her losing her job at the Supreme Court. Gogoi, today, is silent on the fact that the complaint’s subsequent reinstatement to her job implies that she was innocent of all that he was accused her.

Gogoi also claimed not to remember the Electoral Bonds case at all! A convenient loss of memory since his tardiness in hearing that case helped the BJP benefit from 95% of the non-transparent funding through the Bonds, making it far and away the richest party in the Lok Sabha polls which it went on to win.

Since Ranjan Gogoi is now a partisan politician, all the judgements that he presided over as a judge mere months ago should be revisited by another Supreme Court Bench. Such a measure, even if it does not undo the damage done by Gogoi’s tenure to the credibility of the SC, may at least acknowledge the harm, and make some amends. Failure to do even this much, makes a mockery of the independence of India’s higher judiciary. □



New Series Vol. 25 No. 12

APRIL 2020

CONTENTS

COVER FEATURE

What The Pandemic Teaches Us.....5
 Lessons for Communists6
 Capitalist Agriculture & Covid-19... 11

COMMENTARY

1984 and 2020: Delhi Violence..... 13
 The Communal Virus 15
 IWD Reflections on Shaheen Bagh. 17
 Yes Bank Fiasco..... 19

ARTICLE

Anti CAA-NPR-NRC Movement 23

FROM THE STATES

TN Round Up..... 27

BOOKS 32

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Dipankar Bhattacharya

EDITOR

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Editors' e-mail: liberation@cpiml.org

MANAGER

Prabhat Kumar

Phone: 7042877713

Website: www.cpiml.net

E-mail: manager.liberation@gmail.com

36 pages including covers

Annual Subscription Rates

India Rs. 150
 Abroad US\$ 30

Send M.O. or Bank Draft
 in favour of

LIBERATION PUBLICATIONS

Payable at Delhi to

U-90 SHAKARPUR, DELHI 110 092

Modi's Response To The Coronavirus Pandemic Is Making The Crisis Much Worse

More than three months after the first Corona 2019 case was detected and reported in China, the World Health Organisation declared it a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. In the two weeks that have elapsed since then, the pandemic has spread to many more countries and become much more lethal. While China has managed to contain the outbreak - new cases being reported are only 'imported' ones, more than seventy thousand people have recovered and the reported death toll remains only a little above three thousand - Italy has witnessed many more deaths than China and the US now ranks third in terms of reported active cases. Almost the whole of Europe is badly affected, Spain, France and Germany being the most affected European countries after Italy, and in Asia while the pandemic seems to have reached a plateau in Iran (despite the impact of US sanctions massively hampering its response to the virus) and South Korea, the number of cases has begun to rapidly rise in India over the last one week.

While many killer diseases and epidemics have claimed more lives, the world has not witnessed such a pandemic in several generations and decades, especially in terms of the global spread of Covid 2019 and the havoc it has already caused in the developed world. In many ways this pandemic is a product of globalisation, a local outbreak of an unknown virus in a city in China has taken the whole world hostage in a matter of a few weeks. Countries and cities marked by increased integration with the outside world because of trade, globalised production network and consequent

flows of capital and labour as well as travel and tourism, have had to bear the maximum brunt of the pandemic. And Europe being at the centre of many of these flows has been the worst hit. China's response of virtually quarantining the massive population of Wuhan and cutting it off from the rest of the country and yet efficiently mobilising all its infrastructural and human resources appears to have effectively contained it in a few weeks. By contrast, countries and cities that failed to take such drastic measures to isolate and insulate themselves turned out to be so much more vulnerable.

However, it is not only the inter-connectedness of globalization but the specific form of neoliberal predatory global capitalism which has generated today's crisis. Biologists like Rob Wallace are pointing to the role of industrial, profit driven corporate food production, land-grab and destruction of forests in releasing and spreading pathogens which were previously contained by long-evolved forest ecologies. And of course, neoliberal economic policies have then amplified the havoc. The neo-liberal policy environment that dominates today's globalised world economy has led to increasing commercialisation and privatisation of health care. The insurance based health care system of the US has made it so much harder for the common American people to get timely medical care. Even in a country like the UK which was once reputed for its excellent National Health Service, the health system has in recent years been virtually destroyed and dismantled. Faced with the challenge of combating the killer outbreak on a war footing, Spain took the bold step of nationalising private hospitals and pharmaceutical companies.

Corona is once again forcing the world to recognise and accept the basic truth that public health cannot be allowed to be a reduced to a profit-making commodity for private players, it must be one of the basic responsibilities of every state to ensure health as a universal fundamental right.

In India, the first Corona case was reported on 30 January, full two months after the disease broke out in China, but the government hardly took concrete measures to expand the capacity of the health system to deal with the outbreak. While the WHO recommended extensive testing, India did nothing to ensure that. Instead of utilising all resources to ensure free testing the government has allowed private laboratories to charge close to 5000 rupees per test. The government did not even ensure adequate production and supply of protective equipment for the medical community, not to speak of making provision for more hospital beds and ventilators. The entire focus of the Modi government is on imposing drastic restrictions on the people without taking any responsibility to help the affected and vulnerable people. This negative approach is exacerbating the crisis on all fronts from public health to livelihood and supply of essential commodities. Large parts of the country are in a state of near-total lockdown and there are no measures to mitigate its economic and social costs for the common people.

The utter absurdity of the government's lopsided approach became glaringly palpable on 22 March when the country had the first trial run of a countrywide lockdown. The call was given by the Prime Minister through his public address on March 18 evening. The country witnessed massive panic buying, and concomitantly hoarding and profiteering in anticipation of possible drastic announcements. Predictably, the Prime Minister talked at length about the need for precautionary measures

based on personal hygiene and social distancing, but he was conspicuously silent about any kind of urgent steps to expand testing and treatment facilities or any relief package to compensate the people for the loss of work and livelihood. The entire focus of his speech was on the observance of what he called a Janata Curfew (people's curfew) on 22 March accompanied by five minutes of mass clapping and clanging of bells and utensils.

It is not only the inter-connectedness of globalization but the specific form of neoliberal predatory global capitalism which has generated today's crisis.

The opportunistic weaponisation of the crisis by the government can be seen already in the violent dismantling and destruction of the Shaheen Bagh protest site and arrests of activists despite the fact that the protest was already restricted by the organisers

Thereafter the administration got busy with its typical event management approach, ensuring the curfew and organising the clapping. While the curfew achieved the objective of keeping people indoors, the clapping and clanging triggered a frenzied mass celebration in many places (with a viral video clip showing seniormost administrative officials taking the lead in a district in Uttar Pradesh) and made a complete mockery of all the precautions the people are required to maintain as individuals and as a community. The Sangh brigade and other bigoted elements are working overtime to spread rumours and all kinds of dangerously unscientific superstitious beliefs. These elements are even taking the opportunity to celebrate the most oppressive Brahmanical caste practices of segregation and

untouchability as a model for social distancing! Along with this, globally and also in India, we can see a distinct rise of racist prejudices and hatred against China (in India, it is directed also against the people of North Eastern states like Manipur and Nagaland). The public health emergency is thus snowballing into a wider and deeper crisis where we are staring at not just an enormous crisis of public health and massive economic disruption but also the consolidation of a draconian surveillance state and recrudescence of bigotry, prejudices and hate. The opportunistic weaponisation of the crisis by the government can be seen already in the violent dismantling and destruction of the Shaheen Bagh protest site and arrests of activists despite the fact that the protest was already restricted by the organisers to a minimal symbolic presence in recognition of the need for Covid-19 precautions.

In his second address to the nation the PM announced the extension of a countrywide lockdown to 21 days, again failing to announce any relief package or to reassure citizens of the availability of essentials including food during the lockdown. Predictably, this address also sparked off panic buying, with crowds gathered outside shops desperate to stock up on essentials.

In the face of the Covid 2019 global pandemic we must therefore summon all our strength, resilience and courage to manage and overcome this multiple disaster and push for a social order of equity, rationality and sustainability in place of the crumbling edifice of predatory capitalism. In the immediate situation, in the spirit of physical distancing and social solidarity, we must demand free widespread testing and free healthcare for all; guarantee of food and essential supplies; subsistence allowance and food rations for all; plentiful public canteens dispensing cooked food, and hygienic environment in slums and villages. □

What The Pandemic Teaches Us

China placed the industrial province of Wuhan under lockdown and contained the spread of the Covid-19 virus. An insightful article in Chuang (a blog devoted to “analyzing the ongoing development of capitalism in China, its historical roots, and the revolts of those crushed beneath it”) noted the difference between the racist tendency to blame China and people of Chinese origin for the pandemic, and between a critical analysis of the Chinese State’s handling of the crisis and what it tells us about capitalism today. The essay is especially insightful because the Chinese state’s response shares some features with the response of authoritarian regimes in India and other countries as well. Regimes like to use fear – (of terrorism, of coronavirus, of loss of employment) to build consensus for their authoritarianism. If an Emergency was seen as an illegitimate clampdown by a dictatorial leader, an Emergency imposed in the name of Coronavirus precautions might generate a lot more support. But, we might ask, do we not need lockdowns to prevent the spread of the virus? Are not lockdowns effective and essential? This is question we could ask not only in the context of China but of India too.

And the answer is pretty obvious. The lockdowns are necessitated by the fact that the healthcare systems are unable to handle the load of a large number of patients at one go. So “social distancing” enforced by a lockdown is needed only

because our healthcare systems are weak. Why not acknowledge this and nationalise healthcare, as Spain has done? Even better, why not have universal testing and effective isolation and care of people testing positive for the virus, as South Korea has done? South Korea’s model has, after all, proved to be most effective in containing the spread of the virus. So why are other governments not doing this?

At the heart of the issue is this simple fact: that democratic methods persuading people to understand basic principles and willingly practice those principles are proven to be far more effective than demanding blind obedience to rules and rituals and punishing violations. In his pathbreaking book on hospital infections, Better, surgeon Atul Gawande recounts the impact of a revolutionary new - democratic rather than top-down draconian - approach to hospital hygiene. Gawande writes, “Stopping the epidemics spreading in our hospitals is not a problem of ignorance--of not having the know-how about what to do. It is a problem of compliance--a failure of an individual to apply that know-how correctly. But achieving compliance is hard.” Repeated injunctions to wash hands correctly and so on fail and infections continue to be rife in hospitals.

With the new approach, doctors in a particular US hospital “held a series of thirty-minute, small group discussions with health care workers at every level: food service workers, janitors, nurses, doctors, patients themselves. The

team began each meeting saying, in essence, ‘We’re here because of the hospital infection problem and we want to know what you know about how to solve it.’ There were no directives, no charts with what the experts thought should be done. Ideas came pouring out. People told of places where hand-gel dispensers were missing, ways to keep gowns and gloves from running out of supply, nurses who always seemed able to wash their hands and even taught patients to wash their hands, too. Many people said it was the first time anyone had ever asked them what to do. The norms began to shift.... Nurses who would never speak up when a doctor failed to wash his or her hands began to do so after learning of other nurses who did.” The result was that hospital infections dropped to zero in that particular hospital. The message is clear: that people’s participation in identifying and solving problems is a lot more effective than any authoritarian and punitive imposition of “rules”. This insight offers clues for the failures of the state-led programmes like Swachh Bharat and Beti Bachao to combat open defecation and sex-selection respectively. And above all, it offers us insights into how the top-down approach in combating coronavirus is costing China, India and the world dearly. A more democratic approach would chose to listen to and learn from doctors like Dr Li Wenliang, and would trust people to be capable of understanding how the virus spreads and acting responsibly in democratic cooperation with

each other to prevent its spread. Such an approach might be life-saving and revolutionary. But since democracy and mutual cooperation are more contagious than viruses, regimes all over the world discourage them and instead use the crisis to shore up their authority and power over people instead.

The lessons for us, the people, are that our response to a pandemic cannot be radically different from our response to the crisis of capitalism and fascism. We must continue to foster mutual trust, empathy, and cooperation – the same qualities and approaches we need to build unions, run communes, conduct revolutions

and sustain revolutions – to help everyone, including the most vulnerable, survive the pandemic.

Below, we carry excerpts from the detailed and thoughtful analysis of capitalism, China, and the Covid-crisis in the Chuang blog.

- Kavita Krishnan,
Liberation editorial board.

China and The Coronavirus Pandemic:

Lessons for Communists

(Excerpts from an essay in the Chuang blog titled 'Social Contagion'.)

Warmongering, Orientalism, Racism

The outbreak has been incorrectly blamed on everything from the conspiratorial and/or accidental release of a virus strain from the Wuhan Institute of Virology—a dubious claim spread by social media, particularly via paranoid Hong Kong and Taiwan Facebook posts, but now buoyed by conservative press outlets and military interests in the West—to the propensity of Chinese people to consume “dirty” or “strange” types of food, since the virus outbreak is linked to either bats or snakes sold in a semi-illegal ‘wet market’ specializing in wildlife and other rare animals (though this was not the ultimate source). Both major themes exhibit the obvious warmongering and orientalism common to reporting on China, and a number of articles have pointed out this basic fact. But even these responses tend to focus only on questions of how the virus is perceived in the cultural sphere, spending far less time digging into the much more brutal dynamics that

lie obscured beneath the media frenzy.

A slightly more complex variant at least understands the economic consequences, even while it exaggerates the potential political repercussions for rhetorical effect. Here we find the usual suspects, ranging from standard warhawk dragon-slaying politicians to the spilled-latte pearl clutching of haute-liberalism: press agencies from the National Review to the New York Times have already implied that the outbreak may bring a “crisis of legitimacy” to the CCP, despite the fact that there is barely a whiff of an uprising in the air. But the kernel of truth to these predictions lies in their grasp of the economic dimensions of the quarantine—something that could hardly be lost on journalists with stock portfolios thicker than their skulls. Because the fact is that, despite the government’s call to isolate oneself, people may soon be forced to “gather together” to tend to the needs of production. According to the latest initial estimates, the epidemic will already cause China’s GDP slow to 5 percent in this year, below its already flagging growth

rate of 6 percent last year, the lowest in three decades. Some analysts have said Q1 growth could sink 4 percent or lower, and that this may risk triggering a global recession of some sort. A previously unthinkable question has been posed: what actually happens to the global economy when the Chinese furnace begins to grow cold?

A Collective Process of Questioning

Within China itself, the ultimate trajectory of this event is difficult to predict, but the moment has already brought about a rare, collective process of questioning and learning about society. The epidemic has directly infected nearly 80,000 people (at the most conservative estimate), but it has delivered a shock to everyday life under capitalism for 1.4 billion, trapped in a moment of precarious self-reflection. This moment, while full of fear, has caused everyone to simultaneously ask some deep questions: What will happen to me? My children, family and friends? Will we have enough food? Will I get paid? Will I make rent? Who is

responsible for all this? In a strange way, the subjective experience is somewhat like that of a mass strike—but one which, in its non-spontaneous, top-down character and, especially in its involuntary hyper-atomization, illustrates the basic conundrums of our own strangled political present as clearly as the true mass strikes of the previous century elucidated the contradictions of their era. The quarantine, then, is like a strike hollowed of its communal features but nonetheless capable of delivering a deep shock to both psyche and economy. This fact alone makes it worthy of reflection.

Of course, speculation on the imminent downfall of the CCP is predictable nonsense, one of the favorite pastimes of *The New Yorker* and *The Economist*. Meanwhile, the normal media suppression protocols are underway, in which overtly racist mass-media op-eds published in legacy outlets are countered by a swarm of web-platform thinkpieces polemicizing against orientalism and other facets of ideology. But almost the entirety of this discussion remains at the level of portrayal—or, at best, the politics of containment and the economic consequences of the epidemic—without delving into the questions of how such diseases get produced in the first place, much less distributed. Even this, however, is not quite enough. Now is not the time for a simple “Scooby-Doo Marxist” exercise of pulling the mask off the villain to reveal that, yes, indeed, it was capitalism that caused coronavirus all along! That would be no more subtle than foreign commentators sniffing about for regime change. Of course capitalism is culpable—but how, exactly, does the social-economic sphere interface with the biological, and what kind of deeper lessons

might be drawn from the entire experience?

In this sense, the outbreak presents two opportunities for reflection: First, it is an instructive opening in which we might review

substantial questions about how capitalist production relates to the non-human world at a more fundamental level—how, in short, the “natural world,” including its microbiological substrata, cannot

Brave Dr Li Wenliang

Whistleblower doctor Li Wenliang who first warned his doctor colleagues in China about the epidemic in early December, was reprimanded for “spreading rumours.” Police detained Li for “spreading false rumours” and forced him to sign a police document admitting that he had “seriously disrupted social order” and breached the law. This authoritarian response by the Chinese state was not only unfair to Dr Li – it has had serious worldwide consequences. Dr Li developed fever soon after, was diagnosed with Covid-19 at the end of January, and succumbed to the virus in early February. His death sparked outrage in China – and the Government responded by trying to censor and delete posts critical of the government and “educate” people to publicly “thank” Xi Jinping for his handling of the crisis. Wuhan residents “flatly rejected” the attempts to coach them to express gratitude and suppress criticism.

In response to the intense criticism, China set up an enquiry into the allegations that Dr Li had broken the law. Following his death, China’s anti-corruption bureau filed a report finding that Dr Li had not disrupted public order. However the report also maintained that Dr Li had not verified the information before sending it, and it was “not consistent with the actual situation at the time”. In keeping with the report’s recommendation, the deputy head of the police station and an officer had been given a demerit and a warning respectively. Chinese social media users asked, “How can you let these police at the very bottom bear the burden? They were just carrying orders. Don’t hurt them.” Then, the anti-corruption bureau issued a statement saying it had “solemnly apologised” to Li’s family and promising to “conscientiously draw lessons and improve” its operations. But China’s people are still not satisfied, pointing out that the bureau’s report criticised “anti-establishment” voices for labeling Dr Li a “hero” and “awakener”!

be understood without reference to how society organizes production (because the two are not, in fact, separate). At the same time, this is a reminder that the only communism worth the name is one that includes the potential of a fully politicized naturalism. Second, we can also use this moment of isolation for our own sort of reflection on the present state of Chinese society. Some things only become clear when everything grinds to an unexpected halt, and a slowdown of this sort cannot help but make previously obscured tensions visible. Below, then, we'll explore both these questions, showing not only how capitalist accumulation produces such plagues, but also how the moment of pandemic is itself a contradictory instance of political crisis, making visible to people the unseen potentials and dependencies of the world around them, while also offering yet another excuse for the extension of systems of control even further into everyday life.

COVID-19 can't be understood without taking into account the ways in which China's last few decades of development in and through the global capitalist system has molded the country's health care system and the state of public health more generally. The epidemic, however novel, is therefore similar to other public health crises that came before it, which tend to be produced with nearly the same regularity as economic crises, and to be regarded in similar ways within the popular press—as if they were random, “black swan” events, utterly unpredictable and unprecedented. The reality, however, is that these health crises follow their own chaotic, cyclical patterns of recurrence, made more probable by a series of structural contradictions built into the nature

of production and proletarian life under capitalism. Much like the case of the Spanish Flu, the coronavirus was originally able to take hold and spread rapidly because of a general degradation of basic healthcare among the population at large. But precisely because this degradation has taken place in the midst of spectacular economic growth, it has been obscured behind the splendor of glittering cities and massive factories. The reality, however, is that expenditures on public goods like health care and education in China remain extremely low, while most public spending has been directed toward brick and mortar infrastructure—bridges, roads, and cheap electricity for production.

Privatisation of Healthcare Breeds Epidemics

Before the country's piece-by-piece incorporation into the global capitalist system, services like healthcare in China were once provided (largely in the cities) under the danwei system of enterprise-based benefits or (mostly but not exclusively in the countryside) by local healthcare clinics staffed by plentiful “barefoot doctors,” all provided as a free service. The successes of socialist-era healthcare, like its successes in the field of basic education and literacy, were substantial enough that even the country's harshest critics had to acknowledge them. Snail fever, plaguing the country for centuries, was essentially wiped out in much of its historical core, only to return in force once the socialist healthcare system began to be dismantled. Infant mortality plummeted and, even despite the famine that accompanied the Great Leap Forward, life expectancy jumped from 45 to 68 years

between 1950 and the early 1980s. Immunization and general sanitary practices became widespread, and basic information on nutrition and public health, as well as access to rudimentary medicines, were free and available to all. Meanwhile, the barefoot doctor system helped to distribute fundamental, albeit limited, medical knowledge to a large portion of the population, helping to build a robust, bottom-up healthcare system in conditions of severe material poverty. It's worth remembering that all of this took place at a time when China was poorer, per capita, than your average Sub-Saharan African country today.

Since then, a combination of neglect and privatization has substantially degraded this system at the exact same time that rapid urbanization and unregulated industrial production of household goods and foodstuffs has made the need for widespread healthcare, not to mention food, drug and safety regulations, all the more necessary. Today, China's public spending on health is US\$323 per capita, according to figures from the World Health Organization. This figure is low even among other “upper-middle income” countries, and it's around half that spent by Brazil, Belarus and Bulgaria. Regulation is minimal to non-existent, resulting in numerous scandals of the type mentioned above. Meanwhile, the effects of all this are felt most strongly by the hundreds of millions of migrant workers, for whom any right to basic health care provisions completely evaporates when they leave their rural hometowns (where, under the hukou system, they are permanent residents regardless of their actual location, meaning that the remaining public resources can't be accessed elsewhere).

Dress Rehearsal for Counterinsurgency

COVID-19 has gripped global attention with an unprecedented strength. Ebola, the avian flu and SARS, of course, all had their associated media frenzies. But something about this new epidemic has generated a different kind of staying power. In part, this is almost certainly due to the spectacular scale of the Chinese government's response, resulting in equally spectacular images of emptied-out megacities that stand in stark contrast to the normal media image of China as over-crowded and over-polluted.

At a deeper level, though, what seems most fascinating about the state's response is the way in which it has been performed, via the media, as a sort of melodramatic dress rehearsal for the full mobilization of domestic counterinsurgency. This gives us real insights into the repressive capacity of the Chinese state, but it also emphasizes the deeper incapacity of that state, revealed by its need to rely so heavily on a combination of total propaganda measures deployed through every facet of the media and the goodwill mobilizations of locals otherwise under no material obligation to comply. Both Chinese and Western propaganda have emphasized the real repressive capacity of the quarantine, the former narrating it as a case of effective government intervention in an emergency and the latter as yet another case of totalitarian overreach on the part of the dystopian Chinese state. The unspoken truth, however, is that the very aggression of the clampdown signifies a deeper incapacity in the Chinese state, which is itself very much still under construction.

This itself gives us a window

into the nature of the Chinese state, showing how it is developing new and innovative techniques of social control and crisis response capable of being deployed even in conditions where basic state machinery is sparse or non-existent. Such conditions, meanwhile, offer an even more interesting (albeit more speculative) picture of how the ruling class in any given country might respond when widespread crisis and active insurrection cause similar breakdowns in even the most robust states. The viral outbreak was in every respect assisted by poor connections between levels of the government: repression of "whistleblower" doctors by local officials contra the interests of the central government, ineffective hospital reporting mechanisms and extremely poor provision of basic healthcare are just a few examples. Meanwhile, different local governments have returned to normal at different paces, almost completely beyond the control of the central state (except in Hubei, the epicenter). At the moment of writing, it seems almost entirely random which ports are operational and which locales have restarted production. But this bricolage quarantine has meant that long-distance city-to-city logistics networks remain disrupted, since any local government appears able to simply prevent trains or freight trucks from passing through its borders. And this base level incapacity of the Chinese government has forced it to deal with the virus as if it were an insurgency, roleplaying civil war against an invisible enemy.

In response to the central state's call to mobilize, some localities have taken their own strange and severe initiatives. The most frightening of these are to be found in four cities in Zhejiang province, where

thirty million people have been issued local passports, allowing only one person per household to leave home once every two days. Cities like Shenzhen and Chengdu have ordered that each neighborhood be locked down, and allowed entire apartment buildings to be quarantined for 14 days if a single confirmed case of the virus is found within. Meanwhile, hundreds have been detained or fined for "spreading rumors" about the disease, and some who have fled quarantine have been arrested and sentenced to lengthy jail time—and the jails themselves are now experiencing a severe outbreak, due to officials' incapacity to isolate sick individuals even in an environment literally designed for easy isolation. These sorts of desperate, aggressive measures mirror those of extreme cases of counterinsurgency, most clearly recalling the actions of military-colonial occupation in places like Algeria, or, more recently, Palestine. Never before have they been conducted at this scale, nor in megacities of this kind that house much of the world's population. The conduct of the clampdown then offers a strange sort of lesson for those with a mind for global revolution, since it is, essentially, a dry run of state-led reaction.

Building Consensus For Clampdown

This particular clampdown benefits from its seemingly humanitarian character, with the Chinese state able to mobilize greater numbers of locals to help in what is, essentially, the noble cause of strangling the spread of the virus. But, as is to be expected, such clampdowns always also backfire. Counterinsurgency is, after all, a desperate sort of war

conducted only when more robust forms of conquest, appeasement and economic incorporation have become impossible. It is an expensive, inefficient and rearguard action, betraying the deeper incapacity of whatever power is tasked with deploying it—be they French colonial interests, the waning American imperium, or others. The result of the clampdown is almost always a second insurgency, bloodied by the crushing of the first and made even more desperate. Here, the quarantine will hardly mirror the reality of civil war and counterinsurgency. But even in this case, the clampdown has backfired in its own ways. With so much of the state's effort focused on control of information and constant propaganda deployed via every possible media apparatus, unrest has expressed itself largely within the same platforms.

The death of Dr. Li Wenliang, an early whistleblower on the dangers of the virus, on February 7th shook citizens cooped up in their homes across the country. Li was one of eight doctors rounded up by police for spreading “false information” in early January, before later contracting the virus himself. His death triggered anger from netizens and a statement of regret from the Wuhan government. People are beginning to see that the state is made up of bumbling officials and bureaucrats who have no idea what to do but still put on a strong face. This fact was essentially revealed when the mayor of Wuhan, Zhou Xianwang, was forced to admit on state television that his government had delayed releasing critical information about the virus after an outbreak had occurred. The very tension caused by the outbreak, combined with that induced by the state's total mobilization, has begun to reveal to the general populace

the deep fissures that lie behind the paper-thin portrait that the government paints of itself. In other words, conditions such as these have exposed the fundamental incapacities of the Chinese state to growing numbers of people who previously would have taken the government's propaganda at face value.

Pandemic Impact on the Map of China's Working Class

Many migrant workers, including those who had stayed in their work cities for Spring Festival or were able to return prior to various lockdowns being implemented, are now stuck in a dangerous limbo. In Shenzhen, where the vast majority of the population are migrants, locals report that the number of homeless people has begun to climb. But the new people appearing on the streets are not long-term homeless, instead having the appearance of literally just being dumped there with nowhere else to go—still wearing relatively nice clothes, unfamiliar with where best to sleep in the open or where to obtain food. Various buildings in the city have seen an increase in petty theft, mostly of food delivered to the doorstep of residents who are staying home for the quarantine. Across the board, workers are losing wages as production is stalled. The best case scenarios during work stoppages are dorm-quarantines like that imposed at the Shenzhen Foxconn plant, where new returnees are confined to their quarters for a week or two, paid about a third of their normal wages and then allowed to return to the production line. Poorer firms have no such option, and the government's attempt to offer new lines of cheap credit to smaller

businesses will probably do little in the long run. In some cases, it seems like the virus will simply accelerate pre-existing trends in factory relocation, as firms like Foxconn expand production in Vietnam, India and Mexico to make up for the slowdown.

If the campaign against COVID-19 can also be read as a dry run against insurgency, it is notable that the central government only has the capacity to provide effective coordination in the Hubei epicenter and that its responses in other provinces—even wealthy and well-regarded places like Hangzhou—remain largely uncoordinated and desperate. We can take this in two ways: first, as a lesson on the weakness underlying the hard edges of state power, and second as a caution on the threat that is still posed by uncoordinated and irrational local responses when the central state machinery is overwhelmed.

Lessons For A Coherent Communist Politics

These are important lessons for an era when the destruction wrought by unending accumulation has extended both upward into the global climatic system and downward into the microbiological substrata of life on Earth. Such crises will only become more common. As the secular crisis of capitalism takes on a seemingly non-economic character, new epidemics, famines, floods and other “natural” disasters will be used as a justification for the extension of state control, and the response to these crises will increasingly function as an opportunity to exercise new and untested tools for counterinsurgency. A coherent communist politics must grasp

both of these facts together. At a theoretical level, this means understanding that the critique of capitalism is impoverished whenever it is severed from the hard sciences. But at the practical level, it also implies that the only possible political project today is one able to orient itself within a terrain defined by widespread ecological and microbiological disaster, and to operate in this perpetual state of crisis and atomization.

In a quarantined China, we begin to glimpse such a landscape, at least in its outlines: empty late-winter streets dusted by the slightest film of undisturbed snow, phone-lit faces peering out of windows, happenstance barricades staffed by a spare few nurses or police or volunteers or simply paid actors tasked with hoisting flags and telling you to put your mask on and go back home. The contagion is social. So, it should come as no real surprise that the

only way to combat it at such a late stage is to wage a surreal sort of war on society itself. Don't gather together, don't cause chaos. But chaos can build in isolation, too. As the furnaces in all the foundries cool to softly crackling embers and then to snow-cold ash, the many minor desperations cannot help but leak out of that quarantine to gently cascade together into a greater chaos that might one day, like this social contagion, prove difficult to contain. □

Capitalist Agriculture and Covid-19: A Deadly Combination

(Rob Wallace, a socialist biologist explains the tight links between new viruses, industrial food production, and the profitability of multinational corporations. Yaak Pabst for the German socialist magazine Marx21 spoke to evolutionary biologist Rob Wallace, author of *Big Farms Make Big Flu* (Monthly Review Press, 2016) about the dangers of Covid-19, the responsibility of agribusiness and sustainable solutions to combat infectious diseases. We reproduce excerpts from the interview.)

You have been researching epidemics and their causes for several years. In your book *Big Farms Make Big Flu* you attempt to draw these connections between industrial farming practices, organic farming and viral epidemiology. What are your insights?

The real danger of each new outbreak is the failure—or better put—the expedient refusal to grasp that each new Covid-19 is no isolated incident. The increased occurrence of viruses is closely linked to food production and the profitability of multinational corporations. Anyone who aims to understand why viruses are becoming more dangerous must investigate the industrial model of agriculture and, more specifically, livestock production. At present, few governments, and few scientists, are prepared to do so. Quite the contrary.

When the new outbreaks spring up, governments, the media, and even most of the medical establishment are so focused on each separate emergency that they dismiss the structural causes that are driving multiple marginalized pathogens into sudden global celebrity, one after the other.

The neoliberal restructuring of the health care system has worsened both the research and the general care of patients, for example in hospitals. What difference could a better funded healthcare system make to fight the virus?

There's the terrible but telling story of the Miami medical device company employee who upon returning from China with flu-like symptoms did the righteous thing by his family and community and demanded a local hospital test him for Covid-19. He worried that his minimal Obamacare option wouldn't cover the tests. He was right. He was suddenly on the hook for US\$3270.

An American demand might be an emergency order be passed that stipulates that during a pandemic outbreak, all outstanding medical bills related to testing for infection and for treatment following a positive test would be paid for by the federal government. We want to encourage people to seek help, after all, rather than hide away—and infect others—because they can't afford treatment. The obvious solution is a national health service—fully staffed and equipped to handle such community-wide emergencies—so that such a ridiculous problem as discouraging community cooperation would never arise.

As soon as the virus is discovered in one country, governments everywhere react with authoritarian and punitive measures, such as a compulsory quarantine of entire areas of land and cities. Are such drastic measures justified?

Using an outbreak to beta-test the latest in autocratic control post-outbreak is disaster capitalism gone off the rails. In terms of public health, I would err on the side of trust and compassion, which are important epidemiological variables. Without either, jurisdictions lose their populations' support.

A sense of solidarity and common respect is a critical part of eliciting the cooperation we need to survive such threats together. Self-quarantines with the proper support—check-ins by trained neighborhood brigades, food supply trucks going door-to-door, work release and unemployment insurance—can elicit that kind of cooperation, that we are all in this together.

As you may know, in Germany with the AfD we have a de facto Nazi party with 94 seats in parliament. The hard Nazi Right and other groups in association with AfD politicians use the Corona-Crisis for their agitation. They spread (false) reports about the virus and demand more authoritarian measures from the government: Restrict flights and entry stops for migrants, border closures and forced quarantine...

Travel bans and border closures are demands with which the radical right wants to racialize what are now global diseases. This is, of course, nonsense. At this point, given the virus is already on its way to spreading everywhere, the sensible thing to do is to work on developing the kind of public health resilience in which it doesn't matter who shows up with an infection, we have the means to treat and cure them. Of

course, stop stealing people's land abroad and driving the exoduses in the first place, and we can keep the pathogens from emerging in the first place.

What would be sustainable changes?

In order to reduce the emergence of new virus outbreaks, food production has to change radically. Farmer autonomy and a strong public sector can curb environmental ratchets and runaway infections. Introduce varieties of stock and crops—and strategic rewilding—at both the farm and regional levels. Permit food animals to reproduce on-site to pass on tested immunities. Connect just production with just circulation. Subsidize price supports and consumer purchasing programs supporting agro-ecological production. Defend these experiments from both the compulsions that neoliberal economics impose upon individuals and communities alike and the threat of capital-led State repression.

What should socialists call for in the face of the increasing dynamics of disease outbreaks?

Agribusiness as a mode of social reproduction must be ended for good if only as a matter of public health. Highly capitalized production of food depends on practices that endanger the entirety of humanity, in this case helping unleash a new deadly pandemic.

We should demand food systems be socialized in such a way that pathogens this dangerous are kept from emerging in the first place. That will require reintegrating food production into the needs of rural communities first. That will require agro-ecological practices that protect the environment and farmers as they grow our food. Big picture, we must heal the metabolic rifts separating our ecologies from our economies. In short, we have a planet to win. □

Racism and Internationalism

Trump calls the Covid-19 the "Chinese virus" - a phrase echoed in US and Indian media, which has been a dog whistle triggering racist attacks on Asian people in the US and Europe, and on people of North East states in India.

But racism is not the only response the world has witnessed in the wake of the pandemic. The courage of the medical community, and their exemplary acts of internationalist solidarity, are truly inspiring.

Japan sent relief supplies to help China when it was the first country to be hit by Covid-19. The relief supply boxes

had the words of a 1300 year-old Chinese poem on them, which read "Even though we live at different places, we live under the same sky." These words of solidarity, from a country with whom China has historically had a bitter and strained relationship), moved the people of China deeply.

Likewise, when China sent doctors and relief supplies to Italy, the boxes of relief supplies and medical equipment carried the words from a Roman poem: "China sent medical masks to Italy, & wrote on the boxes a quote of a Roman poem: "We are waves from the same sea."

The legendary leader of Cuba, Fidel Castro, had once declared, "Our country doesn't drop bombs on other people. We

don't have biological or nuclear bombs. We train our doctors to help other nations." In keeping with its long tradition of generously sharing its medical expertise, the tiny Communist-led Cuba sent teams of doctors and nurses to Venezuela, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Suriname, Grenada and Italy. A news report observed, "The Caribbean island has sent its "armies of white robes" to disaster sites around the world largely in poor countries since its 1959 revolution. Its doctors were in the front lines in the fight against cholera in Haiti and against ebola in West Africa in the 2010s."

Long live internationalist solidarity – against Coronavirus, as well as against fascism, capitalism, and imperialism! □

Coronavirus Precautions and Protections Must Cover India's Most Vulnerable

The CPIML Central Committee in its meeting held at Kolkata on 14-16 March announced that it is suspending all mass mobilisations till 31 March as a precaution to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

With such a virus, all people including the most privileged are only as safe as the weakest and most deprived sections of society. India's lack of a robust public health infrastructure and affordable and quality healthcare makes India especially vulnerable. The vast majority of Indians dependent on daily wage labour and other forms of precarious employment in the informal sector will find it hard to survive with so many avenues of work being shut down. They will also find it impossible to maintain social distancing and preventive hygiene without adequate compensation and support.

The CPIML demands that the Central and State Governments

- Increase capacities for free Coronavirus testing and quarantine in Govt hospitals and health centres
- Ensure paid leave for all waged workers, and compensation and free rations for all non waged workers to facilitate social distancing.
- Announce postponement of census and other surveys, formally announce cancellation of NPR survey plans. This is important since enumerators will be potential victims and carriers of the virus.
- Urgently release all persons from detention centres,

and release all undertrials to prevent overcrowding in jails. Take steps to ensure that hygienic precautions are maintained in jails, shelter homes, relief camps and the like.

- Provide soap, water and hand sanitisers to every poor and deprived household in India. Strictly prevent hoarding of sanitisers, masks, and other essential items.
- Certain sections of people will have no choice but to continue to work, to maintain essential services. These include health workers, as well as farmers and farm labourers who need to perform harvesting and sowing work at the right time. These sections of people must be provided with all the necessary means (at public cost) to maintain hygienic precautions.

The CPIML appealed to all people to resist rumours and not succumb to panic, and to responsibly maintain all the necessary precautions.

In response to a CPIML appeal, people all over India observe the whole day of 22 March as a day of social solidarity in the face of the Corona Virus disaster. CPIML also directed its cadres to organise a sustained Stop Covid-19 drive all over the country, helping to provide relief, rations and other provisions, as well as social support networks for the most vulnerable sections of society including informal sector workers, daily wage workers, sex workers, the elderly, the sick and the self-quarantined. □

1984 to 2020: A Tale of Shared Loss and Injustice

(Kawalpreet Kaur, student and President of the Delhi Unit of AISA, reflects on the legacies of the 1984 and 2020 targeted killings in Delhi, and the lessons these legacies hold on solidarities).

On February 23rd evening the entire city was returning back from the routinely weekend rituals and the night was throwing light on massacres of the day light, my

father quietly picked up his three decade old notebook and started translating his troubled soul on the strained sheets which had become yellowish now. On being asked why he looked so exasperated, he said with his restless and anticipating eyes "Delhi Hun Phir Hilli," (Delhi shook again).

In India's capital bearded men with skull cap signified what the turban did 36 years ago. The entire pogrom (using for the lack of a

better word) looked as a rehearsal of a larger schema which seems to unfold in days to come. Violence continued unabated for three days in Delhi's Northeast area under the watch of state machinery. The entire social media was flooded with videos of such cruelty that one only wished were unreal. Videos of Delhi Police openly siding with the Hindu rioters, identification of Muslim houses, and shops for setting them on fire, the violent

cries of “*Jai Shree Ram*” is all before us.

After three days of continued violence I along with a friend decided to visit the affected areas. A local boy who I met during the anti-CAA protests helped us with the way. We visited the localities of North East Delhi namely Kabir Nagar, Kardampuri, Maujpur, Noor-e-Ilahi and Mustafabad. It was Shiv Vihar which was hit the most but we were not allowed to cross the Mustafabad- Shiv Vihar border. So we halted at Babu Nagar of Mustafabad which is closed to Shiv Vihar. Thousands of Muslims who fled Shiv Vihar region had taken shelter in Babu Nagar area and nearby places. On reaching Babu Nagar I heard a small pat on my back by an old man who looked frail and appeared to be over eighty. His long white Daadi with a prominent black mark on his forehead which was a sign of Namazi could not be missed. He invited me to his scrap collection shop and insisted me to sit on the trunk nearby which he used both as a chair and table in his old shop. With a heavy voice he asked me “*what will happen now?*” I could see the moist clouding his eyes when he went on to talk about that day when mob from Shiv Vihar was prevented from entering in Mustafabad by the local Muslims. Hindus have lost shops but not lives he insisted, “*humari to jaan ka nuksaan hai.*” On knowing that I came to deliver *Langar* here, he told me that eight big cars had come from Punjab yesterday to deliver relief materials. His voice was low. He took me back to 1984 when similar violent mobs took lives of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi. He was living in Karawal Nagar at that time and saw bloodthirsty mobs dragging Sikhs by their hair and setting them on fire. He had saved

life of at least five young Sikh men who as he recalled were smartly dressed with neatly tied turbans and daadi. He shook his head as if struggling within and said without looking at me “*they may come back for Sardars again; they don't want anyone to be above them.*”

I also met Basheer at the site. Basheer had his small *Parchoon* shop which was looted in Shiv Vihar. He managed to save his and his children's life somehow by trusting his intuitions and fleeing his home when the disturbances began. He now continues to roam in Chaman Park, Mustafabad. Not knowing what to do with his loss, he takes everyone to his shop in the hope that these English speaking ‘outsiders’ may do something. I know they wouldn't be able to do anything. Nobody can. Basheer reminds me of Sardarni Attar Kaur whose husband was burnt alive in East Delhi's, Trilokpuri in 1984. She too had been expecting justice but it has been over 36 years now. They both don't know that the language of justice has changed long ago. Today justice is small amount of compensation and general appeal to ‘move on’. Many Basheer's can be found in the locality. One such family I met had their entire house burnt. They had to flee from Shiv Vihar by making a hole in the roof of their house as the mob silently guarded their main gate waiting for them to come out. Similarly, Nusrat's brother was to get married on 9th March, 2020 and found everything burnt to ashes when they returned after three days. They have received twenty five thousand from Delhi government as ‘compensation’ for the loss suffered. Thousands of families have left Delhi from these areas leaving behind their empty and burnt houses for all of us to witness and ‘document’. Over fifty

people have died till now; many Muslims and some Hindus too have lost their lives after being hit by bullets fired by the mobs.

I am well aware that any comparison between the two may be erroneous but I can clearly remember the similar pattern between 1984 and 2020. At that time voter lists of Gurudwara elections were used to identify Sikh houses and ‘mobs’ with firearm, phosphorus powder, gas cylinders were called from different places who went from door to door killing the Sikhs. Sikhs were made to suffer indignities such as cutting of their hair and beard and taking off their turbans. My father still remembers his friends being ‘necklaced’ with rubber tyres and burnt alive in Bhajanpura. Today Muslim houses and shops were similarly identified and set on fire. Desecrated and burnt Masjids present the horrors of the pogrom. The old man whom I met in Babu Nagar could be the one who saved my father during 1984. I would like to believe that it was someone like him who saved my father and thus us. I am aware that nothing truly may change and violence on minorities may go unabated in near future too. But I am hopeful for knowing that it is for such old man like the scrap dealer who saved young Sikh men in 1984 that I am writing and speaking today. We all must strive now to become like them. Minorities must now strive to forge real solidarities with each other. Solidarities based on shared memories of loss, pain, grief and fight for justice as equals.

The elites have constantly championed that capital city is safe and nothing can happen here, clearly forgetting the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi. For them 1984 was always an act of aberration. The way they

are describing the violence on Muslims as a clash and riot between two communities is appalling. The chilling testimonies of those who took part in the mobs that rampaged Muslim houses in Northeast Delhi and set them on fire shows the sinister pattern that works in these anti-minority pogroms. The detailed admission of a proud Hindu rioter who is also a cab driver, published in Scroll that *"In 1984, my father fed the sword with blood, this time I colored it red."* His admission that his father had killed Sikhs similarly in 1984 as he did today with Muslims presents a devastating account of violence against minorities that has been going around with complete impunity. The similarity is so profound to ignore. Nobody is worried that no one has been punished in 1984 massacre till now and that meager compensation had come for the survivors only

after long and tedious court battle.

I am writing this piece being fully aware that it will change nothing. I write this to express my anger at things being same even after ages. I write this to express the shared grief and to remember what has been conveniently forgotten. I am reminded of Osborne's Jimmy Porter from his Look Back in Anger who was angry not because he felt everything changed but because he found everything to be same. I am writing this for many young Muslim men who I met in Northeast Delhi. The young boys who in their most beautiful phases of lives are forced to go to police stations and courts. They have to go around *naalas* in their locality to see which new body has been recovered. The young Muslim men who are assumed to be their own killers and are being picked up randomly by Delhi Police and charged with frivolous cases.

Looking around it feels that nothing has changed and there are no signs of it in the near future. The dark clouds give no signs of going away. I don't want to end this with a sense of despair. Behind every cloud they say there is a silver lining. We have heard stories of Sikh man saving Muslims in his neighborhood by tying them turban in Gokulpuri and helping them flee. In return we saw a Muslim groom and his friends tied turbans in Giddharbah on his nikah to honor Sikhs for helping Muslims in Northeast Delhi. We saw Sikh groups heading to affected areas with relief materials. The silver lining came with the kind of real solidarities that Sikhs have shown to the Muslims. What we need now is visible solidarities on ground. What we need now is to step on the ground for each other. Time for an unconditional solidarity has come. Sikhs have shown the way.□

'This Is Our Version of the Coronavirus. We Are Sick'

(Text of an address by **Arundhati Roy** at a gathering of writers and artists at Jantar Mantar, organised by the Jan Sanskriti Manch).

Beloved friends, comrades and my fellow writers,

This place where we are gathered today is only a short bus ride away from where four days ago a fascist mob, fired up by speeches made by members of the Ruling Party, backed up and actively assisted by the police, assured of round the clock support by a vast section of the electronic mass media, and comforted by the belief that the courts would do nothing to come in their way – mounted an armed, murderous attack on Muslims in the working class colonies of North

East Delhi.

The attack had been in the air for a while, so people were somewhat prepared, and so defended themselves. Markets, shops, homes, mosques and vehicles have been burnt down. The streets are full of stones and debris. The hospitals are full of the wounded and dying. The morgues are full of the dead. Both Muslim and Hindu, including a policeman and a young staffer of the Intelligence Bureau. Yes. People on both sides have shown themselves capable of horrifying brutality as well as unbelievable courage and kindness.

However, there can be no

equivalence here. None of this alters the fact that the attack was begun by lumpen mobs chanting "Jai Shri Ram" backed by the apparatus of this now nakedly fascist state. Notwithstanding these slogans, this is not what people like to label a Hindu-Muslim "riot". It is a manifestation of the ongoing battle between fascists and anti-fascists – in which Muslims are the first among the Fascists' "enemies". To call it a riot or a "danga", or "Left" versus "Right" or even "Right" versus "Wrong" as many are doing, is dangerous and obfuscatory.

We have all seen the videos of the police standing by and sometimes

participating in the arson. We have seen them smashing CCTV cameras, just as they did when they vandalised the Jamia Millia Islamia University library on December 15. We have seen them beat wounded Muslim men as they lay piled up against each other and force them to sing the national anthem. We know that one of those young men is dead. All the dead, wounded and devastated, Muslim as well as Hindu are victims of this regime headed by Narendra Modi, our nakedly fascist Prime Minister who himself is no stranger to being at the helm of affairs in a state when 18 years ago a massacre on a much larger scale went on for weeks.

The anatomy of this particular conflagration will be studied for years to come. But the local detail will only be a matter of historical record because the ripples based on hateful rumours fuelled on the social media have begun to eddy outwards and we can already smell more blood on the breeze. Although there have been no more killings in North Delhi, yesterday (February 29) saw mobs of people in Central Delhi chanting the slogan that built up to the attacks: "Desh ke Gaddaron ko, Goli maaron saalon ko."

Only a few days ago, the Delhi High Court Judge, Justice Muralidharan was furious with the Delhi Police for having taken no action against Kapil Mishra, former BJP MLA candidate who had earlier too used it as an election slogan. On the night of February 26, the judge was given midnight orders to take up his new assignment in the Punjab High Court. Kapil Mishra is back on the streets chanting the same slogan. It can now be used until further notice. Fun and games with judges isn't new. We know the story about Justice Loya. We may have forgotten the story of Babu

Bajrangi, convicted of participating in the killing 96 Muslims in Naroda Patiya, in Gujarat in 2002. Listen to him on YouTube: He'll tell you how "Narendra bhai" got him out of jail because of "setting" the judges.

We have learned to expect massacres such as this one before elections – they have become a sort of barbaric election campaign to polarise votes and build constituencies. But the Delhi massacre happened just days after an election, after the BJP-RSS suffered a humiliating defeat. It is a punishment for Delhi and an announcement for the coming elections in Bihar.

Everything is on record. Everything is available for everyone to see and hear – the provocative speeches of Kapil Mishra, Parvesh Verma, Union Minister Anurag Thakur, Chief Minister of UP Yogi Adityanath, the Home Minister Amit Shah and even the Prime Minister himself. And yet everything has been turned upside down – it's being made to appear as though all of India is a victim of the absolutely peaceful, mostly female, mostly – but not only – Muslim protestors who have been out on the streets for almost 75 days, in their tens of thousands, to protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The CAA, which offers a fast-track route to citizenship for non-Muslim minorities, is blatantly unconstitutional and blatantly anti-Muslim. Coupled with the National Population Register and the National Register of Citizens, it is meant to delegitimise, destabilise and criminalise not just Muslims but hundreds of millions of Indians who do not have the requisite documents – including those who are chanting "Goli Maaro Saalon Ko" today.

Once citizenship comes into question, everything comes into

question – your children's rights, your voting rights, your land rights. As Hannah Arendt said, "citizenship gives you the right to have rights." Anybody who thinks this is not the case, please turn your attention to Assam and see what has happened to twenty lakh people – Hindus, Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis. Now trouble has started between local tribes and the non-tribal population in the state of Meghalaya. There is curfew in Shillong. The state borders are closed to non-locals.

The sole purpose of the NPR-NRC-CAA is to destabilise and divide people not just in India but across the whole subcontinent. If they do indeed exist, these phantom millions of human beings who India's current Home Minister calls Bangladeshi "termites", cannot be kept in detention centres and cannot be deported. By using such terminology and by thinking up such a ridiculous, diabolic scheme, this government is actually endangering the tens of millions of Hindus who live in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who they pretend to be concerned about, but who could suffer the backlash of this bigotry emanating from New Delhi.

Look where we have ended up.

In 1947, we won independence from colonial rule that was fought for by almost everybody with the exception of our current rulers. Since then all manner of social movements, anti-caste struggles, anti-capitalist struggles, feminist struggles have marked our journey up to now.

In the 1960s, the call to revolution was a demand for justice, for the redistribution of wealth and the overthrow of the ruling class.

By the 1990s, we were reduced to fighting against the displacement of millions of people from their own lands and villages, people who became the collateral damage for

the building of a new India in which 63 of India's richest people have more wealth than the annual budget outlay for 1,200 million people.

Now we are reduced to pleading for our rights as citizens from people who have had nothing to do with building this country. And as we plead, we watch the state withdraw its protection, we watch the police get communalised, we watch the judiciary gradually abdicate its duty, we watch the media that is meant to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted do the very opposite.

Today is the 210th day since Jammu and Kashmir was unconstitutionally stripped of its special status. Thousands of Kashmiris including three former chief ministers continue to be in jail. Seven million people are living

under a virtual information siege, a novel exercise in the mass violation of human rights. On February 26, the streets of Delhi looked like the streets of Srinagar. That was the day that Kashmiri children went to school for the first time in seven months. But what does it mean to go to school, while everything around you is slowly throttled?

A democracy that is not governed by a Constitution and one whose institutions have all been hollowed out can only ever become a majoritarian state. You can agree or disagree with a Constitution as a whole or in part – but to act as though it does not exist as this government is doing is to completely dismantle democracy. Perhaps this is the aim. This is our version of the coronavirus. We

are sick.

There's no help on the horizon. No well-meaning foreign country. No UN.

And no political party that intends to win elections will or can afford to take a moral position. Because there is fire in the ducts. The system is failing.

What we need are people who are prepared to be unpopular. Who are prepared to put themselves in danger. Who are prepared to tell the truth. Brave journalists can do that, and they have. Brave lawyers can do that, and they have. And artists – beautiful, brilliant, brave writers, poets, musicians, painters and filmmakers can do that. That beauty is on our side. All of it.

We have work to do. And a world to win. □

IWD 2020

International Women's Day And the Shaheen Bagh Revolution

(This piece by Ujjaini Chatterji first appeared in The Leaflet. We reprint it with gratitude.)

The international day for women, March 8 every year is a day of global celebrations with a history of over hundred years of socio-political struggle and movements. Clara Zetkin one of the pioneers of the communist feminist movement, is remembered not just for her immense contribution in the organization of women within the communist movement but also for her immense vision on sexual freedom, society, struggle and fascism that is astoundingly relevant even today. In fact, particularly today, more than ever before.

It has been 73 years since India gained Independence. And our diplomats, politicians, textbooks and newspapers could not declare

more emphatically that India is the World's largest democracy. We have also learnt to repeat this assertion, largely without much scepticism. However, in contemporary India, the decay of civil liberties and individual freedom has begun to expose the cracks within the pillars of its democracy.

Dissenters

Professors, writers, lawyers, poets, artists, students, philosophers and thinkers are in jail without a fair trial. Activism and human rights are terms indicative of weakness and resonate anti-national activities with the Central government. Those delivering hate speeches are given police protection. Peaceful protesters are surveilled on through surveillance drones. Face recognition technology

remembers everyone entering protest sites and dissenting to the policies of the government. Our phones, text messages and conversation are often snooped by the government to keep us under watch.

Use of lethal methods like pellets, bullets to fire on protesters and students is also a daily affair. Even as I write this article, New Delhi is just recovering from a fatal massacre of the Muslim community. Judges, who deliver justice, are transferred overnight. Over 9 million jobs have been lost in the last 6 years and the economy is at an all-time low point. New codes of labour laws, diminishing rights of collective bargaining are on their way. Yet, the media has another narrative, vibrant with conviction on the government and profoundly angry on the anti-national dissenters.

Women leading protests

Sure, as of now, we have regular elections in India. Yet, we are no longer a democracy. And this international women's day is more relevant than ever to notice the vibrant re-emergence of women's struggle for freedom in India. Since, December 2019, India also witnessed the massive gathering of women from across the country to organise and protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Population Register -National Register of Citizens process.

While the protests were centred around the question of the discriminatory citizenship laws in India, they became much more than just protests. The protests by women from Shaheen Bagh inspired women across the nation to come together and build a chain of intersectional sisterhood which has now become the medium of collective democratic feminine voices of India.

Shaheen Bagh, is a piece of democratic India. Women aged twelve to ninety, are singing songs of freedom. There is a small stage. Behind the stage, there are pictures of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (feminist author and founder of the primary school for girls in Calcutta), Dr BR Ambedkar, Sarojini Naidu, Savitribai Phule, Bhagat Singh and so many other revolutionaries.

Anyone can climb the stage and speak their mind. There is no censorship but there is a rule against hate speech. One may disagree with the audience, but she must reason herself out and engage in debate. There are no winners, however. Young boys are reciting their shayaris (poetries) on liberty and equality. Stories of Saadat Manto are being narrated and the works of Ismat Chughtai have made a comeback.

At Shaheen Bagh

There is a bus stop that has been turned into a library. They call it the Fatima Sheikh-Savitribai Phule library. Anyone can donate any book and read anything there. And while they read, someone is delivering a talk about the history of women in protests in India. They are remembering the struggle of Satya Rani Chadha and Shahjahan Apa, whose relentless struggle and bond of sisterhood similarly organised women hundreds of women against dowry and influenced landmark cases and legislative reforms on dowry. Someone else is speaking about domestic violence and marital rape.

The conversations have emancipated the struggle from the spheres of a narrow Hindu Muslim debate to an open space of abundant ideas and liberation. There is no single leader of the protests. Every protestor is a leader in Shaheen Bagh. And while the talks continue and slogans of Azadi get louder in the background, a quiet artist is capturing the moment in his cartoons. Inspired by Shaheen Bagh, peaceful protests continue throughout India. This protest is now a movement.

Democracy and Constitution

Yes, we are no longer a democracy. Perhaps, we never were. 71 years ago, when India adopted the Constitution and promised justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, most Dalits, Adivasis, members of the denotified tribes and women had little understanding of its implication. However, the constitution was a beginning. It was the beginning of a revolution that would reform the dehumanizing ways of Indian society into an inclusive and democratic society.

The Constitution was also not an

end in itself. It was a milestone in the thousands of years of struggle of the disenfranchised Dalits, Adivasis and women of India. And today, the women of Shaheen Bagh and the rest of India have pioneered that vision of the constitution by upholding its most important facet of individual liberty and equality.

It is essential to understand that fascism, surveillance and curtailment of civil liberties are some of the key features of the assertion of crude masculinity of patriarchy. Patriarchy particularly distastes debate and alternate opinions and boasts of majoritarian masochism through the elimination of any diversity within the society.

As Clara Zetkin had observed, the emergence of fascism is intricately related to the economic crisis of capitalism and the decline of its institutions. She added that as the attacks and surveillance fascism escalate through racism, police brutality and xenophobia, the answer shall emerge from the working classes, as they fight to defend their unions, to save democracy and to pursue to equality. And that struggle has only begun in contemporary India.

While fascism and anti-democratic forces strike us with all their might, Indian women, from the conservative middle-class households have reclaimed their identity. No longer are these women mere mothers, daughters, or sisters. Today, each one of them is a comrade, fighting to assert their individuality, their opinions and their rights. They are demonstrating the power of dissent to the world, especially to the Indian government that is trying in every way, to break their will. This is a struggle between bloodthirsty hateful fascism and the vision of Indian Constitutionalism. □

Yes Bank Fiasco: Cronies Relish, Public Funds Perish

Saurabh Naruka

Within a few months of the PMC bank collapse, another bank-Yes Bank which is now being jokingly called 'No Bank' crumbled. But the fear in banking sector in general doesn't subside here, as most Public Sector Banks (PSBs) have posted in red in last two financial years. **The total loans written off in last financial year by banks stood at Rs 2.54 lakh Crore, 20% of all their NPAs. (Economic Times) As per earlier report combined bank write off between 2014 and 2018 stood at Rs 5.7 lakh crore worth of bad loans. Thus total bank write offs from 2014 when Modi Govt assumed power to last financial year for which data is available stands at staggering Rs 8.24 Lakh Crore, mega loot which should draw people's attention. For PSBs loans written of is four times of their own write-offs in 2014-15. (Business Standard).**

Total Write offs under Modi dispensation stands at staggering Rs 8.24 lakh Crore

Write offs jumped four times for PSBs under Modi regime

The further dipping of economic growth to 4.7% in third quarter of current financial year would certainly stress the pains of banking and financial sector as many otherwise genuinely good assets would become NPA's especially in small and medium segments due to economic downturn. Tanking of stock market at record historic speed now would only

make situation worse as investors flee for safety of capital. Corona pandemic would also certainly affect the economy now amidst news of complete shutdown doing the rounds and it is in this overall backdrop that what happened at Yes Bank should be analyzed and not as one-off incident. The news certainly is not isolated in banking and non-banking financial sector as we have seen crisis of IL & FS, Diwan housing, IDBI, Laxmi Vilas Bank besides PMC hitting the headlines only in span of last one year. Yes Bank fiasco is both fraud in lending's at end of management of the bank headed by Rana Kapoor, who is now under arrest and face criminal charges for financial irregularities, cheating etc., but more importantly structural and regulatory failure at end of RBI, Govt, auditors etc, who are supposed to push red danger button before things go out of hand.

Yes Bank third quarter numbers: Worse than what was imagined

As expected the third quarter results of Yes Bank which came out after govt declared restructuring plan, underlines the severity of crisis in the bank. **For the quarter ended December 2019, Yes Bank reported a loss of Rs 18,564 Crore compared to a profit of Rs 1001 Crore in the same quarter last year. The bank's net loss would have been wider at Rs 24,778 Crore in the third quarter, if it weren't for a tax write back of Rs 6,214 crore.** The bank reported a surge in bad loan which led to a jump

in provisions that needs to be set aside against the soured debt. **Gross NPA's rose to Rs 40,709.20 Crore, or 18.87 percent of the bank's total loan book in December quarter.** (Bloomberg quint)

Union Cabinet has approved a restructuring plan for Yes Bank but success of any restructuring plan would essentially depend on success in recovery of doubtful loans and winning back confidence of depositors. **It is here that we need to understand the reasons of failure in repayments on part of borrowers, recovery process, substantial increase in write-offs and bank frauds which has been taking place under Modi dispensation for banking sector in general and Yes Bank in particular.** It is also essential that we analyze the restructuring plan from point of view of innocent defaulters as they are the worst hit without any fault of theirs in any of such banking fiasco.

YES BANK:

Loss of whopping Rs 18,564 Crore in December quarter

Gross NPA's stand at Rs 40,709 Crore, around 19% of total loan book

Loan Book of Yes Bank jumped from Rs 55,000 Crore in 2014 to whopping Rs 2,41,000 Crore in 2019

Just Anil Ambani and Subhash Chandra in total defaulted to the tune of around Rs 21,000 Crore

Compromised Credit Culture in form of political impunity, reason for record increase in NPA's

The protagonist of Modi Govt has been arguing that the NPA's are legacy issues bestowed upon them due to unhindered lending during UPA era. While this is purely an attempt to avoid political responsibility, it also fails to take into account the fact that NPA by definition arises in first place when any installments for loan repayment remains unpaid for more than ninety days. One need to raise the pertinent question that why the same financial assets which was being repaid earlier as per the agreed terms started remaining unpaid when Modi government resumed power to fix accountability? It can be for two reasons- First the genuine one where the assets which were otherwise good assets became bad due to economic downturn attributed to disastrous economic policies like demonetization and GST of Modi Govt. Whose political responsibility is this if good assets became bad because of this reason? Second is case of willful big defaulters who sees that the new Modi government will give them political cover even if they willfully default on repayments of loan. They are the once for whom Ex-Governor of RBI Raghuram Rajan wants action and whose list he submitted to PMO as early as 2015 in Modi Govt tenure. It failed to incite any action on part of Govt who instead of taking action against them kept on insisting even after Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) orders that they can't even reveal names of these willful defaulters what to talk about recoveries. It is such actions which give hints to the willful big defaulters that the government is on their side and they have nothing to worry. The

resultant compromised credit culture due to political impunity can also be smelled from record increase in bank frauds during Modi era. It is not only names of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi that has become household names as they escape easily under patronage of Modi Govt but the record increase in bank frauds which highlights that fraudsters have nothing to worry. The bank frauds jumped exponentially to reach Rs 1.13 lakh Crore in first half of FY 2020 while it was pegged at mere Rs 10,170 Crore for whole year in 2013-14 when Modi Govt came to power. Its more than 10 fold increase even when the data for whole year is still not available for current fiscal. (Economic times). The Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) under Narendra Modi's flagship scheme Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana(PMMY) saw a jump of 126% in just one year. The NPAs of loans issued under the programme leapt Rs 9,204.14 crore in FY 19 from Rs 7,277.31 crore in March 2018 to reach Rs 16,481.45 crore in March 2019.

It's the combination of all this which explains record fivefold increase in NPA's from 2014 to 2019 under Modi Govt to cross Rs 10 lakh Crore in 2018 only to improve marginally in 2019. It's not only at stage of repayment but also at recovery stage that the institutional system in place put by Modi dispensation in form of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and National Law Company Tribunal (NLCT), that give willful defaulters reasons to rejoice and behavioral tendencies to default on repayments.

NPA's jumped five times to cross Rs 10 lakh Crore under Modi regime

Bank Frauds jumped more than ten times to reach unprecedented Rs 1.13 lakh

Crore just in first half of FY 2020

NPAs under Mudhra stands at Rs 16, 481 Crore

IBC & NLCT: Banks run on depositor's money take haircut, willful defaulters come clean

Under recovery process at play presently under much touted structural measures it's the PSBs and banks in general, who runs on depositors money, that are being forced to take big haircut (financial jargon for write-offs) in such recoveries in name of speedy and streamlining of process. While govt wants us to believe that recovery rate at 43% has improved in last year, the truth is that this is half side of the story. **The sheer scale of write offs are such that the PSB's and banks in general will be forced to take a big haircut. As per business standard the cases referred to IBC increased 27 percent in volume while tripling in value in last financial year. In FY 19 around Rs 8.15 lakh crore worth of stressed assets were involved in recovery process up from Rs 2.7 lakh crore in FY 2017-18.** Moreover the claimed marginal improvement to 43% in FY 19 was one off in nature due to improved comparative recovery in two-three big cases because of specific nature of them while in general the recovery rates remained low with banks forced to take big haircuts. **After that it came down to just 12% in last December quarter of this financial year while it was 34% in quarter ending in September (Economic Times).**

In FY19 Rs 8.15 lakh Crore worth of stressed assets under new IBC regime, up from Rs 2.17 lakh crore in FY18

Recovery rates stands at just 12% for quarter ending in December, 2019

The much celebrated earlier identification of NPA's and initiation of timely recovery process then merely becomes a pretext to force the PSB's to give up voluntarily on their legal debt claims while taking a big haircut, the brunt of which would obviously be borne by public at large whose money is being given up. In name of clean balance sheets for banks and debtors what is being siphoned off is public money and legal right to recover debt from willful defaulters. It won't be out of order to point out that as per IBC, 2016, once proceedings have been initiated against a borrower under the IBC, the Sarfaesi Act cannot be invoked against them which have much stringent provisions for recovery and criminal action against willful defaulters. Similarly, if an errant borrower was being pursued under the Sarfaesi Act before the IBC came into effect, and the lender now wants to initiate proceedings under the IBC, the Sarfaesi proceedings would cease to apply to the borrower. **It's here that cronies close to ruling dispensation will get a big pie of the forced haircut while coming out clean after completion of the celebrated timely and speedy recovery process! Can you imagine any bank giving up voluntarily on say even half of amount of home loans and car loans for small time genuine borrowers in practice even if they fail to pay EMI's say due to loss of employment?**

Claim of improvement in NPAs only half truth

Despite tall claims by Central Govt that 2019 seems as turning around year for banking sector in form of a little improved 'recovery rates' and

lowering of NPA's, the risk of full fledged financial crisis persists. *The NPA's in banking sector continues to hover at dangerous level and a little improvement that is talked about is mainly because of moratorium put on classification of debt of small and medium enterprises as NPAs. It is this sector which has taken maximum hit due to disastrous policies of demonetization and GST and its only when moratorium on classification of debt as NPA's is lifted for them in March 2020, unless extended, that the real picture of state of NPA's can emerge.* While on one hand the moratorium is in name of helping small and medium businesses by not classifying their assets as NPA's, the other side of the story is that it's the big businesses and big corporates who gets the first opportunity to milk the recovery process at IBC and NLCT. *It will result in a situation that willful big corporate defaulters abuse the process while small and medium sector borrowers who genuinely defaulted due to effect of economic downturn on its business are denied opportunity of debt settlement opportunity.*

Innocent depositors most hard hit

As happens in every such fiasco it's the innocent depositors' who keeps their hard earned money in banks, keeping faith on regulatory process of RBI and Govt in place, who takes the brunt while the cronies and willful defaulters sees opportunity to emerge out of it with 'clean balance sheets'. The story of Yes bank depositors' is no different. While 21 lakh of ordinary depositors faced moratorium on withdrawal as they found out that there deposits were used to lend loans without basic due diligence by management while the regulatory bodies were seeing other way when all this was happening with

their money in last few years. **They now found out that as much as Rs 21,000 Crore are stuck with Anil Ambani group (Rs 12,800 Crore) who was favoured during Rafale deal by Modi Govt and Subhash Chandra owned Essel group (Rs 8,400 Crore) which control Zee news, widely believed as mouthpiece of BJP government.** It is being told that ten big defaulters debt amount to whopping Rs 36,000 Crore and besides two mentioned above includes names such as DHFL Group, IL&FS, Jet Airways, B M Khaitan Group, Omkar Realtors (Deccan herald). Many of these names were already making news for wrong reasons and bad financial health in past but were able to avail credit from Yes Bank. **The loan book of Yes bank jumped from around Rs 55,000 Crore in 2014 to staggering Rs 2, 41,000 Crore in March 2019 within span of five years with most dramatic rise coming in two years post demonetization with jump of more than Rs 1 lakh crore in loan book with no one in RBI and Govt raising the alarms. It is these unrestrained lending's which have now become stressed with fear of financial loss hanging on innocent depositors.**

Restructuring plan: Use of public money to bail out banks without fixing responsibility on willful defaulters

The protagonist of Modi govt claims that depositor's money is safe but who is footing the bill of this safety which should be asked? The depositor's money became insecure in first place due to culture of political impunity enjoyed by willful defaulters but the restructuring plan in place hovers around public funded SBI headed consortium of investors to

bail out Yes Bank with SBI picking up 49 percent stake at Rs 7,250 Crore. Other private sector players such as Axis Bank Ltd., ICICI Bank Ltd. Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bandhan Bank and Federal Bank as well as housing finance company Housing Development Finance Corporation Ltd have also approved investments in Yes Bank. But its pertinent and ironical to note here that at the same time when SBI is being asked to foot the bailout bill the bank slashes interest rates on saving and term deposits. **Thus loss of Rs 6,754 Crore in interest to 44 Crore of ordinary savings and term deposit holders of SBI would now be utilized to fund Rs 7,250 Crore bailout investments in Yes bank,** the need of which arose due to likes of cronies like Anil Ambani and Subhash Chandra defaulting on loans from Yes Bank. This is not first time that public money of SBI which is being used to bail out erring private sector bank as govt gears its act to rescue depositors to address crisis. Last year it was LIC who was forced to put in Rs 21,000 Crore in IDBI. This amounts to use of public money in name of securing particular set of depositors while the willful defaulters would be in position to milk the cake through IBC and NLCT route when recovery process would be unleashed for defaults in such failing banks including Yes bank. The restructuring for banking sector as a whole to address NPA crisis has taken the form of recapitalization from budget resources to the tune of around Rs 2.5 lakh Crore from 2015 which is obviously tax payer's money. The situation had become so worse that to balance the budget and foot recapitalization bill the govt has even drawn on reserves of RBI.

The deposits of Yes Bank had already plummeted in last year as news of bad financial health was doing the rounds. It is difficult to imagine how depositor's confidence would be regained now when the news of complete fiasco is now in open. The depositors are likely to withdraw money for safety once moratorium is lifted. **The ideal thing even in such crisis would have been that SBI should have completely taken over Yes Bank as was practiced earlier in case of Global Trust Bank so that with brand of SBI depositors of Yes bank would have felt secured and their interest completely protected.** It's even more essential when one takes into account the fact that PMC depositors have still not being paid off and they even failed to secure relief from Bombay High Court. Legally also the depositors insurance extend only to cover of Rs 1 lakh of their deposits in each bank.

Public money utilized for restructuring due to banking crisis:

LIC puts Rs 21000 Crore in IDBI

SBI puts Rs 7,450 Crore in YES BANK

Slashing of Interest rates to fund investments in Yes Bank costs ordinary depositors Rs 6,754 Crore

Recapitalization of banks through budgetary resources reached Rs 2.5 Lakh Crore

Conclusion:

The Yes Bank and banking crisis in general has its roots in crony capitalism and neo-liberal policy framework. **Recapitalisation and bail out of banks has become**

a cover for stealing of people's money through multiple routes - claiming RBI reserves several times, forcing PSBs and LIC to invest in faltering banks, direct use of tax payers' money through budgetary resources for capital infusion, bleeding the depositors through steady cuts in deposit rates, multiple charges for banking services etc. This all is in essence only to compensate and make up for the loans given out of common people's deposits that corporates and cronies have happily walked away either as NPAs, unrecovered loans, write offs, or even through pure fraud, and all with full political impunity.

The real intention of recently announced govt plan of mergers of PSBs is also to utilize the public money and depositors' money in most 'efficient' way to achieve the objective of 'clean balance sheets' of willful defaulters to safeguard them at time of economic crisis while legally writing off their debts in name of timely settlements and recovery process. The government's want that PSBs run on public money- both of depositors and people in general who pay taxes to govt- mainly bear the brunt of defaults by big corporates and thinks that merged 'strong' PSBs would be in better position to survive these forced haircuts. It eventually plans to privatize them as banks with better logistics, integrated wide branch network, lean organization with reduced staff strength after mergers and package them as lucrative offers to international financial capital and big MNCs and Corporate houses as banks with 'clean' balance sheets. But what in essence is cleaned is public money in general, depositors money and employment at PSBs as willful big defaulters come out clean out of the crisis with help of IBC and NLCT. It's unlikely that it would

be any different for Yes bank as the recovery process in place is available to defaulters of Yes Bank too like other defaulters. The essence of the policy framework in place thus is to

push the burden of economic crisis on people's throat and eventual privatization of PSBs as restructuring of financial and banking sector- part of second generation reforms- with

demonetization earlier only providing the much needed liquidity in banks to keep them float during pressing times. Cronies in end relish, while public funds (Jandhan) perish! □

The Countrywide Upsurge against CAA-NRC-NPR: What We have achieved and What Comes Next

Arindam Sen

In the first part of this article we traced the genesis of the movement and discussed its most distinctive demands and slogans. In this concluding part, let us talk about its salient features, key achievements and long term perspective before taking up the question as to how the movement must be carried forward in the changed situation marked by the Delhi pogrom and the Corona pandemic.

Fine Blend of Spontaneity, Creativity and Networking

The People's festival of protests has been impressive not just for the scale of mobilizations, which comprised people from all communities, and on many occasions ran into tens of thousands and even lakhs. Equally noteworthy is the stamina and determination both at individual levels (recall the young mother at Shaheen Bagh whose small child died because of exposure to biting cold night after night, but who continued to participate in the sit- in "for the sake of my country and my people") and as group initiatives (look at the sustained protest at the numerous Shaheen Baghs).

Another strong point of the mass uprising lies in the diverse creative ways individuals and groups have been contributing to it on their own initiatives. For example, the landmark big map of India in the

original Shaheen Bagh, set in an iron frame with the words "We the people of India Reject CAA NPR NRC" inscribed on it, was created and erected by a group of artists from different universities with the help of local volunteers. Similarly, the Fatima Sheikh-Savitribai Phule library-cum-reading space was started by one young post-graduate from AMU with some forty books only. Very soon, the collection crossed a thousand books while sitting arrangements were made by enthusiasts who appreciated this endeavour for spreading knowledge as part of the movement. In addition to the Constitution of India – which happens to be the most sought-after book and is available in many copies – titles by Gandhi, Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Nehru, Tagore, A K Azad as well as later-day authors like Arundhati Roy, Gauri Lankesh are also available, and so are books by the likes of Hitler and Savarkar. The task of systematically running the library has been taken up by young activists and local people. Visitors from certain other sites were so impressed that they wanted to set up libraries in their own areas. In response, young people including AISA activists in Shaheen Bagh came forward to help spread the People's Library campaign and thereby developed new contacts also.

This is how - - and there are

any number of instances like these - - the movement has been sustaining and expanding itself. The absence of any Party banner also facilitates spontaneous and energetic participation of those who, for whatever reasons, tend to avoid partizan programs. Moreover, since everybody is equally entitled to issue a call or initiate and event, any major development – for example the attack on Jamia and JNU or even a threat - - prompt the protesters/ supporters of the movement to get actively involved through networking on social media. Thus it was that the seven-day long cultural fest was conceived and launched at the original Shaheen Bagh in early February, within hours after the Hindu Sena threatened a counter mobilization at the protest site.

The all India Movement has no command structure, but certainly has a unity of purpose and a set of common policies. The protesters should, under all circumstances, try and remain peaceful. Even in verbal communications, it should never slip into hate mongering and the 'tu - tu mayn mayn' (aggressive name-calling and brazen boastfulness) that characterize much of political discourse today. The focus of the protest should never shift from the single point agenda of opposition to the CAA-NRC-NPR scheme and allegiance to the Constitution. No political

party or leader should be allowed to dominate the autonomous agitation or to use it for narrow partisan interests.

Participants in joint mobilizations without any organisational banners willingly follow these norms. On the other hand, parties/platforms/ organisations hold their independent programs under their own banners and in whatever ways they choose to. But they too try and abide by the general understanding of the broader movement and never fail to express warm solidarity with other wings or components of the movement.

A very broad unity and coordination amidst a rich diversity of initiatives, taken by hitherto unconnected individuals and groups, has thus emerged as a suitable template for the progress of the movement at this stage. It matches the mood of the masses, particularly the young people, provides enthusiasts with ample free space for creative involvement, and facilitates maximum mobilization.

Three Icons or Rallying Points

Three icons, most prominently visible and audible in every protest everywhere, have emerged as symbols of the United resistance of all Indians against the deceptive, discriminatory and deceitful CAA-NPR- NRC matrix. These are: the national flag, the national anthem and the Constitution of India or more precisely, the Preamble to the Constitution.

All three icons are closely associated with - - in fact they are product of - - our glorious freedom struggle. All three are hundred percent secular and equally inspiring. However, the Preamble is of special importance. It leaves nothing to symbolism or allusion: in direct and concise terms it lays down the key ideals the Republic

of India stands for and the basic principles of the supreme law of the land - - to which every other law/ rules /regulations/ government policies etc. must conform. Since the CAA-NPR-NRC project as a whole militates against those ideals and principles, protesters assert in every public reading of the Preamble, it must be withdrawn or rejected lock, stock and barrel.

This assertion leads the protesters, and all who hear them, to a novel and profound realization. If we the people of India are the supreme authority of the land, then who are Modi- Shah to question our bona fides as citizens of India? How dare they decide who among us will have to leave the country or end up in detention camps despite already having official documents like Epic and Aadhar cards? This is simply not acceptable. The anti-constitutional CAA - NPR - NRC project must be revoked permanently and in its entirety, not partially or just for the time being. And all the more so because the scheme strikes at the heart of the fundamental principles on which the Republic stands : Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Such is the courage of conviction that lies at the root of the exemplary tenacity of protesters.

The Key Achievements

First and foremost, the movement has compelled the party in power to beat at least a tactical retreat on the citizenship front. The central government now says that 'so far' there has been no decision about NRC. It is also soft pedaling on NPR. Under the impact of the movement, legislative assemblies in many opposition-ruled as well as NDA-ruled States have passed resolutions expressing different degrees of opposition to the contentious project.

Clearly, there is a lot of trickery and duplicity involved here. The

unanimous resolution adopted in Bihar Assembly is a case in point. Its highlights are: (a) there is no need for NRC in Bihar at present (which means all options remain open for the future) (b) NPR will be implemented, albeit in the 2010 format (which can very well be used as a basis for NRC) and (c) no opposition to the CAA, since the matter is pending before the Supreme Court. The Bihar resolution – and those in most other state assemblies – should therefore be read as an important but partial victory of the movement, which remains to be carried to its logical culmination, that is, total and unconditional revocation of the entire project.

It is interesting to note that BJP leaders and ranks on the ground are also feeling the heat of the agitation and changing tack. For example, the BJP-dominated Selu Municipal Council in Parbhani district in Maharashtra has unanimously passed a resolution against the implementation of CAA and NRC.

Secondly, it is thanks to the movement that even the most virulent Sanghi propaganda has failed to polarize society to the extent they desired. This is quite evident from the recent election results in Delhi. For all its hateful communal campaigning, the BJP managed to register only a small increase in vote share and seats compared to the 2015 assembly election.

Another precious contribution of the movement has been the emergence of India's largest minority community as an advanced contingent in the struggle to defend democracy and the Constitution against fascist onslaughts. Casting aside the sense of isolation and frustration that was thrust upon them over the decades and particularly during the Modi Regime, Indian Muslims have hit the streets in great numbers, with the Constitution and the national flag in their

hands, to fight for a secular cause that concerns all Indians. On the collision course against the powers that be, they have found a reassuring source of strength and confidence in the respect and camaraderie extended by fellow fighters from other communities. The militant unity thus forged, further bolstered by active participation of Dalit contingents, is no doubt a powerful bulwark against the divisive policies of the majoritarian state.

Arguably the most significant part of this democratic awakening is the independent assertion of Muslim women from all backgrounds: illiterate/semi-literate housewives and working women, students and educated women, activists, intellectuals and professionals and so on. The movement has inspired and empowered them to break free from patriarchal and religious restrictions. They are now speaking for themselves and playing leading roles not only in Shaheen Baghs but in rallies and marches too. To be sure, this is a very significant contribution of this agitation to the broader democratic movement and women's movement in our country.

Every historic movement leaves its mark on art and literature, and the present one is no exception. National award winning lyricist Varun Grover's new creation "Hum kagaj nahi dikhaenge" (we will not show our documents) for example expresses the defiant spirit of the agitation with such power and eloquence that it has become a marching song of protesters throughout the country. And then you have the good old "Hum Dekhenge" (we shall come to see), composed by Faiz Ahmad Faiz in 1979 targeting the authoritarian Pak President Zia-Ul Haq, resurfacing with a new connotation and new relevance in the current Indian context. It has been translated into almost

all major Indian languages and has acquired the status of a new national song, so to say, a song that accurately captures the people's revolutionary aspirations in the struggle against Indian fascism. Mention must also be made of activist Amir Aziz's spoken word pieces like "Sab kuchh yaad rakhha jayega" (everything will be remembered) and "Yeh hain Jamia ki ladkiyan" (here are the Jamia girls).

In addition to poems and songs, the movement's cultural harvest includes many other art forms like street plays, paintings, stand-up comedies and video clips uploaded on the YouTube. Widely shared on social media, they carry the message of the movement far and wide and serve to inspire and recruit new activists. The explosion in revolutionary democratic art and literature is no doubt a major achievement of the popular movement.

While building on the achievements, we must try and overcome certain weaknesses also. For example, we need to focus more on mobilising non-Muslim working people and democratic forces with persuasive and painstaking campaigning. Special attention must be paid to mobilization of social groups who are vulnerable to RSS-BJP propaganda, such as sections of Bengali Hindu immigrants who had migrated from East Pakistan/Bangladesh during or after Partition and who tends to have a soft corner for CAA.

Manuvadi Hindu Rashtra or Secular Democratic Republic?

As we know, right from 1857 the national liberation movement in our country developed on the strength of a robust Hindu Muslim unity. That was the main trend of the times. But there was also an opposite undercurrent of

communal animosity, which was cunningly fostered by the British Raj and finally took the shape of two nations theories of Savarkar-Golwalkar on one hand and of M A Jinnah on the other. The first trend - the united struggle against colonialism - gave us our independence, and the second, the trauma of Partition. But the Partition remained incomplete in that a very large number of Mohammedans chose not to migrate from India, while a large number of Hindus opted for staying back in Pakistan, East Pakistan in the main. The Sanghi dream of constructing a great Hindu homeland and a pure Hindu rashtra as a counterweight against Islamic Pakistan was thus fulfilled only in part. As the Hindutva brigade see it, the project remained incomplete in two respects. First, a large number of Hindus remained trapped as a persecuted lot in the neighbouring Muslim-majority countries and second, a huge number of Muslims, who are as a rule anti-national and pro-Pakistan, lived on in 'our' land as a pampered lot. Now, firmly saddled in power, the Sanghis are trying to solve the first problem with the CAA, which they claim would provide all Hindus, including those who have come from and will come from Muslim majority countries in our neighbourhood, with an easy route to registered citizenship. And to solve the second problem they have plans to press into service the NPR-NRC mechanism, which would render a large chunk of Indian Muslims stateless and liable to be deported or put into detention camps as cheap prison labour. This is how the Sanghi dispensation is trying to bring to consummation the unfinished task of partition based on their two nations theory. This is how they are trying to build a de facto Hindu rashtra in a Hindu homeland through an Indian version of ethnic cleansing.

It is against this whole sinister design that the current agitation is directed. It has already gone a long way in healing the open wounds of partition by bringing Hindus and Muslims together in an all India political struggle. At the core of the struggle lies a choice between two options. The Sangh Parivar is desperate to accomplish its original mission of a Hindu Nation in a majoritarian state, which is by definition Manuvadi, i. e., anti-women, anti-Dalit, anti-Muslim. On the other side of the battle line are these persecuted underdogs of Indian society, out on the streets with other fellow Indians to reclaim the secular democratic republic where everyone will enjoy the same dignity and freedom, rights and opportunities. In fact such a just, free, egalitarian and compassionate society is what our freedom struggle aspired to achieve, but never achieved in full. That unfinished task the protesters are now trying to fulfill, just as the Sangh Parivar with its divisive policies is conspiring to complete the unfinished business of Partition.

With this long term perspective on the movement, we need to think over and decide how best to carry it forward today in keeping with changes in objective situation.

In the Aftermath of Delhi Pogrom and Corona Outbreak

Over the past one month the movement has continued despite virulent hate campaigns, state repression and finally an anti-Muslim pogrom designed to crush it in its citadel. In addition to rallies, sit-in protests, seminars (such as the one in Patna on March 5, which proved highly effective in mobilising and interacting with a wide range of social and political forces) etc., certain new forms of protest have been devised. In Odisha for example, as many as

402 gram sabhas in 15 districts have passed resolutions urging the state government to stop the implementation of CAA and pull out from the NPR exercise. A memorandum was also sent to the Chief Minister and the district collectors of these districts. The move was organised by social organisations like Campaign for Survival with Dignity and Odisha Nari Samaj. Similar initiatives are being taken by us in Bihar and some other states.

The international Women's Day this year saw women across India coming out on the streets rejecting the CAA-NRC-NPR project. AIPWA and other women's organisations raised their voice against Sanghi attempts to drown the current protest movement in state-sponsored violence and demanded exemplary punishment for the culprits. In many of these programs rural and urban working women including scheme workers played a very prominent and active role. At Mansa the Sambidhan Bachao Manch (Save the Constitution Forum) organised a massive protest. Addressing the gathering, former JNU president Geeta Kumari said that the women's struggle against the new citizenship laws and rules are also a part of their own struggle for equality, dignity and freedom. The Indian women's struggle also found a strong echo beyond the borders of the country. In London for example, a vibrant contingent of women marched in solidarity with Shaheen Bagh with slogans like " Shaheen Bagh we stand with you, you won't let the fascists through".

Following the pogrom in Delhi, which was clearly a calculated move to force the protesters into submission, our party and mass platforms took various initiatives according to the demands of the situation, as reported elsewhere in this issue. Special mention must be made of Young India – a coordination committee of

over hundred student and youth organisations - - which held peace marches, organised relief work and peace Committees and at the same time carried forward the movement through a month-long campaign culminating in the Delhi Chalo rally on March 3.

By the middle of March, the rapidly spreading Corona infection became the single most important concern for the whole nation, pushing all other issues behind. Physical distancing and avoiding large gatherings became absolutely imperative. In the larger interests of society, protesters at Washermenpet (Chennai) temporarily suspended the sit-in from 18 March and declared their resolve to resume the same as and when the situation permitted. On 21 March civil society group United Against Hate urged people in Delhi to hold up placards against CAA-NRC-NPR from balconies, windows and gates during the so-called 'Janta Curfew' and raise slogans at 5 pm. On 22 March, Shaheen Bagh (Delhi) adopted an innovative form of protest. Only five ladies sat on the protest site with sufficient distance between themselves, and put out the footwear of other protesters as a symbol of their presence. In Bihar, Shaheen Bagh activists themselves became fully involved in fighting the deadly pandemic.

Today the drastically changed situation demands that the movement against the Sanghi citizenship project be pursued as an integral part of the wider anti-fascist pro-democracy movement. It needs to be linked up, in a phased manner, with other pressing issues such as fighting the Corona menace and the gross inadequacy of official response, the exacerbated banking crisis in the wake of the Yes Bank episode, and so on. The battle will be long and hard, but in the end victory will be ours. □

Tamil Nadu Round Up

A state cadre convention of the party on 20 October at Guduvanchery (Chennai – Kanchipuram) decided to undertake a campaign to 'Go to the Masses' and also passed a set of resolutions for struggle. It was decided to organise 'People's Rights Rallies' in various districts and was aimed at generating initiatives at grassroots level against the anti-people Edappadi Palanisamy led AIADMK government. A booklet explaining CAA-NPR-NRC was published in Tamil and widely distributed.

People's Rights Rally

The rally at Pudukottai against CAA, NRC and NPR was the first ever major protest in the series. It was held on 18 Dec, the memorial day of our beloved comrade Vinod Mishra. Thousands of people, particularly rural poor, including some from neighbouring districts of Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, Karur, Dindigul, Madurai and also Puducherry participated in the rally with great enthusiasm and zeal. The rallyists thundered that they would boycott NPR and demanded revocation of CAA and NRC. Similar protest rallies and demonstrations were also held at Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Villupuram, Chennai – Kanchipuram, Cuddalore, Salem, Kumarapalayam (Namakkal) and Coimbatore. Combined mobilisation of eight districts and Pudukottai surpassed - in fact, it was more than doubled - all our previous records in the recent past in the state.

Cuddalore – Unleashing Initiatives

The rally at Virudhachalam in Cuddalore district on 12 December 2019 was quite encouraging because there was not much of activity over there for more than two years. The

campaign to go to the grassroots, with people's issues and with a task of creating awareness on CAA-NRC-NPR, kindled and unleashed grassroots initiatives. Rural poor marched to the Sub-Collector's office defying prohibitory orders by the Edappadi Palanisamy led AIADMK government. Moreover, the campaign also became an inspiration and various other demonstrations also sprang up on basic issues of the people in the run up to the demonstration on 12th. We have also won a Panchayat Ward Member seat in the district.

Carrying the Panchami Jyothi – The Struggle for Panchami Land

Chennai–Kanchi districts organised mass protests at Guduvanchery on 15th Dec. demanding restoration of Panchami land to Dalits by enacting a special legislation in the assembly. Housing for unorganised workers also was another major demand. The Panchami Jyothi, carried from Thiruporur, the land of struggle for Panchami land, where a protestor became a martyr as police opened fire, was handed over to youth leaders by Com Kavita Krishnan, the Politbureau member of the party. The same was to be handed over to the party GS Comrade Dipankar at Pudukottai on 18 Dec. In addition to organising an independent campaign along with joint ones, we held a demonstration on 11th March as a part of state call to observe a Protest Day against Modi's attack on rights of citizenship.

Coimbatore: People's Rights Convention – Broadening Horizons

On the same day, 15 Dec, a 'People's Rights Convention' was held at Coimbatore. The people struggling

for housing rights and belonged to our Slum dwellers organisation joined in good strength. We could also witness workers from various areas and categories, including loading and unloading workers of Civil Supplies Corporation, joining in good numbers. The convention also decided to intensify struggles of sanitation workers and also slum dwellers. Resolutions were also passed against privatisation of water supply system to private players, mainly the MNC, Suez.

Subsequent to the convention, sanitation workers meetings were organised in various localities covering more than 1000 workers. The spontaneous two days strike and agitation on 9th March against the Coimbatore Municipal Corporation on the issue of regularisation and unrealistic reservation in appointment of sanitation workers was jointly led by us, CITU and other Dalit organisations. The Collector and the Municipal administration agreed to increase wages to Rs. 550 per day, 16500 per month, from the present wages of Rs --- per day, no victimisations, forwarding a recommendation to state government regularise contract sanitation workers, etc., but is yet to give the same in writing.

Our Slum Dwellers organisation in the city has not only fought for demands of housing pattas and sites but also expressed support to struggling Shaheen Baghs of Coimbatore. Recently, slum dwellers thwarted an attempt by the administration for eviction in several slums, including the ones at Kumarasamy Colony, etc. The recent struggle against disconnection of electric power to slums is also very significant.

Kanyakumari - Conflict with Communal Fascists

Kanyakumari witnessed a massive demonstration on 16 Dec. with an overwhelming presence of women, construction workers and various other sections of the unorganised workforce. The demonstration organised in the midst of Panchayat elections was well attended. The demonstration raised several basic issues of people, including housing, in addition to their opposition to CAA-NRC and NPR. We have also won a Panchayat Ward member. Our intervention in the struggle against CAA-NRC-NPR is quite significant because our comrades played an active role in the protests that attracted thousands of minorities and also Hindus. This is one district where Sanghis are actively against us because of our anti-fascist thrust and have also filed complaints against us.

Tirunelveli – Revival of Beedi Workers Struggle

Beedi workers, construction workers, washermen and Loading and Unloading workers of Civil Supplies Corporation marched on the streets of Tirunelveli on 17 Dec. demanding a minimum wage of Rs 1000 per day, abolition of middle-men – contract system, etc. Good number of women, mainly Muslim workers, also joined the protest. This is the district where we lost our Comrade Mariappan some years back in the course of struggles of washermen in the district. Our beedi work is under revival course and was quite evident in the demonstration.

Villupuram – Asserting Agricultural Labour

Agricultural labourers and NREGA workers marched on the streets of Ulundurpettai (Villupuram

district) demanding minimum wage, 365 days work and also house sites. They also registered their opposition to Citizenship Amendment Act that questioned the very existence of poor workers. We are consistently active in the district and Villupuram is one of the strongholds of our work among agricultural labourers in addition to Delta districts, Thanjavur, Nagapattinam and Pudukottai. The struggle against corruption in government machinery, against the high-handed attitude of police machinery, etc., has been a regular component of our work here.

Salem: Demanding Ownership Rights

In Salem, our work among slum dwellers, particularly among those residing in houses of Slum Clearance Board demanding ownership has assumed significance, next to our consistent struggles and a temporary victory regarding 8-lane corridor. The government says that they have mortgaged all houses under Slum Clearance Board to the World Bank and they can get it back only if they repay the loans to World Bank. Despite the willingness of the people to pay some money and get ownership rights, in spite of willingness on the part of local administration to do the same, the central and state governments that mortgaged the houses are not willing to give ownership rights to the dwellers who reside there for more than a decade. Slum Dwellers held a massive demonstration on 23 Dec defying prohibitory orders in force. We also have significant presence among powerloom workers, construction workers and such other unorganised workforce in the district, in addition to our influence among small farmers under AIKM.

Powerloom Workers and Housing Issue

But for bonus and wage issues in powerloom centres, Kumarapalayam and Pallipalayam, no organisation is capable enough to organise powerloom workers. But, it was surprising to witness more than 500 workers demonstrating under the banner of DPLU-AICCTU-CPIML demanding housing on 24 Dec. Democratic Powerloom Labour Union (DPLU) affiliated to AICCTU, operating in powerloom workers belt of Salem, Namakkal and Erode is well known for its militant struggles since 80s, well before the present leaders joined the workforce. The movement has been consistently active since then. In the present situation, it is heartening to watch all those generations of leaders – past and present – coming together to reclaim and uphold the banner, DPLU which is inseparably integrated with the politics of CPIML and AICCTU.

We could also witness various cross sections of people, including minorities and various political forces, mobilised at the call of our organisation against the draconian citizenship amendment act for a demonstration on 9th Feb at Pallipalayam.

Political Assertion of Agricultural Labourers

In Pudukottai, our main workforce is agricultural labourers. We have also won the post, Panchayat President and two ward members in one block in the recently concluded local body elections in January. We held several block level demonstrations, public meetings on people's issues, in the first round, upto 18 December. Then again, we were engaged in Panchayat elections contesting several posts from Ward members to Panchayat Presidents in at least 15 places in the district. We are working

in more than seven block and are a significant force, at least, in five. Then began our own struggles in March, against CAA-NRC-NPR and also several other interventions, jointly with Left parties on the one hand and also with several other organisations, on the other. We have been actively supporting many Shaheen Baghs in the district.

Karur – Tex Workers

In Karur, we organised an elaborate campaign and demonstration of Tex workers, construction workers and EB workers demanding increase in wages and housing sites. A Hindi leaflet was also distributed in order to reach out to large section of migrant workers in Karur. There was also a convention against CAA-NRC-NPR addressed by Comrade Sai Balaji, All India Coordinator of Young India and President of AISA along with Comrade Shankar. The convention was preceded by a rally that began with garlanding Periyar statue.

In Dharmapuri, we have expanded our work among construction, EB, hospital and Transport workers recently and also into Pennagaram block. We have a vast network of construction workers in several panchayats in two blocks of the district. We have also established an office in the district recently.

In Dindigul, we are a force in some blocks, including some Panchayats. We put up a brave fight in elections to the President of the Kottanatham Panchayat. Comrades participated in Pudukottai rally with renewed enthusiasm. We are also working among agricultural and rural workers and also among poor farmers.

In Madurai too our work among agricultural labourers and student youth is growing. We have relatively greater following among women in one block. In fact, they form the backbone of our work in the district.

Nagapattinam, Mayiladuthurai

and Thanjavur districts participated in good numbers in Pudukottai rally on 18 Dec. Anti-CAA-NRC-NPR campaign is also taken up in addition to several initiatives on local issues and on issues of construction workers. We contested in some wards and for the Panchayat presidents too. We are also fast expanding our work in Thiruvannamalai district.

We had several joint demonstrations with Left parties and active support to Shaheen Baghs in Madurai, Dindigul, Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Vannarpettai – Chennai, etc.

Workers' Movements

Our participation in 8th January all India Strike was very encouraging. We joined the joint demonstrations in more than 35 – 40 centres which is more than number of centres we participated in the past. We declared Rail Roko at Kanchipuram independently and all our workers were arrested. Similar independent initiatives were there in other places as well. The challenge is to reflect our full participation and higher mobilisation and meaningful presence in joint platforms.

Women's Struggles

AIPWA recently reorganised its state convening team. Our recent intervention in women issues, including the issue of the plight of lightning struck women agricultural labourers in Pudukottai, the issue of rape victims, etc., generated support. The state's presence and size of delegation in the all India conference of AIPWA was also significant.

Student – Youth Movement

Reorganising our student – youth work began with a cadre meet attended by Com Sandeep Singh, GS of AISA at Trichy in November.

The meeting decided to undertake a campaign towards its all India conference at Hyderabad in Jan. A large delegation from the state also attended the conference. Subsequently, many student strikes were organised in many colleges in the state and also many demonstrations against the Sanghi government's targeted and brutal attack on students of JNU, Jamia and AMU. Student – youth cadre meetings were also held at Karur and Trichy in the presence of Com Sai Balaji, when he was there to attend Makkal Adhikaram's Convention at Trichy, to initiate Young India Coordination in Tamil Nadu.

Some new initiatives

A recent meeting of concerned friends and progressives decided to float a Tamil version of Insaaf Manch that can address issues of Minorities, Dalits and also can be a platform to protect progressive political and social values of Tamil society, including that of Periyar's ideas, that are under systematic attack by right wing forces.

Our advocates in Tirunelveli, Chennai, Coimbatore and Trichy played a key role in organising legal community against CAA-NRC-NPR in alliance with other progressive and Left lawyers in the beginning. Later, several demonstrations by various groups of lawyers followed. We took the lead in a lawyers demo with others when 17 Dalits died because of the collapse of the 'Untouchability Wall' in Mettupalayam. The State Secretary Com NK Natarajan also visited the spot and met families in grief.

The party is now working towards holding district conferences and state conference on 19-20 May at Villupuram to consolidate the organisation and intensify people's movements. □

North East Delhi Struggles To Recover and Heal

CPIML PB members Kavita Krishnan and Prabhat Kumar, CC member Sucheta De, AIKM Vice President Prem Singh Gehlawat, AIPF Convenor Girija Pathak, JNUSU General Secretary Satish Chandra Yadav and AISA activists Dolan Samanta, Kaushik Raj, Junaid, and Manikant visited some areas of North East Delhi today.

Maujpur

In main road Maujpur near the place where Kapil Mishra called for violence on anti-CAA protesters, we saw shops owned by Muslims specifically being targeted for vandalism, arson and loot. We met one Muslim shop-keeper whose footwear shop was attacked and vandalised by a communal mob. While many other shops run by Muslims had been set on fire, this one had been saved from arson by the Hindu man who owned the shop next door, and who insisted the shutters be closed to protect the building from fire. So, while the shoes had been taken out and burned, the shop was intact. Several Hindu shopkeepers told us – “arson in one shop would likely consume all the other shops as well; fire in one’s neighbour’s shop would threaten one’s own as well – we would never be on board with such violence. The mob came wearing helmets and masks, and appeared to be outsiders to the area.” The damage to the property of each shopkeeper goes to several lakhs. Those whose shops and property were destroyed expressed two concerns.

First, the footwear shopkeeper told us he was apprehensive that

he would be asked to show receipts of every pair of shoes that had been in the shop in order to claim compensation. This was obviously impossible to do. Moreover, he sold the shoes at a price slightly higher than the price at which he bought them from wholesalers – now that the shoes were no longer saleable, surely he ought to be compensated at the sale price, for which he could show no receipt? Also, many shopkeepers we met said, “Our papers were burnt inside the shop, or taken outside the shop and destroyed. We are not able to earn all these days – should we not be compensated for the loss of livelihood in this period?”

Second, many of the Muslims whose shops were trashed or burned, are tenants, not owners. Some of them said that the Hindu landlords were threatening not to rent the premises to them any more, saying “It will invite trouble, keeping a Muslim tenant means I risk my property being set on fire.” The Muslim tenants told us, “As it is we have lost all our property – now if we are not even allowed to return and run our business again, how will we survive? Even if we get monetary compensation for what we lost, how will we earn a living in future?”

Bhajanpura

In Bhajanpura, several auto spare parts and tours and travels shops belonging to Muslims are totally destroyed by arson. It is clear that the mob has selectively targeted properties of Muslims – shops belonging to Hindus, cheek-by-jowl by the destroyed shops, are intact. In a few rare

cases, it seems some properties belonging to Hindus have become collateral damage. These include a Maruti showroom next to “Zohan automobiles”, and a petrol pump right next to a series of shops owned by Muslims. The petrol pump owners said the mob listened to no reason, and even attacked policemen badly, and was intent on vandalising the petrol pump – perhaps to use the stolen fuel to torch shops?

A mazaar (a Sufi saint’s tomb that is now a shrine) right in front of a police help centre at Khajuri Khas has Manvir Singh Choudhury, a Hindu, for its President – a reminder of a fragile syncretic culture that is one of India’s unique features. The mazaar is destroyed by arson.

We acquired video footage of the mobs attacking these properties – in one of them, one of the mob members taking a selfie video is chanting “Jai Shri Ram” and announcing proudly that “The police is with us”, “Long live the police.” There are many videos of such mobs firing guns on the street and from the roof of a small nursing home, and asking Muslims hiding in homes to “come out and take your azaadi”. The mobs are also shouting vile sexualised abuse to Muslim women.

At Bhajanpura, we met Islam Bhai who had set out with his children in his car, to drive them to safety. On the way, he was stopped by a policeman in distress, begging him to help take their ‘sahab’ (senior police officer) injured by bullets, to a hospital. Islam immediately took an injured ACP, DCP, and Constable Ratan Lal to hospital, leaving his children including a nine-year-old

daughter to wait for him on the road. Constable Ratan Lal, as we know, lost his life to the bullet and could not be saved. Islam told us, "My children were very afraid to be left on the road, but there was not enough room in the car, and I felt that it was a matter of life and death, which is why I must rush the policemen to hospital."

Shiv Vihar

Shiv Vihar is one of the areas worst ravaged by the violence.

Auliya Masjid near Nala Road, Shiv Vihar is a mosque devoted to the 'auliyas' (Sufi saints). It is devastated by arson. Gas cylinders were burst in the mosque.

On the main road and in the lanes close to the masjid, the devastation is frightening. In Gali number 12, we found a woman weeping over her tiny home and its pitifully few belongings, burnt to cinders. Through sobs, she told us about how she struggled to educate her children even though she is illiterate, how she worked so hard to acquire every tiny necessity (fridge, gas, furniture, vessels). "It's all gone now, what can I do, what will happen to us, to my children," she wept. She had received Rs 25000 as compensation from the Delhi Government, and the SDM had paid a visit to take a look at her home, she said. Many of the other victims we met also told of SDM visits and of receiving Rs 25000 in cash. But this tiny amount might tide them over the next month or so – but it could in no way recompense them for the losses they had suffered. This woman told us that she and her children spent time with their relatives in Idgah, and had shifted to the relief camp the previous night. At the camps, she said, food was being distributed. But, she added, "The clothes and other things they are distributing are being snatched and hoarded by

people who do not need them. We have no clothes but the ones on our back – and yet we have not got any clothes. Is this right?"

We were heartened to meet a very poor Hindu family (an elderly woman and her daughters-in-law and grandchildren) living in a crumbling hovel. Though poor, they had been generous in humanity. They told us how their Muslim neighbours were attacked, and how showed us injuries they sustained in stone pelting when they helped their neighbours escape. Right next to their home was a cattle shed – the Muslim owners fled leaving behind the buffaloes. "We fed the buffaloes, even though some neighbours asked us, who are these Muslims to you that you should feed their cattle. After some days we called the owners back and asked them to come and take the buffaloes to safety, because we could not afford to feed them anymore." Speaking in the dialect of the Aligarh and western UP, these women were warm in praise of their "Modan" (Mohammedan) neighbours. They said, "One young woman had just given birth to a baby and nearly fainted. We took her into our home and laid her out on our bed and gave her water and tried to calm her down. We are women too, we know how it feels after you give birth."

They cursed the politics that reaps benefit from riot and hatred between Hindus and Muslims. One of the women said, "My husband, the earning member of this family, works at a cycle-repair shop of a Muslim. Since the Muslims have been forced to shut shop and flee, my husband too cannot go to work. What will we eat if he cannot earn? We know those whose shops and homes are destroyed should be given compensation, and that's right. But surely those who work at the shops too have lost their

livelihood - and should get rations, relief and compensation to tide us over these days? Can you please raise this issue?"

Near Shiv Vihar Tiraha, we met Mahender Kumar whose home has been badly burnt. He took us into his lane, where several homes and shops belonging to Hindus have been torched. Right at the end of the lane were a couple of Muslim families sitting on a charpai. Along with them was their immediate neighbour, Sundar, and his father and brother. The friendship and camaraderie between these families was apparent. Sundar told us that Gulfam and his family had kept watch over his shop to protect it from Muslim mobs. When they heard that a Hindu mob was approaching, Gulfam's family took shelter inside Sundar's home. But then, they felt they might not be able to protect Gulfam and his family from the mob. Gulfam and his family then fled. After this, a Muslim mob did destroy Sundar's shop. Both the families agreed that in this particular lane, it was a new Muslim neighbour of theirs (they did not even know his name since he was new to the area), had invited in the mob that destroyed several of the houses and shops belonging to Hindus. Sundar's father told us - 'See, I am blaming a particular individual, not the Muslim community. Gulfam and his family are our friends, and they are not to blame. I can never understand how people blame and punish a community for the crime of an individual.'

Both the families repeated to us that in their opinion, the Delhi Police was to blame, as were politicians who stoked hatred and violence for votes. As we were leaving, the Muslim family members took one of us aside to tell us, "One of the Hindus who lost his shop here is so poor, and is such a good person.

Please do what you can to make sure he is compensated properly.”

Elsewhere, the communal divide and distrust is still deep. Muslims are afraid of Hindu neighbours. But still, we did find that some humanity and trust had survived the episode. Gulfam's and Sundar's family members kept telling us, “You will find insaniyat – humanity – alive here still.”

The violence was orchestrated by the BJP to create a permanent fissure between Hindus and Muslims. It was orchestrated to ensure loss of life and property of Muslims. While there are victims among both Muslims and Hindus, it is clear that the police and state machinery backed only one side – the side on which BJP leaders were.

It will take hard work to undo the damage done by the BJP in these areas. We feel that the Delhi Government should be held accountable to ensuring peace, justice, relief, and rehabilitation efforts. In particular, we feel the Delhi Government can play an important role in;

1) making sure Muslim tenants are retained on rent by Hindu landlords;

2) needless paperwork is not made a condition for adequate compensation

3) compensation should be paid for loss of livelihood as well as loss of property and life

4) far more effective relief and rehabilitation efforts

We will do all we can to ensure that those who have survived the riot can rebuild their lives. We will do all we can to ensure that justice is done and the economic loss suffered by the survivors are duly compensated. We must help the victims document every loss. If the government fails to rebuild lives, we, the people must do it. □

Surveillance State and the 'New Frontiers' of Power

Radhika Krishnan

We are all perhaps familiar with the fictionalised account of a pizza delivery service interacting with a potential customer. Through the course of the conversation, the server reveals an awareness of the customer's medical condition, financial status, legal misdemeanours, and more. This situation, which was at one time seen as a joke or a frivolous exaggeration, is now strikingly close to our lived experiences. As a recent RTI request has revealed, the Modi government's proposed “National Social Registry” is designed to do an all-round surveillance of each and every Indian, via the Aadhar system. Data which was previously collected by various government bodies for specific governance-related purposes and located in separate silos will now be brought together in a centralised manner using the unique Aadhar number. Computational tools and algorithms will now be used on this centralised data in an extensive manner.

All sorts of personal data – related to births, deaths, marriages, travel, migrations, address changes and financial status – will not just be collected to create a profile of individuals, it will serve as a key policy input for governments. The government claims that this is

to enhance the performance of state-funded projects targeted at the poor and the marginalised; it seeks to “dynamically” record and verify the status of people below the poverty level who are beneficiaries of various projects. This however is a specious claim, since each and every citizen of this country is under scrutiny. This is a clear a violation of a right to privacy, which the Supreme Court has argued is a fundamental right, because it fails the proportionality test and subjects everyone to a breach of privacy of massive proportions. So how does the Modi government plan to circumvent this? Through amending the Aadhar Act in order to allow for a complete dismantling of the Supreme Court's right to privacy judgement.

Fears of gross violations of individual rights through the proposed social registry have been expressed by none other than Manoranjan Kumar, a bureaucrat who was one of its loudest proponents at one time. Kumar has been deeply involved in discussions and preparations around this registry since 2015 when it was first mooted. His enthusiasm has now given way to profound scepticism, and he has warned that computer algorithms can (and will, by design) be used to do all kinds of searches across

various databases to profile individuals and communities. This, as we can well guess, is a recipe for disaster.

What we are now seeing is the latest, and by far the strongest form of the panopticon in human history, powered by technological tools and being put in place by political regimes. Constant collection of information after all provides the basis for a regime of control and discipline. The question for us is: what exactly is the nature of the modern panopticon, propelled by digital technologies? Our personal data is today the very fulcrum of a significant proportion of private business ventures. Digital technologies actively and silently record and process every instance of our lives. Detailed profiles are prepared, and this information is transformed into usable services which are now an integral part of our lives. While private businesses use our data, often without our explicit consent, governments are empowered to collect and use vast amounts of personal data. Sweeping powers make for a regime of anticipatory surveillance, where data can be collected and processed without having to cite a specific investigation. This point has been eloquently reiterated most recently in Edward Snowden's autobiography, *Permanent Record*. Snowden speaks of how technological tools and regulatory mechanisms have colluded to create an extensive system of mass surveillance.

These concerns have been reflected in India. Since its inception in 2009, the Aadhar project has given an additional momentum to existing concerns of governmental overreach and the loss of privacy. Several other initiatives are equally worrying. India has proposed a centralised telecom interception system to automate eavesdropping on conversations. The Modi government also plans mass surveillance of private conversations and posts on social media. In response to this, we have been urged to look for specific rights (such as the "right to explanation", the "right to erasure" and the "right to correction" detailed in a previous piece carried by *Liberation*). Consent and privacy have been the pivots around which any discussion of surveillance and data privacy takes place. It is in this context that Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for the Future at the New Frontier of Power* needs to be read for its description of the nature of modern surveillance systems.

Tracing the Contours of Surveillance Capitalism

"Demanding privacy from surveillance capitalists or lobbying for an end to commercial surveillance is like asking...a giraffe to shorten its neck"

Zuboff characterises the current economic model as "surveillance capitalism," where human experience is a raw

material to be extracted and used to predict intentions, in order to produce and sell more goods and services. It crucially relies on new computing tools such as machine learning to exist. For example, personal data can be processed and converted into an application that is used by insurance companies to decide on the creditworthiness of its clients. It can be used to develop an application to help a car owner find an empty parking lot, or the least congested route to her destination. Zuboff's central argument is that this regime poses a specific challenge because of its tumultuous impact on the very concepts of consent and privacy.

A key feature leading to the development of surveillance capitalism out of earlier models of capitalism is what Zuboff calls the discovery of "behavioural surplus": the surplus value generated in mining enormous amounts of personal data and converting it into a marketable product. This surplus becomes available to corporations for uses beyond service improvement and its only purpose is to ensure exponential profits. The rush to increase behavioural surplus and thus ensure continuing profits leads corporations to move inexorably towards systems that not just infer personal behaviour, but are able to predict it with increasing accuracy. This is made possible through a continuous expansion of data that feeds into the prediction process and the use of computational

tools. We are now seeing “permissionless innovation”; a unilateral seizure of rights over data without consent in order to cater to these new needs. Data is continuously extracted, behaviour is predicted, and user experience is personalised and customised.

The quest for behavioural surplus has moved to the offline world. Companies now track every moment of our daily lives in the physical world through smart-home devices, wearables, and applications such as Google Maps. Even human emotions are harnessed by computational methods that identify sentiments from textual and visual sources. The creeping incursion into daily routines slowly habituates people to them, but if a particular incursion generates too much of an uproar, companies adapt by promising reforms or by occasionally paying fines. This, however, fails to check the ever-growing range of data collection, made possible through tools such as ambient computing, ubiquitous computing and the Internet of Things (IoT).

From monitoring, surveillance capitalism has now entered a new domain: behavioural control. Not only is data being constantly collected, it is being processed and fed back to trigger certain desired commercial outcomes. Cars can be made to break down in order to facilitate loan recoveries; a Pokémon player is directed close to a MacDonald’s outlet;

advertisements are presented to individuals when they are emotionally vulnerable and most likely to respond impulsively. In Zuboff’s narrative, human beings are now essentially Pavlov’s dogs, punished by the regime of surveillance capitalism for ‘undesirable’ behaviour and rewarded for ‘desirable’ ones.

How has what Zuboff calls “digital dispossession” (humans being dispossessed of the control of their personal data) taken place? She argues that tech companies such as Google and Facebook have benefitted from an economic model that is based on libertarian notions of fundamental freedoms and a model that is deeply sceptical of regulation. They equally benefitted from the post 9/11 political milieu in the US, which accepted and allowed for exceptional levels of surveillance under the garb of fighting terrorism and protecting national security. Zuboff reminds us that long before Cambridge Analytica, tech companies were working closely with political campaigns (such as the Obama 2008 campaign) to build voter profiles and to advise on strategy.

Zuboff’s arguments powerfully remind the reader that they are a mere pawns within an elaborate system of social control driven by technological tools controlled by big corporate houses or by governments. She convincingly argues that privacy and consent have been rendered toothless in this new regime of

surveillance capitalism. Efforts to foreground privacy and consent are doomed to fail.

Is it possible to “take back” big-data analytics from the state and from big business? How effectively would regulatory mechanisms work? While Zuboff expresses hope that this particular form of capitalism (which is product of a certain historic juncture) is at fault, her own arguments suggest otherwise. Big data analytics seem incompatible with democratic control and far more in sync with authoritarian control. As David Harvey suggests, socialism or democracy will need technologies which have mental conceptions of new social relations embedded in them unlike the current technologies which have the idea of surveillance-based social engineering deeply embedded in them. Machine intelligence is the very means of production in surveillance capitalism and therefore alternative means might have to emerge. Given the extent of compatibility between surveillance capitalism and digital technologies, it is difficult to imagine the existence of one without the other. Taking back the digital seems a difficult task, requiring the reconstitution and rebuilding of digital technologies themselves. ▣

A version of this piece appeared as the article ‘Consent and Privacy in the *Age of Digital Technology*’ published by the India Forum, <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/consent-and-privacy-age-digital-technology>.

Dr Shyam Bihari Rai

Dr Shyam Bihari Rai, Director of **Grantha Shilpi**, matchless in the Hindi publication world for social sciences publications, passed away on 10 March 2020. His life was the epitome of simplicity and resoluteness. After the fall of the Soviet Union, he worked throughout his life on the hazardous task of publishing Hindi translations of books on Marxist thought and ideology. The weakness of the Left movement in Hindi speaking areas is almost an acknowledged fact, but Rai sahib still discharged this responsibility with great courage.

Dr Rai was confident of the existence of readers of serious Hindi literature. The basis of this confidence was his Marxist understanding of social movements. At the time that he entered the world of publication, a somewhat different generation of new readers in Hindi had come to the fore. The social composition of this generation was different from that of the previous generation. This included students from backward sections who had come into higher education as well as a large number of girls, all of whom had a keen desire to read and acquire an understanding of the world. In addition to literature this new group of readers was taking an interest in writing also, as a result of identity discussions and intellectual contact. Rai Saheb started familiarizing these readers with cognitive reflections and writings of high quality. He introduced these readers to the books of Marxist thinkers from all over the world and from all disciplines. He knew these readers and maintained a lively dialogue with them. Through the success of his publications he broke the myth that Marxism holds no attraction for the Hindi speaking intellectual collective.

He was born at Birpur village in Ghazipur District, Uttar Pradesh. The anti-zamindari movement led by the undivided Communist party was going on in that District from the time of independence. Contrary to the belief of land owners, that was a movement which greatly attracted the young. Rai Saheb, though himself born in a land owner caste, was also deeply influenced by that movement. In order to understand the extensive impact of the Communist party in



Ghazipur District, the interesting fact should be noted that in the first general election the Communist Party won the Parliamentary seat as well as all four Assembly seats from the District. This initial impact on Dr Rai became even deeper when he came to Kanpur for education. At that time Kanpur city used to be the hub of the Left workers' movement. Here he directly experienced another facet of the Communist movement he had seen in childhood, and his initial commitment was reaffirmed even more strongly.

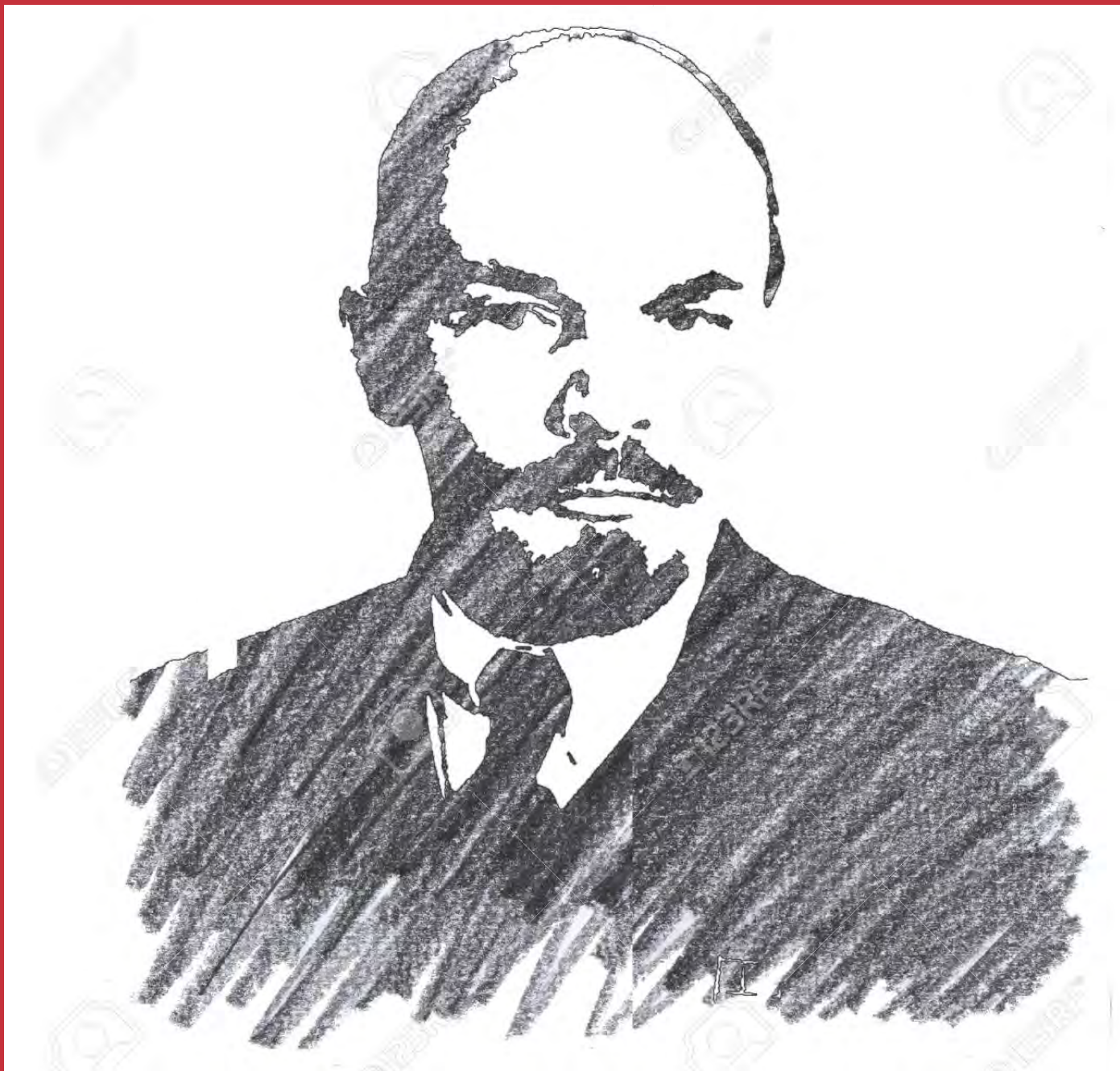
His experience relating to trade unions and farmers' issues in the Communist movement made him an important collaborator with the Left movement in the intellectual world. As Editor of the Hindi Department of an important international publication like Macmillan, he procured and published many translations done by Gorakh Pandey, Founder General Secretary of Jan Sanskriti Manch. 'Manaviya Sartattva', Gorakh Pandey's translation of George Thompson's book was published by People's Literacy through Rai Saheb's motivation.

In search of livelihood, Dr Rai initially took up the teaching profession in Kanpur and taught Vinod Mishra (late General Secretary of CPIML) and Brij Bihari Pandey (Editor of CPIML Hindi organ Lokyuddh) when they were in Middle School, both of whom who had lasting contact with Rai Saheb. As a witness to this relationship that went beyond teacher and student to the warmth of comradeship, I can assert that he was indeed a rare person. Brij Bihari Pandey translated for him Marc Bloch's book *The Historian's Craft* into Hindi with the title 'Itihaskar ka Shilp'. He had an extremely warm and lively relationship with our Party. Often he used to walk over from his office to our Party office.

Shyam Bihari Rai's profound ideological studies and experience prepared him for undertaking the historic responsibility of disseminating Marxist writing in the Hindi language through Grantha Shilpi Prakashan during a phase when Marxism and Communism had to fight their way back into popularity. We salute his memory!

Posting Date : 27-28 of every month
Published on 26th of every month

R.N.I. No. 55777/93
P. R. No. DL(E)—11/5156/2018-20
Posting at New Delhi G.P.O.



April 22, 2020 marks the completion of 150 years of Lenin's Birth

**Red Salute to The Pathbreaking Revolutionary Thinker and Leader of the Bolshevik Revolution,
Comrade Vladimir Ilyich Lenin**

EDITORIAL OFFICE

CHARU BHAWAN, U-90, SHAKARPUR, DELHI - 110 092 PH.: 91-11-22521067

email : liberation@cpiml.org ; website : www.cpiml.net

facebook & twitter : @cpimlliberation ; YouTube : OfficialCPIML

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

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

EDITOR : Arindam Sen