

NEW WAVE

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A BJP rally in North India

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Foreword

The Indian elections have officially begun with the first of seven phases of polling starting on the 19th of April. The states of Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Chattisgarh, Assam, Bihar, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Jammu went to polls during this period, with Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, having their voting covered entirely in the first phase of voting. Altogether 102 seats would be covered in this first phase of polling.

The elections take place in the midst of one of the worst heat waves in North and Eastern India, while Southern India suffers from a water crisis. In some parts of the country, people have taken to boycott elections altogether, boycotting all bourgeois political parties. In Nagaland voters have boycotted the polling over demands for greater Nagaland. In Delhi, the Anganwadi workers, who have been betrayed by the opposition and exploited by BJP governments, have decided to boycott the elections.

These elections are perhaps the most important elections in the country since the 1977 elections which ousted the Congress government led by Indira Gandhi. It is also an election which many perceive as rigged, and not without reason. The BJP enjoys overwhelming superiority in numbers, money and organizational power over the oppositional parties. They have unconditional support from the leading capitalists of the country. They have virtual control over the country's news media, and hold total control over governmental institutions.

The parliament at both the upper and lower house has BJP hegemony. They have shown that they can steamroll the opposition in parliament to pass whatever law they want,

and push through their agenda. It is only the mobilized masses in struggle that have been proven to stop them.

India has been in the midst of a slow counter-revolution with the reactionary BJP at the helm. They have pushed forward the Hindutva agenda with an unseen aggression. It is very well possible, that they may succeed, unless they can be ousted from power and the movement crushed to its core.

Simply defeating them electorally cannot achieve this. Should the BJP lose, they will retreat, regroup, and try again. Even if the BJP would no longer be in power, the organizational infrastructure and the toxic ideology of Hindutva would continue with the RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Over six decades of successive Congress governments have failed to defeat the hydra of the Hindutva movement. They and every other bourgeois party in India have proven that they can't and they won't do what is needed to defeat Hindutva. Equally disappointing has been the Stalinist Communist Parties, who prioritize local and regional electoral calculations rather than defeating the forces of Hindutva. Their alignment to the Congress party lends them credibility that they do not deserve, and only leads to a slow liquidation into the mainstream of bourgeois politics.

The way to defeat the BJP and their Hindutva agenda was shown in 2020 by the agitating farmers in Delhi. It is only the mobilized forces of the working class and peasants united to defeat reactionary forces that can triumph against this evil. To build a revolutionary movement rooted in the struggles of the working class and peasantry must be our goal and that is what we work towards.



Anti CAA protests in Assam

RESIST THE CAA

In 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Act was pushed through parliament shortly after an opposition boycott. The new law was the first time in Indian independence that citizenship was made conditional upon the religion of the applicant. In this new law, Non-muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who immigrated to India before 31st December 2014 would be eligible for citizenship. The new law was part of a massive overhaul of India's citizenship law designed by the new BJP government.

Already, one can see the imbalance of this law. First off, the law is retrospective, only pertaining to those who had entered India before 31st December 2014 and had yet to acquire citizenship through the normal procedure. The new law also excludes Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus who have suffered oppression from the Sri Lankan state on the basis of their ethnicity in addition to their religion. Neither does this law concern several Hindu Rohingyas who have fled the ongoing genocide in Myanmar. This is to say nothing

about the muslim minorities who belong to supposedly heretical sects, who have to flee persecution in Sunni majority Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan. Neither does it consider ethnic oppression, such as what the Biharis of Bangladesh have had to endure since the country's independence. The true intention behind this law was revealed shortly in Assam, where the experiment of combining the CAA with the National Register of Citizens was put into effect.

Soon after the bill was passed into law in 2019, protests erupted across the country, the most vigorous of these protests were in Assam. Not long after the protests in Assam, the rest of the country broke into protests. These were spontaneously organized with support from every quarter of civil society, opportunist bourgeois opposition parties, and religious groups as well as leftist organizations. The protests against the CAA were among the largest protests in Indian history. The right wing responded to this with formulating a pogrom against muslims in

Delhi, resulting in dozens of deaths. Even this was not enough to end the protests however, and it was only after the Covid Pandemic hit India, and harsh lockdowns were imposed, did the protests really die down.

The protests were enough to push back the enforcement of the Citizenship Amendment Act for four years, till today.

The Hindutva Agenda :

The Hindutva movement did not start yesterday, but was the product of a long term effort by reactionary Hindu and caste supremacist organizations like the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha. These organizations championed the cause of upper caste, upper class Hindus. At least on the surface, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS both claimed to be defensive organizations of the Hindus, against the rising tide of muslim assertion.

What had begun from the birth of the Muslim League and the Khilafat movement had swollen into something far greater. The Hindu Mahasabha was born in 1915 and acted initially as a pressure group within the Congress Party. The RSS was formed in 1925 modelled initially on the bourgeois nationalist clandestine groups in Bengal, particularly the Anushilan Samity and Jugantar Dal.



S.P mukherjee, Savarkar, and Hegdewar, pioneering leaders of Hindutva movement

Both these organizations would eventually spearhead the Hindutva agenda. Enunciated by V.D Savarkar, the core of the agenda was recognizing Hindus as a separate nation, and claiming them as the ‘true’ sons of India. The Hindutva world view agreed with Nazism and Zionism, the idea of nationhood based on

religious or ethnic identity. For them the idea of Pakistan was not wrong, simply it’s placing. During the second world war, the British legitimized the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS by using them to recruit Hindus for the war effort. On the other hand, the Muslim League was legitimized as the main representative of the Muslims of India. They too supported the British war effort. The irony of a Hitler admirer in Savarkar supporting the British war effort has been lost to history.

With both communal forces legitimized during World War 2, the agenda of partitioning the British Raj into two distinct Hindu majority and Muslim majority dominions was hastened. It proved to be the perfect foil for the revolutionary developments which were happening in India at this time. The Red Fort trials were followed by revolts in Calcutta by the youth and students, joined in support by industrial workers. The mutiny of naval ratings was quickly followed by a general strike call in Bombay, and uprisings of peasants across India.

This revolutionary wave would have swept aside the League and every Hindu reactionary party, had it not been for the events of Direct Action Day. The day of mass protests and strike action called by the Muslim League became a day of unrestrained violence as riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims. The riots in Calcutta was followed by tit for tat pogroms between Hindus and Muslims. The violence did not calm down even after independence and partition. The nascent Indian revolution was doused in communal blood letting, and the Hindutva movement scored a major victory.

The partition only reaffirmed the Hindutva ideology that Hindus and Muslims represented two distinct nationalities. Millions were displaced on either side of the arbitrary border between India and Pakistan, entire cultures were lost. The Muslim League came to rule Pakistan, but the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha would not come anywhere close to ruling India, not until decades later.

While not stated openly, the truth is the Hindutva movement is as much a movement to defend the interests of the upper caste as it is a movement against Muslims and Christians. The communal hatred against Muslims is the foremost weapon for the upper caste to shepherd the Dalits into supporting their agenda. This indirectly helps them consolidate economic and political hegemony, which has been crafted over generations, aided by British rule, and now solidified in independent India.

It is not by accident that the BJP, which is but a creation of the RSS, pursues anti-Dalit policies. The RSS may pretend it does not follow caste, but caste hierarchy is inseparable from the agenda of a Hindu Rashtra.

However, the first and most visible object of hate from the Hindutva movement is the Muslim community. The new Citizenship Amendment Act and the proposed National Register of Citizens, are designed to exclude them from the India that they envision. Both these instruments together would reduce Muslims to second class citizens, and deprive huge numbers of them from citizenship, despite having lived here for decades. It is nothing but the continuation of their policy and the ideology of Hindutva.

The BJP victory :

The agenda of the RSS and the Hindutva movement, is not short term, but in the long term. At it's core, it's a movement of the upper caste hindus, and ascendant baniya caste hindus, to consolidate and defend their social hegemony. It's enemies are any movement or religion that threatens this dominance, naturally it will find Islam and Christianity to be threats, but also the movement of Dalit assertion, and Dalit rights.

The most important victory for the movement, was the success of the BJP in the 2014 national elections, in which it's lifelong enemy, the Congress party, was soundly

defeated, and the Communist Party was pushed to the margins. This victory was further consolidated in 2019 when the BJP won with an even greater majority of seats in the lower house of parliament.

However, the BJP and for that matter, the Hiindutva movement, have not achieved final victory. That can only come in the form of a Hindu Rashtra, a Hindu supremacist state where Muslims can only exist as second class citizens, and Dalits would be stripped of rights and forced to accept the pitiable social position that Hindu society ascribes for them.



Adani and Modi together.

The Indian capitalist class had not wholeheartedly supported the Hindutva movement through most of its existence. That has changed today, with the BJP becoming not only the foremost political tool of the Hindutva movement, but also that of the Indian capitalist class, pushing a ruthlessly aggressive agenda of proletarianization. The destruction of farming, rural India, and the petty bourgeoisie, together with crushing labour unions and enabling the further exploitation of India's working class.

While the bourgeoisie had historically supported secularism for the purpose of keeping the Republic of India united against the threat of muslim separatism, that has changed today. It is preferable to keep the Muslims in a state of terror and anxiety, and use the communal hatred that the BJP can

incite to shepherd Hindus into an anti-labour and anti-farmer agenda. The wealth of Indian capitalists today is pegged to the Hindutva agenda.

This has only emboldened the BJP and the RSS in pursuing the Hindutva agenda more aggressively. Not only to exclude Muslims from citizenship, but in realizing their dream of an aggressive and domineering India that has an absolute hegemony over South and South East Asia.

The map of greater India is a visual realization of this macabre dream, and it has found a place in the new Indian parliament.



Inmates in Matia detention camp in Assam

Detention camps in Assam:

Since the BJP won in Assam it has been used as a laboratory to test how far the Hindutva agenda can be applied. Historically, the state of Assam has had a violent nativist insurgency that opposed immigration from Bangladesh and other parts of India. The most deadly single pogrom against Muslims in India took place in Assam in 1988. Anti-immigrant protests forced the passage of a National Register of Citizens in 1983,

The movement to rid Assam of any migrant community cut across religious lines, with both Hindus and Muslims being target of violence. As long as they were 'outsiders'. For the BJP this sort of nationalism would normally pose a challenge, but the Assamese nationalists did not wish for secession, rather it wished to become part of the Indian

mainstream. The BJP won the state elections in 2016, Hindutva became a means for joining the mainstream.

The state's chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, a former Congress Party leader, has become a leading Hindutva leader. The demand for updating the NRC in Assam had been long in coming, but it was under the BJP that this was finally done, even before the Citizenship Amendment Bill was presented in parliament.

The NRC updating process itself was fraught with problems. With sparse documentation, it was natural that many would fall out of the list of citizenship. At the end of the process, the final list excluded 1.9 million people, these would now be compelled to prove their citizenship. Those who would be unable to prove their citizenship, would end up in a detention camp and likely be expelled.

The chaos and pain that the people of Assam had gone through was a frightening display of what may await non-muslims and many Hindus who had emigrated from Pakistan and Bangladesh, most of whom are poor and lower caste. Protests first broke out in Assam, before spreading to the rest of India. The horror show of the NRC in Assam galvanized opinion against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The protests against the CAA in 2019:

The first experiments towards a national register of citizens took place in Assam, which has been a hotbed for xenophobic, anti-Bengali and anti-immigrant sentiment. The idea of a National register of citizens was not new, and had been an idea floated decades prior. Under the BJP, this idea assumed a different form. It became designed as an instrument of exclusion and discrimination.

The NRC and the protests against it had put the BJP in trouble. They had to wait till they achieved their sweeping mandate in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, when they felt emboldened to push through several contentious

bills. The Assam register of citizens became a litmus test for the rest of the country. Immediately following their election victory, they began pushing for the abrogation of Article 370 of the constitution (which gave Kashmir limited autonomy), and pushing for an amendment to the Citizenship Act. On paper this was designed to provide for a backdoor for Hindus who had migrated from India's neighbouring countries and settled in India to acquire an easy route to citizenship.

The proposed amendments allowed for members of four religious groups, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, from three countries in India's neighbourhood (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan) to acquire Indian citizenship through an automatic route. The BJP has claimed that this has been done on humanitarian grounds that these groups are persecuted in these three countries, but this leaves out Muslim minorities such as Ahmediyas, who also suffer persecution, not to mention the Shias who also face discrimination in Pakistan, as well as various ethnic communities who aren't oppressed due to their religion. It also completely leaves out Hindu Tamils from Sri Lanka who still face discrimination in Sri Lanka. While the Citizenship Amendment bill became law, it could not be enforced without the framing of rules.

Almost immediately after the bill was introduced in parliament there were protests across the country. There were protests organized by the mainstream parties, as well as citizenship groups. In time, the protests outpaced the mainstream 'secular' parties, and the biggest protests were being organized spontaneously by the masses and citizenship groups.

The core of the protests were based in Delhi and Assam. The latter is doubly significant for the fact that it was the first state to implement the National Citizenship Register and most affected by this. The first thrust of protests came from students around various colleges in the country. The state forces responded by brutally clamping down on protesters in Jamia

university. Here the police attacked students with tear gas and forcibly raided into the college library. Far from demoralizing or scaring protesters into submission, this act of brazen state sponsored violence galvanized support for the anti-CAA protesters. Soon, students across India joined in protests on the streets.

In many parts of the country, trains were stopped, roads were blocked and spontaneous congregations assembled around city parks and squares.

For more than 70 days, the masses, especially women, have been coming out in strength to protest the new citizenship law. It was amidst such protests that the Citizenship Amendment bill was passed into law.



Delhi during the pogrom of 2020

From its epicenters in Assam and Delhi, the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act had spread like wildfire across the country. Every major city in India had marathon protests and they still continue. The government was on the backfoot here. Delhi however, proved to be the most radical and impactful of these protests, even providing a model for protesters in other cities. In the midst of these protests came the Delhi election. The BJP was pitted against the local social-democrat party the Aam Admi party (meaning the common man's party, AAP for short).

For the BJP whose single minded focus on gaining power, electoral defeat is what worries it the most. Without political power, the BJP cannot pursue its Hindutva goals, this defeats its very purpose. Protests in and of themselves can be 'managed', their impact contained. It is only when they seem to threaten their prospects of power, does it really become a danger.

The results of the Delhi elections, saw the AAP make a clean sweep, pushing the BJP to the margins. While not the sole factor, the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act was certainly a factor behind this. The BJP had to crush the protests one way or another. A pogrom was planned against the Muslims of Delhi. Not only would this planned act of violence disorganize the main community in support of the protests, it would give an excuse to control and block the main protest site of Shaheen Bagh, and provide an excuse to incarcerate many of the protest leaders. In addition, the pogrom can be used to divide Muslim and Hindu. Inter-communal solidarity was one of the main pillars of strength behind these protests, to break it would be to break the protests itself.

The Delhi pogrom of 2020 was preceded by hate speeches by BJP MLA Kapil Mishra, inciting people to commit acts of violence against 'traitors to the country', his target was without a doubt, Muslims. Mere days after the elections ended, we began to see the first attacks come in. The first incidents of violence emerged on the 23rd of February, and by the night of the 24th, entire neighbourhoods were being raided by armed gangs of Hindutva thugs.

While violence began to spiral out of control the police seemed to deliberately avoid taking any preventive measures. In some videos it appeared almost like the police were assisting the rioters. The total death toll from the rioting stands at 48, with over a hundred injured, about 80 shops have been burned down and many have lost their livelihoods. Shoot at

sight orders were given in parts of East Delhi which saw the most rioting.

As bloody and painful as the riots were, they weren't enough to break the will of the protesters. The mobilizations continued despite the pogrom in Delhi. The government remained on the backfoot, as the protests showed no signs of dying down. It was only after the pandemic hit the country, and lockdown measures were announced, that organizers began to withdraw. Exhaustion had set in, and the danger of the pandemic was too large to ignore.

The protests did not achieve the repealment of the act, but it had pushed back against the Modi government hard enough, that for 4 years, it could not enforce the act. The rules could not be framed.

Where's the national mobilization today?

When recalling back to the anti-CAA protests in 2019, it is hard to imagine that there is almost no whimper of protest today, even as the rules of the act has been passed, making it enforceable.

The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act found celebrations among a few supporters, largely among immigrant Hindu Bangladeshi communities in Assam and West Bengal. Everywhere else, there was a feeling of panic and fear about the consequences of the act.

The act in and of itself, is limited to granting Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Jains from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan citizenship through the automatic route. It does not go beyond this. It is only if the National Register of Citizens is implemented, that a situation like that of Assam would emerge, where 2 million Bengalis who had lived in Assam for decades, now find themselves without citizenship. It is the greatest irony perhaps, that most of those without citizenship in Assam are Hindu.

The celebrations reported in the mainstream media were few and far between, and even those did not last long. Once it became clear how much paper work would be involved to prove citizenship, joy turned to despair. Most Indian citizens, particularly those of an older generation, do not have birth certificates. Documentation is irregular and sparse, creating added difficulties. The situation is especially dire for the poor, which account for the vast majority of the immigrant population.

The implementation of a nationwide NRC has been a state goal of the party, laid out by none other than the Home Minister Amit Shah. Even if the BJP hasn't put it forward now, there is no cause for complacency. The Citizenship Amendment Act has become law, the NRC is next.

What to expect with a BJP victory :

Should the BJP win in 2024 with a wide margin, we can expect more and worse than what followed its 2019 victory. The victory had emboldened them to pursue a reactionary agenda with greater vigour. Kashmir's autonomy was stripped away, the anti-worker Labour Codes were pushed forward, and the farm bills were brought forward.

The BJP appeared invincible, leaving the feckless opposition parties to despair. This situation enabled the BJP to push forward aggressively with their pro-corporate and Hindutva agenda. The icing on the cake was the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The farm laws were repealed after a mammoth mobilization by farmers across the country, the labour codes remain in place. Earlier this year, new criminal laws were pushed forward with the same brazenness as the abrogation of article 370 and the passage of the Labour Codes.

The BJP and its coalition's super majority in parliament means they can manipulate the proceedings to ensure no debate takes place

before bills are passed into law. Should they win in 2024, we can expect more of this.

The core Hindutva agenda of turning India into a Hindu Rashtra is a long term project that has been playing out over decades. Partition was but one part of that plan, the next step is to convert India from a secular bourgeois democracy, into an autocratic Hindu supremacist apartheid state. This in practice is what the Hindu Rashtra will be. The CAA is a first step, a national level NRC would be the next step.

It is likely that the BJP will win the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. It is not yet clear by what margin, but even the most critical of predictions shows the BJP maintaining hegemony over the parliament in the foreseeable future. The next election may either strengthen it, or weaken it, but it will not undo it.

The only real threat to the BJP's seemingly unfettered power, is mobilized masses of people in struggle.

How we fight back :



The site of protest at Shaheen Bagh Delhi

The CAA is one critical part of the Hindutva agenda to turn India into a Hindu Rashtra. It is the first time that citizenship has been made conditioned on one's religion. The frightening scenes in Assam are but a preview of what

should await the rest of the country, when the BJP does finally roll out the NRC while the new citizenship law is already in place.

In 2019 the spontaneous mobilizations and protests against the CAA pushed the BJP to the back foot. They held off the framing of rules for four years, still licking their wounds. The very next year, farmers gave a more decisive blow to the BJP forcing them to repeal the three farm laws.

Over the course of 2021 to 2023, the BJP lost several key state elections, like West Bengal, Karnataka, and Rajasthan. This was despite the overwhelming advantages that the BJP has in money, organization and backing. This could not have happened without the momentum created by the farmer's agitation and the anti-CAA agitation before it.

Important but localized protest and strike actions such as the Anganwadi worker's strike also played a part in this.

These show us the way to challenge the BJP and the forces of Hindutva. They have shown how every bourgeois democratic institution can be undermined and used as tools to rig elections. It is actions on the street that they cannot control.

To resist the CAA we must revitalize and rebuild the movement against the CAA as part of a wider struggle against the Hindutva agenda. The most important tool in this, is to unite workers and peasants in struggle.

REPEAL CAA !
RESIST HINDUTVA !
LONG LIVE WORKING CLASS UNITY !



A farmer protests the police in West Bengal during last year's panchayat elections

In the heyday of British rule in India the province of Bengal accounted for a third of all revenues collected from the sub-continent. It was the political and economic nerve center of the Raj, as well as becoming a cultural center. The city of Calcutta was the largest port of Asia, and by far the most important financial center of India. That ended in the 1940s as the

THE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF WEST BENGAL

Second World War, and the Bengal famine ruined the economy of Bengal and consequently much of Eastern India. Partition destroyed whatever was left.

Partition divided the united province of Bengal into the Indian state of West Bengal and the province of East Pakistan. In 1971, East Pakistan broke away to become the modern nation of Bangladesh. The decades after independence was one of tumult and destruction for the region of Bengal, and it left the state of West Bengal and much of India's North East deindustrialized and impoverished. These changes went alongside political and social changes that have had a deep impact on the state of West Bengal. Though it's economic significance has diminished, West

Bengal remains politically and strategically significant.

The borders of the partition have left West Bengal in an interesting position. To its North lay the Himalayas. West Bengal holds the Siliguri corridor, which is the only land route connecting Assam and the North Eastern states. The corridor is wedged between Nepal on the West and Bangladesh to its South East, and Bhutan to its North. The corridor makes West Bengal a key state for trade between the Indian mainland and North East's 'seven sisters'. In addition, West Bengal holds much of India's coal reserves, accounts for a big part of its steel production, and is fast emerging as a major logistics hub for trade between India and other Eastern nations. Being wedged between Nepal and Bangladesh lends West Bengal the role of a gateway to the East for India.

West Bengal is home to nearly 90 million inhabitants over a resource rich, fertile state. This accounts for 40 seats out of 543 seats in the lower house of the Indian parliament, roughly 8% of the total seats. Thus, whoever wins the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal can wield great influence over the parliament. Any opposition party that wins West Bengal, can become a powerful voice against the ruling party's hegemony. Since their victory in 1978, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the left front drew much of their power in parliament from their base in West Bengal. Today, the TMC rules the state, and has successively won a majority of lok sabha seats from the state of West Bengal.

Victory in West Bengal lends the TMC more political clout than it would have, becoming one of the leading bourgeois opposition parties, and inspiring them to attempt becoming a national party. While these efforts have failed, this does not diminish the importance of West Bengal. The eyes of the ruling party have fallen on the state. It has been almost 50 years since a national party which governed at the central level, also ruled the state of West Bengal. Should the BJP win,

it would reverse a political reality that has existed for nearly half a century.

From pre-colonial prosperity to colonial poverty :



The famous painting showing the grant of diwani to the East India company

During the Mughal era, right up to the point of its fall to the East India Company, what was then the Subah of Bengal, was the richest region of the richest Empire in the world. Bengal alone accounted for 5% of the world's GDP, this was despite the destructive Maratha invasion, and the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire in the face of the rise of the Marathas and the invasions from Afghanistan and Persia. The British East India Company was one of two trading companies backed by European powers vying for control over trade between India and Europe, the other being the French East India Company.

As fate would have it, Bengal would be the first great victim to fall prey to the greed of the still rising capitalist power that was Britain. The East India Company under the leadership of Robert Clive had defeated the army of the last independent nawab of Bengal Siraj Ud Daula in the battle of Plassey in 1757. In alliance with the powerful proto capitalist class of Jain bankers in Murshidabad, the East India Company placed their puppet nawab Mir Jafar. A British resident would remain at court influencing the administration of the province, but this was only the beginning of their creeping rule.

The takeover of Bengal would only be completed in 1765, following a larger and more decisive battle at Buxar in the modern state of Bihar, where the company defeated the army of the new Nawab of Bengal Mir Kasim,

and his ally the nawab of Awadh. From here, the company acquired the right to impose taxes on Bengal, a power that would allow it to finally open Bengal for the fullest and freest capitalist exploitation.

The ruthlessness with which the East India Company under Clive exploited Bengal became the subject of fear and legend. The company built concentration camps for weavers where they would often be worked to death on little or no pay, conditions grew so dire that some weavers cut their thumbs off than have to work under the East India Company. The indigenous textile industry of Bengal which had been the envy of the world, was broken and destroyed, heavy taxes and draconian enforcement of payments from peasants created fear of the company in the hearts and minds of the people. In Britain, these stories made their way to the press, where Robert Clive was derided by the public as 'Lord Vulture'. Even after his removal, the company's quest for profits did not cease. The reckless asset stripping exercise left Bengal in a state of poverty, and caused the worst man made famine in its history in 1769 when a third of the population perished from hunger.

From this structural violence, the East India Company emerged as one of the richest and most powerful organizations in the world, and Robert Clive died as the richest man in Europe. Some of the first mass popular rebellion against British rule broke out in Bengal, the Sanyasi rebellion, Titu Mir's rebellion, and the Santhal rebellion. While Bengal became a victim of British colonialism, it also set the groundwork for shaping Bengal into a center of anti-colonial resistance.

The often reactionary and disorganized anti-colonial rebellions would serve as inspiration for a later generation of Bengalis, to build an enlightened nationalist movement which fought for the rights of Indians. The first great effort in this direction would come from the Indigo rebellion, where the growth of bourgeois democratic thought, and the birth of

a western education bourgeois elite would at once turn Bengal into a bastion of British cultural hegemony, and a tool for India's emancipation.

British colonialism was described by Marx as a prodigy of creative destruction, 'with the destructive parts being more dominant than the creatives parts'. Nowhere more was this dialectic visible than in Bengal.

The first fifty years of company rule from 1757 to 1807 were one of destructive exploitation which culminated in the Bengal famine of 1769. The East India Company had killed the proverbial goose that laid the golden egg, and its finances were in disarray. From 1773 onwards the company came increasingly under British influence through the first of many regulating acts. Over time the British crown acquired over 50% of the East India Company.

The period following this transition saw British bourgeois institutions being replicated in some form or another in colonial Bengal. The province became the main center of British economic and political power in the Indian sub-continent. A consequence of this, was what scholars call the Bengal renaissance, a period of social and political awakening.

With old political and social structures shaken, the native bourgeois class which was created in part by the company's implementation of private property through the permanent settlement, rose in power and confidence. The early part of the company rule bore its more creative character traits in the last 50 years of its existence in Bengal. This period saw the rise of social reform movements and new spiritual movements like the Brahma Samaj. A prominent leader of the movement, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, led the campaign to abolish Sati. Around the same time, Ishwar Chandra Bidasagar led a campaign for the empowerment and education of women. This period saw the widow remarriage act, and the abolition of sati law being passed. This was despite a backlash by Hindu society.

This period saw Bengal become one of three main centers of social reform and capitalist development. The other being Bombay, Pune, and Madras.

Even after the East India Company's rule had ended, and the company backed missions and schools were undone, the Bengal renaissance continued. The key institutions of Bengal's social transformation were the Hindu School, later Presidency University, the University of Dhaka, the University of Calcutta, and the Calcutta Medical School.

The political developments of this period culminated in the formation of the Congress Party. The party which would play the most important role in building the independence movement, and come to rule India. Surendranath Bannerjee, a leading politician of the National Conference in Bengal, played a key role in building the Congress Party.

Bengal's emergence as a center of revolutionary socialist struggle

The capitalist development in Bengal, much like the rest of the Indian sub-continent, was marked by uneven and combined development. Further distorted by arbitrary colonial restrictions, which ensured the lion's share of the Indian economy would remain in British hands, either directly, or indirectly through control via British finances.

The native capitalist class could accumulate wealth through commerce, or land ownership. A powerful agrarian and commercial capitalist class developed in Bengal and elsewhere, together with an influential intelligentsia. These classes led the development of an independent nationalist bourgeois movement in India. Bengal was one of the pioneering provinces where this development took place, and was by far the most significant economically.



*The writers building in Dalhousie Square, Calcutta.
Once the most important financial hub of Asia*

During and after the first world war, Indian industry began to boom. In the inter-war years, India saw the dramatic growth of an Indian proletariat. This growth took place at a time when the Russian revolution had shaken the capitalist world order to its core and given hope to workers across the world, that they could overthrow a capitalist system in their countries. The communist movement emerged, together with a radicalized trade union movement, no longer satisfied by social democracy.

India was not immune from these developments, and Bengal, which had been the most significant center of Indian capitalist development, could not but be affected by these developments. If the Bengal renaissance in the 19th century represented the birth of bourgeois democratic politics in Bengal, the 20th century represents the continuation of that into the era of socialist class struggle.

The industrial belt along the Hooghly river represented one of the most concentrated industrial regions of all of Asia. In the sprawling jute mills, engineering factories, pharmaceutical factories, and warehouses, was born a powerful militant working class movement. Alongside, grew a radicalized youth and student movement.

The period after the First World War saw a new phase in the struggle for Indian independence. On the one hand the Indian bourgeoisie grew in power and felt emboldened to demand more from the British,

on the other hand a working class grew in strength. Together with the radicalized youth, the working class represented an alliance of a revolutionary force which could push the independence movement in a revolutionary direction.

Bengal became a center of the communist movement, with leaders like M.N Roy, Satyendranath Tagore, Surya Sen and Nazrul Islam, spearheading the growth of the communist movement. In time, the Communists of Bengal would play a pivotal role in the independence struggle of India as well as shape the post-independence Indian political landscape.

Bengal after partition: A center of left wing opposition



A scene of Calcutta dockworkers on strike in the 1960s

United Bengal was a political and economic powerhouse within India. The bourgeoisie based in Calcutta was influential, and assumed a leading role in the Indian independence movement. It was both a fountainhead of Indian capitalism, and a center of the communist movement. It was not surprising then, that the British would conspire to break this power. The best instrument before it was religion, and Bengal's uneven development.

While Hindu capitalists and the middle class advanced under the protection of British capitalism, Bengal's muslim population fell behind. The Bengali muslim capitalist class

and it's intelligentsia were latecomers to the renaissance. While there were stalwarts among them, such as Begum Rokeya, and the Suhrawardy family, who were pioneers of social reform and education, as well as successful capitalists, the population at large remained behind their Hindu counterparts.

The decades immediately following World War 1 saw the rise of a nationalist movement, and a new vigor to the independence movement. It also saw the growth of a Muslim bourgeoisie in parallel with their Hindu counterparts. The competition between the two would begin to shape politics, not just in Bengal, but the whole of India. Bengal once again, became a center of communal politics, as a Hindu reactionary movement grew in response to this.

For the British, both the Muslim League and the Hindu supremacist parties such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, represented viable partners in ruling India. In the inter-war years, particularly in the aftermath of the Khilafat movement, the appeal and power of Muslim organizations like the Muslim League, grew. In particular, it League was able to secure the support of Bengal's muslim peasantry and petty bourgeois giving it the numbers to win in the 1946 elections.

Bengal and Punjab represented two important economies within the British Raj, and also two important bastions of the emerging Communist movement. Calcutta was still the main financial center of India and the largest port of Asia, it remained at the core of political developments in the country, and proved to be a center of revolutionary politics. For the British to ensure their reign over India remained for however long it could be, they had to clamp down on both these movements. The rise of communal politics proved to be a powerful foil against any emerging working class solidarity.

In Bengal and Punjab, the British divide and rule strategy succeeded, resulting in the movement for partition, shortly after the

devastation from the Bengal famine and the effects of World War 2. What had been the most important economy in India since Mughal times, entered a spiral of decline and disaster.

The partition of the sub-continent into a Hindu Majority and Muslim majority dominion included the partition of Bengal into a Hindu majority West and a Muslim majority East. The province of East Pakistan with Dhaka as it's provincial capital drew away most of the agrarian resources of Bengal, most important of which was jute and rice, while West Bengal with it's capital in Calcutta had most of Bengal's industry. One Bengal was starved of raw materials, while another was starved of an educated workforce and industry.

The decline of Bengal which right wingers and neo-liberal authors pretend to lament over, was triggered by a partition that they played a leading role in building. The state of West Bengal had begun it's life as part of the Indian Republic, damaged and crippled, with a burden of refugees. However, the legacy of the Bengal Renaissance, and the political and ideological developments which followed over the course of the 20th century, ensured that the city of Calcutta would remain politically relevant, and the state would continue to play a significant part in the politics of India.

The CPIM rule :

One of the landmarks of the Communist movement in India was the formation of the Communist Party of India in Tashkent in 1920. The leadership of the young party fell on Bengali leadership, with Muzaffar Ahmed and M.N Roy playing leading roles in the early years of the party.

The party was banned soon after its formation, and struggled to set roots in India. It was further hobbled by counter-revolutionary Stalinist leadership whose misdirection alienated potential Socialist revolutionaries and led it from one political disaster to another.

The counter-revolutionary leadership from Stalin culminated in the Second World War where the party stood against the anti-colonial movement which was reaching fever pitch in the Quit India movement. While the workers and peasants of India rose in rebellion against the Raj, the Communist Party was busy trying to whip up support for Britain's war effort. It had subjugated the interests of India's masses for those of the USSR. The Communists never recovered from this taint, even if public memory eventually forgot it.

It was only after independence, that the party grew in power and popularity. The party played a leading role in peasants struggles in Southern India, built a massive trade union network in present day Tamil Nadu and Bombay, and built a strong support base among Bengali Hindu namashudra refugees coming from the then East Pakistan.



The former chief minister Jyoti Basu (L) the leader of the CPIM in West Bengal

The party's power grew as conditions in West Bengal worsened. The legacy of partition and the Second World War played out to ensure that West Bengal would fall from being at the center of Indian industry to today where it is at the periphery of India's economy.

The economic decline of West Bengal did not take place overnight, but came as a result of shocks from political developments. Partition had destroyed the economic eco system of United Bengal, while West Bengal still possessed considerable industry, these entered a period of crisis following the wars with Pakistan, the pogroms against Hindus, and the

ensuing refugee crisis. The combination of factors aided in West Bengal becoming a bastion of the Communist movement in India with the lower caste Namashudra refugees becoming a vanguard of class struggle.

Organizing among exploited and marginalized namashudra gave the CPIM power to influence the politics of West Bengal. Nationally, the communist party became the main opposition. Within Bengal and Southern India, the Communists were the dominant opposition.



Refugees from East Pakistan coming into West Bengal

The refugee crisis and economic decline caused the downfall of the Congress party within West Bengal. Since the formation of the united front government in 1967, the Congress party in West Bengal was in a state of terminal decline. The only way in which the crisis ridden grand old party could hold on to power, was through governor's rule. West Bengal endured one of the longest period of emergency rule beginning from 1972.

Under the shadow of the Bangladesh liberation war, the Congress government imposed a reign of terror which went for five years till the election of 1977. As the Congress party was overthrown in 1978 during the national elections that year, elections in West Bengal brought the CPIM and the left front government to power in West Bengal. What followed was a thirty five year long rule of the

CPIM and the entrenchment of West Bengal as a bastion of left wing opposition in India.

The fall of the Stalinists and the rise of the TMC:

The Stalinist period of West Bengal is derided by right wingers and liberals alike, as a period of the state's decline. As if to say, nothing bad happened between the Bengal famine, and 1978, and all the problems of Bengal can be laid at the feet of the CPIM.

Most Indians have been fed this impression, of a state that tumbled from the richest, most economically significant state in India, to a marginalized economy whose importance is at best limited to the East zone, the most impoverished region of India. The truth is, that the decline of Bengal, and West Bengal in particular, owed much more to the Congress party and its politics, than to the CPIM. Partition had already crippled Bengal's economy by destroying the foundations of its jute industry. Its situation was then made worse by the imposition of freight equalization policy, which robbed Bengal of its natural advantages in transportation and location. The slow decline of Bengal's relative economic importance began right after independence.

The present day marginalization of West Bengal was a foregone conclusion when partition was decided. As of 1966 West Bengal accounted for 20% of India's industrial output, by 2011 it had fallen to 5%. While the CPIM cannot alone be blamed for this, they can be blamed for their failure to stop the drain of industry that left hundreds of thousands unemployed and turned the Hooghly industrial belt into a rust belt.

While they had failed to industrialize West Bengal, the left front government did succeed on other fronts. During its nearly four decades long rule, the CPIM increased literacy to over 75% in 2011 from 38% in 1971, it implemented comprehensive land reforms which gave land to the landless and relieved much rural distress, and empowered panchayat

systems in the countryside which prepared the groundwork for rural development.

In the first two decades of left front rule, West Bengal had the highest agricultural growth rates in India. This accompanied a dramatic poverty reduction in the state, along with a decrease in unemployment which had reached crisis level.

However, there was another side to the left front rule. Worker's agitations and strikes played a big role in propelling the Communist party led left front to power. The number of strikes were greater than the number of lockdowns, whereas after the left front government came in power, the number of lockdowns by business owners increased while strikes decreased. This represented a shift in power balance against the workers.

The left front government was the first to privatize electricity supply in India, with the Calcutta Electricity Supply Company being handed a virtual monopoly over the city of Calcutta. The darkest chapter in the early years of the left front rule, was the eviction of refugees on the island of Marichjhappi in the Sundarbans. The eviction was for the benefit of tourism development, an excuse was made for preserving the environment in the Sundarbans, an unknown number of people, mostly Dalit Namashudra, were killed in implementing the eviction.

The CPIM had rolled out several welfare measures, empowered rural democracy and brought about poverty reduction and increased literacy. Today, West Bengal has one of the lowest levels of infant mortality in India, a direct legacy of the CPIM rule. However, they presided over a capitalist system, and intended to rule West Bengal within the framework of Indian capitalism. Upholding the capitalist system, would eventually be its undoing.

As India embraced neo-liberal development, acquiring agricultural land for industry became increasingly common throughout the country. West Bengal under the CPIM

embraced the liberal economic order from 2000 onwards, and in half a decade of development, land reforms slowed down, agriculture started to decline, and agricultural land started to be acquired, sometimes by coercion for the benefit of industry.

The repressive apparatus set up by the CPIM required the liberal use of lumpens to terrorize their opponents. This became fully apparent during the peasants agitations in 2006 in the village of Singur where land was to be acquired for the construction of the Tata Group automotive plant in West Bengal. Parallel to Singur, was the agitation in Nandigram, where land was acquired for building a chemicals plant. The suppression of the agitation in Nandigram resulted in the massacre of 11 peasants.

The CPIM whose power over the state seemed unshakeable was suddenly faced with mass protests all over the state. The main opposition party, the TMC (a breakaway faction from the Congress party), led the protests. The protests broke the power of the CPIM in the state, and plunged it to a chaotic situation, reminiscent of the last years of Congress party rule in the late 1970s. Students, and peasants joined forces to fight the CPIM.



A protest led by Mamata Bannerji in solidarity with Singur farmers 2006

Over the five years following the Singur agitation, the party continued to lose ground. In the national elections of 2009 the left front alliance, which had till then gained the highest seat tally in its history, was reduced to less than half that number. The writing was on the wall, in the state elections two years later, the

CPIM led left front government collapsed. The TMC won.

Over the decades following independence, West Bengal had become a bastion for progressive and left wing politics in India. It was one of the first states to successfully challenge the hegemony of the Congress Party. Under the CPIM, the state remained as a major bastion of the left, and was the basis on which the Stalinist parties could project power on a national level. West Bengal being the fourth most populous state in the country, has nearly a tenth of all parliamentary seats. This was a major asset for the left front to influence parliamentary politics. That ended in 2011, with the ending of the CPIM government in West Bengal. What followed was a period of violence and anarchy at the hands of the TMC, which in the first instance, attracted the lumpen cadre of the CPIM and proceeded to use it against their former masters.

The loss of West Bengal, and of the Stalinists as a national force, paved the way for a momentary return of Congress hegemony over Indian politics between 2009 and 2014. This was ended after a series of protests and strike actions between 2011 and 2014. The fall of the Congress led to the rise of the BJP, while West Bengal remained a bastion of oppositional politics, it was devoid of its former historically progressive character.

The TMC during its 13 year rule over the state, proved to be an out and out reactionary party, fielding gangsters and ruling by a combination of intimidation, and populism. It was a degenerated version of the CPIM's rule, utilizing the lumpen force that previously formed their repressive party-state apparatus.

Should the BJP win Bengal :

Bengal's emergence as a bastion of oppositional politics in India was not just the result of the politics of the CPIM, but a consequence of its historical development and

the specific situation it found itself in the aftermath of the partition.

Beginning from the Bengal renaissance, and its position as the most important economical and cultural center of colonial capitalism in India, to the post independence era when it emerged as a center of class struggle, West Bengal had played an important, and sometimes pivotal role in shaping the political future of India.

Despite the loss of its previously held economic power, West Bengal remains an important state with cultural and historical significance. It is not for no reason that the TMC and Mamata Bannerjee emerged as the main face of the opposition soon after defeating the BJP in the 2021 state elections. The BJP in its quest to dominate India and become the next great hegemonic party, cannot ignore Bengal.

The national elections of 2024 have seen both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister coming to West Bengal on campaign, with the elections themselves stretched out and arranged over seven phases to give the BJP the greatest possible advantage over their opposition. No defeat hurt the BJP as much as the defeat in West Bengal, and it is today a focal point for their politics.

Despite being a bastion of oppositional politics for decades, the long rule of Stalinists, and now the TMC, has left a population that is exhausted and demoralized. Robert MacNamara was famously chased out of the airport in Calcutta when he visited India. He was forced to take a helicopter to the American embassy. Calcutta remained quiet when Donald Trump's son visited to inaugurate the Trump Towers, even as his father then the president, was initiating a brutal sanctions regime on Venezuela.

The potential of West Bengal as an engine of revolutionary politics has been exhausted by decades of Stalinist rule, and buried by the misrule of the TMC that followed. Both these parties have laid the groundwork for the dire

prospect of the reactionary BJP to take over the reins of the state, which had previously defied them over decades.



Calcutta during the riots of 1946 , the "great calcutta killings"

For the Hindutva movement, West Bengal has special significance. It was not only the home of one of their main leaders, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, but also the battleground where partition was decided. The muslims of Bengal, influenced by the historical factors which gave rise to the Bengal renaissance, also became a leading force for the Pakistan movement. The Hindu upper caste landed gentry and middle classes had thrown their lot behind the emerging Hindutva movement as a counter. Today, the Hindu upper caste and descendants of Hindus persecuted at the hands of Pakistan, form the vanguard of the BJP in West Bengal. Adding to their ranks are those, especially in rural Bengal, who have suffered from the misrule of the TMC and their gangsters.

The TMC has done much to lend legitimacy to the BJP, and done much to deprive the state of any progressive alternative. The CPIM must be blamed for creating and empowering the very lumpens who today join the TMC and train their guns on their former party. Together, they have created the once unthinkable prospect of a BJP dominated West Bengal. Once taken by the BJP, they would ensure one of the most important centers of opposition in Indian politics would be

nullified. West Bengal would be converted from a bastion of progressive politics, rooted in the history of the Bengal renaissance, anti-colonial struggle, and class struggle after independence, into a bastion of reaction. It would have complete dominance over the gangetic plain region, and the East zone. Their larger plan of pushing forward a Hindutva agenda, would become easier.

Conversely, a defeat in West Bengal, would encourage forces against Hindutva, whether bourgeois centrist, or progressive, or revolutionary, to fight against the BJP. West Bengal would remain a bastion of opposition in Indian politics. The Muslims of West

Bengal can become the vanguard of a movement against Hindutva, in alliance with Dalits and farmers. However, as long as these forces remain under the leadership of the TMC, they will continue to be hobbled. They will divert the energy of the masses towards empowering their agenda to loot West Bengal and enrich themselves.

All indicators suggest that it is likely that the BJP may yet win West Bengal, and an irreversibly reactionary situation would emerge in the state and the wider region. It might become the start of a reactionary wave in India, even stronger than 2014 and 2019. For that, we must prepare for the worst.

ON THE ELECTION BOYCOTTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

970 million are eligible to vote in the Indian elections this year, but not all Indians are coming forward to vote. In some parts of the country, people are boycotting the elections in entirety. News from Delhi, Nagaland, Tripura and parts of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, reveal frustrations among the masses, not just to individual political parties, but with the entirety of the process. The issues vary, but a common theme emerges. The relevance of voting and of bourgeois democracy is only to the extent that it can cater to the issues facing the public.

Anganwadi workers boycott the elections :

For years Anganwadi workers across the country have been protesting and striking for better conditions, regularization of work, and better pay.

Anganwadi workers recruited under the ASHA scheme are frontline care givers for women, especially in poorer communities, and villages.



Anganwadi workers on protest in Delhi

During the Covid pandemic, they performed a critical service helping with immunizing large numbers of the poor who had little to no access to healthcare. The Anganwadi workers were not properly equipped to handle the risks of the pandemic, many died on duty. Despite this,

neither state nor central governments gave them their due respect.

Conditions of work remain abysmal, pay remains low, and Anganwadi workers remained outside of the category of permanent employees. This has been the root cause of all the troubles facing the Anganwadi workers across the country.

The demand for permanency has been a core part of the protests by Anganwadi workers, in addition to better pay and compensation packages. The Anganwadi workers in Delhi had launched an indefinite strike in 2023, which was brutally suppressed by the Delhi government led by the AAP. While the Anganwadi workers struck work and protested, neither the BJP, nor the AAP, nor the Congress, and neither the CPIM aligned CITU stepped forward to help.

The struggle led by the Delhi State Anganwadi workers Union (DSAWU) has been pushing forward despite of the betrayal by all the mainstream parties, both bourgeois and Stalinist. Today the workers boycott the elections of 2024, because they rightfully see there is no alternative to choose from between the various corrupt mainstream parties.

Elections boycotted in Manipur :



Kuki Zo groups boycotting elections

With the silence of almost every mainstream Indian news media channel, it is easy to forget

that there is a situation of civil war going on between Kuki-Zo and Meitei people in Manipur. The violence has claimed hundreds of lives, with thousands displaced. The violence often takes the form of organized mob pogroms against mostly Christian Kuki-Zo tribe who live in the highlands, by dominant Meitei who live in the plains.

While earlier Indian governments attempted to balance the two communities to keep the peace in the region, the BJP has leaned hard towards the Meitei alienating the Kuki Zo and ensuring violence would erupt in Manipur again. What had begun from May last year continues to this day. While large scale acts of violence have largely subsided, sporadic acts of violence often by Meitei militias, continues to be reported.

The true death toll may never be known, but what has come to light is the continued situation of strife in the state.

The Prime Minister has kept mum on the violence, only speaking out to support the incumbent BJP Chief Minister of the state, one who has helped fan the flame of tribal violence. The Indian government has all but forsaken the people of Manipur to a horrible quagmire of violence. It is only natural that the people respond with a boycott.

Kuki parties have declared that they won't be fielding any party for the elections. The Global Kuki-Zomi-Hmar Women community, a group of Kuki-Zo women, including journalists, social workers, former Outer Manipur MP Kim Gangte and leaders of the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar women's forums in Delhi, had earlier written to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, informing him of its decision to boycott the polls.

Following suit, two more bodies -- Kuki National Assembly and Kuki Inpi -- have joined the chorus against the parliamentary election.

"We express our dissatisfaction with our leaders. It is disheartening that Indian forces, which are capable of preventing and countering threats from China and Pakistan, have failed to protect innocent citizens from terrorists. This has led to a loss of faith in the Indian Constitution and the country's claim that it is the world's largest democracy," said Mangboi Haokip, a spokesperson of the Kuki National Assembly.

"We feel compelled to abstain from voting in the Lok Sabha election to express our anguish towards the Indian leadership. If suffering is deemed our right in India, then we choose not to participate in the election. This boycott serves as a means to convey our pain and suffering to India and the world," Haokip added.

The Kuki Inpi also passed a resolution on Sunday to abstain from voting in the election.

In a statement issued on Saturday, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), which emerged as a conglomerate of tribal bodies in Churachandpur after ethnic violence broke out in the state in May last year, said, "Central security forces are deployed to maintain peace and remain neutral, but their actions today have raised many questions ahead of the Lok Sabha election."

The violence in Manipur did not happen by chance. Since India's annexation of Manipur, the people of the state have been denied their right to self-determination. India had offered the Manipuri people impoverishment, violence, and terror. Now it continues to do so, while clearing the ground for palm oil cultivation, and the conversion of Manipur into a transportation hub in the North East. These goals are to be met on the corpses of hundreds of Kuki Zo minorities.

It comes as no surprise then, that the people of Manipur have taken to boycott as a response.

Boycott by Tamil Nadu farmers :



Tamil farmers boycott the elections

A dozen villages in Tamil Nadu boycotted the elections in Tamil Nadu during the first phase of the voting. These villages' lands have been earmarked for the construction of the second airport at Parandur. Villages have raised concerns over acquisition and compensation which have fallen on deaf ears on the ruling DMK government.

For the past 600 days, the villagers had been protesting the airport. Today, their protest assumes a new form as they boycott the elections entirely. Out of 1400 registered voters at Ekanapuram constituency, only 21 government officials came forward to vote. No farmer voted in these elections.

Parallel to this protest, four villages under the Muthanai village panchayat boycotted the elections in Cuddalore district over lack of basic infrastructure like drinking water, bitumen roads and transportation. In another district, sixty Dalit families boycotted the election, over police inaction in pursuing a case of poisoning their overhead tank in 2022 with human feces.

While not a unified issue, the tactic of boycotting the elections shows frustration with

the system, over failure to address basic issues and challenge caste discrimination.

Conclusions:

Lenin had said, “Bourgeois democracy is democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, exuberant promises and the high-sounding slogans of freedom and equality. But, in fact, it screens the non-freedom and inferiority of women, the non-freedom and inferiority of the toilers and exploited.”

The examples of election boycotts show this in clear view, a feeling shared among at least some in the electorate, of the futility of the democratic exercise. The example of the Anganwadi workers puts this contradiction in sharp focus. The system that has worked to enrich billionaires and create new oligarchs could not give permanent employment to hundreds of thousands of Anganwadi workers who risked their lives to provide care to the most vulnerable people. For them, the national elections are a sham, to choose between one party promises to loot, and the other party that loots while promising to save.

However, these examples, do not account for the vast majority of the electorate. The vast majority of India’s workers and peasants have come out to vote. It is likely that many would cast their vote for the reactionary BJP or the bourgeois opposition, who are no less in the pockets of the big capitalists. It must also be acknowledged, that a sizeable section of the petty bourgeois have been sold out to the forces of reaction. These are die hard supporters of the BJP, for whom the vote assumes an altogether different meaning. For them, a vote for the BJP is a vote

for the Hindu Rashtra. Should the bourgeois democratic system be ended for it’s sake, they would not care.

For many the vote is still relevant as a means of expressing their discontent, and pushing for issues. Ultimately, it is these material considerations that are front and centre in the minds of the people. They are not swayed by high sounding phrase mongering over ‘democracy’. For the vast majority of people, the relevance of the elections will always be about putting food on the table. Most remain in the illusion that the bourgeois democratic system would deliver, or more correctly, see no other immediate alternative to it. To fight the system is not easy, and most would rather use peaceful means to seek better conditions within the system and survive.

It is only when the patience of the masses have been exhausted that they proceed on the path of struggle. In a world where capitalism is suffering through one of it’s most severe historical crisis such conditions arrive more often than before. It is the duty of revolutionaries to step forward to give leadership.

The revolutionary movement cannot see boycotting elections as a viable tactic, when the majority of workers and peasants look to it. Our task is to dispel illusions in the system, and present revolution as that viable alternative, and in fact it is the only viable long term solution for capitalism. If the past decades have proven anything, it is that capitalism can never solve it’s own problems. Only a socialist revolution can solve the crisis of capitalism.

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