



IV531 - April 2019

PSOE gains from useful vote against the reactionary right

30 April 2019, by **Jaime Pastor**

Pedro Sánchez managed to channel the cry of “No pasarán” to the detriment of UP (Unidos Podemos), which went from 21.15% in 2016 to 14.31% and also, unlike Ciudadanos, has been especially affected by the electoral system’s procedure of seat distribution, going from 71 seats to 42. In addition Sanchez won an absolute majority in the Senate (going from 43 to 121 seats) against a right (falling from 130 to 56 seats) that has traditionally dominated this institution, whose role had been revalued with the application of article 155 against Catalan autonomy after the days of September and October 2017.

The second conclusion to be highlighted from these results is undoubtedly the rise of ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya - Republican Left of Catalonia) which has gone from 9 to 15 seats, with 3.89% of votes, this being the first time that a pro-independence political force has become the biggest force in Catalonia in a general election. This is compounded by the rise of its Basque ally in the upcoming European elections, EH Bildu (which has gone from 2 to 4 seats, with 0.99% of votes), confirming the greater weight of sovereignist and republican leftist forces in the next parliament, although they are not going to be

decisive to guaranteeing the investiture of Sánchez as president of the government.

The PSOE’s triumph is completed with its achievement in the elections that were also held on Sunday in the Països Valencià : it rises from 23 to 27 seats and, with the support of Compromís (17) and Podemos (8), has a majority to form a government over the three right wing parties (47 seats).

This new scenario is a very serious defeat of the PP and, above all, its leader Pablo Casado, whose radicalization of discourse to compete with Vox has not yielded the desired results and, instead, now opens an internal crisis of incalculable consequences a little less than a month from the municipal, autonomous and European elections of May 26, 2019. Resignations and defections to Ciudadanos are not ruled out in the next few days, following in the footsteps of Ángel Garrido, former president of the Community of Madrid, a region where Ciudadanos beat the PP.

The new correlation of forces in parliament allows Sánchez to obtain investiture by adding his votes to those of UP, the Basque nationalist PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco, which has risen from 5 to 6), Compromis (1) and the Cantabrian

regionalist PRC (1), if not in a first in a second round of parliamentary voting, without having to agree with the Catalan independence movement (which includes Junts per Catalunya, which will have 7 seats) or with Ciudadanos.

This last formation will enter a new stage in which its leader, Albert Rivera, has already expressed his aspiration to become head of the opposition to the Sanchez government, all the more so in view of the coming electoral battles and the new setback that awaits the PP in them. It does not seem foreseeable, therefore, that in the short term there will be a turn towards a negotiation on their part with the PSOE but, on the contrary, a greater effort to wrest votes from the PP and Vox and to strengthen its support so as to enter government in large cities like Madrid and some Autonomous Communities.

Against this background we are seeing how Pablo Iglesias, despite the setback suffered, has offered to be part of a coalition government with the PSOE. An option that does not seem to be taken into account by Sanchez but which, if realized, would mean, given such an unequal correlation of forces between the two formations, moving towards strategic subordination to a party whose programmatic axis around the main

cleavages - social, the national-territorial and political-institutional - that run through society continues to be that of a fundamental pillar of this regime - against which Podemos was born - and a faithful servant of the dictates of the Ibex 35 and the neoliberal troika.

Such an orientation, in the midst of the new electoral campaign that is soon to begin, would not serve at all to recover that part of the electorate that opted this Sunday for the vote for the PSOE or other formations on its left, but quite the opposite. A coherent position should be limited to supporting the investiture of Sanchez in parliament and reaffirming the strategic autonomy of a project openly prepared to confront the right wing

parties and, above all, the threat of the penetration of Vox among certain popular sectors with an alternative program that from the first day is able to seek a confluence with the social mobilizations and popular empowerment around urgent demands whether they are social, feminist, ecologist, anti-racist, the defence of liberties or national-territorial. The latter, essential in the face of a plurinational reality that has become manifest again and again and before which the PSOE of Sánchez continues to yield to the pressures of the right and of its own baronies, even avoiding its already moderate federalist proposals in its electoral program and turning a deaf ear to the majority clamour in Catalonia against the

farcical trial taking place in the Supreme Court (let's not forget that four elected representatives of ERC and Junts per Catalunya are in jail) and in favour of a dialogue-based way out that goes through a referendum on their future.

The presence of a diversity of candidacies of popular unity in cities, towns and Autonomous Communities before the elections on May 26 should be an opportunity to seek greater social roots in neighbourhoods and workplaces that helps to move towards a process of recomposition of a left that, coinciding with the eighth anniversary of 15M, once again renews the spirit of indignation that saw it born while maintaining a clear horizon of rupture.

Looking at the presidential duel

30 April 2019, by **Pierre Rousset**

The election result will only be officially announced in a month's time. For the presidential election, it already seems clear that Joko Widodo, known as "Jokowi", obtained about 55% of the vote, against 45% for Prabowo Subianto, who is unconvincingly contesting these figures and has denounced the regime's "organized fraud". However, the poll also concerned the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, provincial governorates and municipal councils - about 20,000 offices and 245,000 candidates. Appropriate figures for this huge Asian archipelago, 4,800 km long, separating the Indian Ocean from the Pacific and stretching to the outskirts of Australia.

Pressure from Islamic fundamentalists

It is therefore currently impossible to assess the "electoral map" of the country after April 17. To stick to the presidential election, the profile of the

candidates seems to embody two clearly opposed options. Jokowi, 57, was not part of the traditional establishment until he was first elected in 2014; he has presented himself as a liberal and effective technocrat, advocating tolerance. Prabowo, 67, a former general and a multimillionaire, embodies the politico-military class which emerged from the dictatorship of Suharto, established in 1965-1966 by the largest anti-Communist massacre of the last century (the dictatorship was overthrown in 1998); he has led military units that have committed many crimes and has the support of the most intolerant Islamic-conservative circles. He is, undoubtedly, a nasty piece of work.

However, in the quest for popular votes, Prabowo made agreements with some unions on a "social" agenda, and sought to win over the peasantry, some of whose income has been chipped away by inflation. As for Jokowi, during his first term, he focused on the former head of the Indonesian secret service, as well as

General Wiranto, who was placed in 2016 at the head of the ministry controlling the security services, when he had been charged with crimes against humanity by a UN-sponsored tribunal!

In addition, Jokowi has chosen as his vice president in this race a very conservative ulema (theologian), Ma'ruf Amin (76) who was one of the people responsible for a violent mass campaign, sectarian and racist, accusing Ahok, a Chinese Christian who is the former governor of the capital, Jakarta, of blasphemy. It is possible that Joko Widodo once again obtained electoral support from the lower classes, non-conservative Muslims and minorities. However, in reality, freedoms are still restricted in Indonesia under the pressure notably of rigid Islamist currents.

Nationalist accents

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, and the vast

majority of Muslims live in Asia. However, the centres of political-theological authority are in the Middle East. With the decisive help of petrodollars, they seek to impose on local cultures their version of orthodoxy, like the Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia. Traditional Indonesian Islam is syncretic, incorporating local beliefs, and is tolerant at the religious level although not necessarily at the political level!

Islamist movements, for their part, carry out a constant offensive against minority religions, homosexuals, women, freedom of expression and behaviour. The situation varies from place to place, but, increasingly, the

administrative powers yield to the demands of intolerant movements that want to remove from the public space all that is not "Muslim" (in their sectarian definition of the term).

Jokowi has proved unable to counter the growing power of the daily dictatorship of sectarian religious movements. On the economic level, he has given priority to the development of infrastructure in this gigantic archipelago - but for whose benefit? Is it really the local people who benefit most, or the larger companies that have greater access to markets and resources?

Jokowi and Prabowo agree on

massively opening the country to palm oil plantations to the detriment of rural populations and at the cost of rapid deforestation. The social, environmental and health costs of this industrial culture are well known, to the extent that the subject has become a subject of controversy between Djakarta and the European Union: the electoral campaign was conducted under nationalistic accents against foreign interference. After Malaysia, the global expansion of palm oil is spreading through Indonesia (and parts of Africa).

Prabowo's victory in the presidential election would have been very bad news - but Jokowi's is not good news.

Teachers on strike in Poland

29 April 2019, by **Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska**

The strike also enjoys broad social support. For example, many academic institutions and town halls have announced that their employees, being parents, can come to work with their children. Others are organizing special events for children. Rallies in solidarity with teachers are held all over the country, also organized by pupils. The strike is supported by other occupational groups such as the recently protesting early-stage physicians and employees of LOT Polish Airlines. The strike also enjoys the favor of circles who do not normally support workers' struggles, including mainstream liberal media opposed to the rule of the radical right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) such as the major daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the largest private TV broadcaster. The Parliamentary opposition is also supporting teachers.

At the same time, teachers are under very strong pressure from the government, which is trying to break the strike in various ways. The personal data of teachers who are on strike is being illegally collected. Vehement anti-strike and pro-government propaganda is broadcast

on the Internet and public television, denouncing the strike as communist and anti-national and accusing teachers of harming children. The strike broke out just before final exams in the junior high schools. However, exams were held, as striking teachers were substituted by random people, like office workers, religious instructors including priests and nuns, prison officers and firemen.

"From the very beginning, the government all the time humiliates us," a striking teacher told *LeftEast*. "Today again we have got a punch in the face. They treat us as if we do not exist. The government has entrenched its position and is trying to starve the teachers - we will not get paid for the strike days. Some people have quit the strike because of the economic pressure, some because of propaganda pressure - the pro-government propaganda says that we are holding children hostage. I'm not judging them. It is hard - we are still thinking about the pupils. Although in my school the atmosphere is great, this strike is not fun. But we are not striking just for money - we are striking for the dignity of our

profession."

The ZNP demands a raise in teachers' salaries of 1000 PLN (â, ~250). For many years, teachers' purchasing power has been systematically declining. At the moment, the basic salary of a graduate teacher (the highest level of the teachers' career), is 3484 PLN (â, ~870) - 70% of the national average. An early-stage teacher earns 50% of the national average. [1] But it is not only about the earnings. In 2017 the Law and Justice government introduced an education reform: a return to an earlier, two-level (primary school, high school) system after a couple of decades of three-level one (primary school, junior high school, high school). Although the very idea was popular, the reform was seen by many as unprepared (44%). [2] Because of its implementation, the reform was criticized and protested not only by teachers but also by parents and local authorities, which were to bear its costs. [3] The ZNP collected 910,000 citizens' signatures (almost twice as many as required by law) in support of a referendum on the question of the education reform but it was rejected

by the Parliament, where the Law and Justice Party holds the majority.

The implementation of the reform has fueled growing discontent among the teachers who are forced to run every day from one school to another so that they can have a full time job. Another "side effect" of the reform is that in 2019 high schools face twice as many candidates as before, which is particularly stressful for pupils and parents.

"The reform of [Education Minister] Anna Zalewska means for teachers not only new duties, deteriorating work conditions and lower earnings but also everyday discontent from the pupils' parents who experience the negative effects of the reform. Because of that, teachers more and more often decide to quit their jobs in schools and kindergartens. ... Zalewska is responsible for all of that," Sławomir Broniarz, president of the Polish Teachers' Union, explained in September 2018.

Because of the growing teachers'

grassroots discontent, the pro-government Solidarność organized their own protests but the union's leadership was against the strike. Moreover, just before the strike, Solidarność signed a separate agreement with the government, accepting the government proposal, seen not only by the ZNP and its members but also by the Solidarność members and non-union teachers as completely unacceptable: teachers started to quit the union and regional and local leaderships of Solidarność supported the strike and called for the resignation of its national chair.

"This strike is extremely important and it should have been organized many years ago. Teachers, like nurses, are blackmailed by mass media. However, as sociologist Beverly Silver writes, teachers are proletarians. Public opinion must be confronted with the fact that teachers are not only in the position of trust or carry out the 'mission' to educate future generations but also an occupational group, who have their own collective

interests," Dr. Marcin Starnawski, a social scientist and a specialist in education, explains to LeftEast. "I personally think that from the very beginning it should have been a sit-in strike, exams should not have been held. This strike should reorganize everyday life. Acts of public support such as the creation of the national strike fund are wonderful, but we need more of them, perhaps also some forms of daily informal community education and care to help parents of schoolchildren. Let us hope that the striking teachers will overcome," he adds.

After the collapse of "actually existing" socialism, at the beginning of the 1990s, facing the implementation of neoliberal reforms, teachers organized strikes and protests with their culmination in 1993 - the biggest teachers' strike in the history of Poland until now, with final high school exams not being held. That strike was not successful. Let's hope the teachers of 2019 will succeed.

Source [LeftEast](#)

Democracy, the constituent assembly and the challenge of transition

28 April 2019, by **Nadir Djermoune**

What is at stake is clear, clear and precise: on the one hand, there are the forces that hold power, embodied by the military institution and the governmental structures left by the decamped president. They demand the continuity of the structure of power, the respect of the existing institutions through the strict and formal application of the constitution in force, especially Article 102. On the other side, there is an opposition that calls for a break with the current regime and commitment to a transition to a new political structure.

But this opposition remains diffuse in its organization and differs in its conception of the "rupture" demanded

and consequently on the democratic future of the country. There are the forces that are asking for a transitional government that will organize the election of a new president and initiate reforms. Forces that we can call "reformist". There are those who demand a constituent process and the passage through a constituent assembly to a true democratic rupture and a new structure of power. Forces that can be described as "revolutionary". These are the questions that this transition poses.

But before examining the issues related to this transition, let us return to the significance of this popular and

historic mobilization for Algeria.

The meaning of the movement

Regardless of the obstacles and difficulties that can block its path, the movement that emerged on 22 February is an untrammelled opening to a real future and a democratic possibility for Algerian society. A fundamental spontaneous awareness has overcome the sediments of defeatism laid down by years of being haunted by civil war, anguish and fear of a dark future. A volcanic effervescence has raised the dead

weight of accumulated failures. In this popular movement, action has freed itself from that which weighed upon it. It has metamorphosed at one leap into a community, into a communion in which demonstrations turn into joy and celebration.

The strength of the movement is in its numbers and territorial and national deployment. There is in this strength a will of the rebels to become the masters of their life and their history, not only with regard to political decisions but also in their daily lives. “Blad dyalna, n’dirou Rayna” says one of the main slogans of the demonstrations (“the country is ours; we do what we want”). It is this strength that remains the only guarantor of a better future and the guard against a barbaric drift or a dark regression.

In this movement, the heroes and geniuses are collective. The movement does not have great leaders or official guides. But the leading figures, both the theoreticians and the men and women in action, do not lack genius, breadth or competence. Like this strategy called “Silmiya”, (peaceful), which has become a good technique of struggle. The bodies and voices of women, men and children block police officers in the face of every attempt at violence, introducing a certain ethical dimension to political confrontation, even if a strong presence of repressive forces continues in the streets of Algiers, the site of power, protecting the “Casa d’El Mouradia” during the demonstrations.

The strength of the movement also lies in the unanimous denunciation of organized theft and the widespread corruption of the “system”. “Edditou blad ya serraquin” (“oh thieves, you took the country”), says another emblematic slogan. While this denunciation is expressed above all at the moral level by claiming the right to dignity and freedom, the debates and criticisms during the marches reveal the deep wellsprings and the economic underpinnings of this organized theft. Economic liberalism and the privatization of entire sectors in all directions are increasingly being blamed. A sovereign appropriation of the wealth of the country is one of the demands that emerges from the

slogans. It already prefigures the content of the debates to come on the way out of the crisis.

This collective and spontaneous force, however, has its limits. The movement cannot fail to give birth to its own leadership and emerge as an alternative power. This is the necessary condition for imposing a revolution or, where appropriate, negotiating in a proper way a reform of the system. Although this possibility is contained in the movement itself, its emergence requires a critical theoretical action to give it a meaning and a democratic and social future at the level of its demands.

Reform or revolution?

Some theoretical critiques limit themselves to stressing the absence of the revolutionary character of the movement. It is said to be reformist because of its sociological component – middle layers and youth – or because of the absence of a vanguard party which would bring the necessary consciousness from outside. It is too easy to manipulate and is even at the mercy of plots from inside or outside.

These readings come from static and formal logics. Because, there is no “revolutionary” movement by definition or essence. No denouement is predictable. Criticism cannot proceed by salvation or condemnation a priori.

Often carried by a spontaneous consciousness, protest movements of this kind always begin with immediate social, cultural, economic or political demands, without addressing the question of “reforming” or “revolutionizing” the existing system. They can be extended in time and space, if their demands are not met, without making a qualitative leap in politics. This is currently the case of the *gilets jaunes* in France. They can radicalize quickly only to peter out later. This was the case in Kabylie in 2001. And they can take political steps and arrive at revolutionary breakthroughs, without prejudging the scope and nature of this revolution. As was the case in Tunisia in 2011.

It is above all the political elites and vanguards who, driven by a critical consciousness, formulate their projects and their alternatives in terms of “reform” or “revolution”. These formulas are hypotheses of necessary construction that start either from a pre-established philosophical system or from direct contact with reality and a realistic critique of the situation with a view to transforming it.

From this point of view, the “system” so much decried by the Algerian demonstrators tries to maintain itself by starting from its constitutional matrix which serves as its political and ideological support. The demand for a provisional government that organizes a presidential election, as we pointed out above, is located on the terrain of a radical reformism. The opposition political forces, essentially neoliberal and oligarchic, demand a parenthesis of the current constitution in order to resume it as soon as a president is elected and then reform it if necessary. They reject, therefore, any revolutionary break with this “system”. They reject the Constituent Assembly slogan under various pretexts, notably the slowness of the constituent process which would open a breach to a “foreign hand” or “Islamist barbarism”. In reality, this rejection avoids any broad and transparent debate with all the components of society on the much-maligned “system”.

It is here that the revolutionary character of the slogan of a sovereign constituent assembly resides. For it opens the way, under these conditions, to a radical and truly democratic change of the “system”.

Democracy, a permanent construction

Other voices consider that it serves no purpose to formulate transitional political alternatives, whether a general strike or, still less, a constituent assembly, as the marchers have not yet clearly formulated a program to challenge the current social order and are not organized into

an alternative revolutionary power. The moment is not propitious for any democratic or revolutionary change, these voices tell us. It would then be necessary to wait for the construction of this vanguard party which would direct the masses towards the seizure of power. In the meantime, we should base ourselves on demands: the demand for democratic, economic and trade union freedoms from a *de facto* regime. In other words, according to this reading, it is a question of asking the millions of demonstrators to give up their political demands, to stand behind the reformers or to stay out of the real story unfolding before us.

It is necessary to abandon this tautology. To get rid of them all, “yetnahha-w gaÄc”, as demanded by the slogan of the millions of protesters, to get rid of them effectively, i.e. to get rid of thieves, but also of oppression and exploitation, it is certainly necessary to have vanguard parties that can bring this critical awareness. But it is the movement itself that can create the conditions for its own political, social and cultural emancipation. It is from within the protests that a project can be built and with it the structures that will carry it to its fulfilment. It is not the mere creation of a partisan organization that will bring the solution from the outside.

It is also here that the meaning of the Constituent Assembly takes on its full meaning. Because by aiming for a refoundation of the republic, a 2nd or even a 3rd in its wake, it requires a wide and transparent debate that the organization of this assembly can

structure.

But the Constituent Assembly is not the ultimate solution. It is the starting point for a democratic solution, especially in the face of this crisis posed by the movement. And the form that this democracy, or this second republic, as a part of the movement stipulates, would take, is not defined a priori. It is a construction. To prefigure the alternative would already be falling back into the trap of Utopia.

Democracy does not have a universal form of expression. That of today, in its unequal expression according to the country, is a legacy of the European peoples introduced in the 18-19th centuries by revolutionary processes called “bourgeois democratic revolutions”, in the context of a triumphant and colonialist capitalism. These structures and institutions of management of the city are not constant. If this form of democratic management can be taken for granted for all humanity, it is called upon to change. It has already evolved from a limited suffrage to universal suffrage, then from white men to women and people of colour, from self-determination to social and cultural rights. It has also known other direct but ephemeral forms, those of the “popular councils”.

But the new structures cannot be created *ex-nihilo*. If men and women make their own histories, but not under conditions they have chosen, Algerians are creating their own history in a context of a backward capitalism dependent on another

global capitalism in crisis. It is also this problem that the debate around a constituent assembly will try to settle.

The technological and productive reality in which we evolve has not really overcome the great problems and contradictions introduced by capitalism. What is new is the awareness of the links that exist between the means of communication and collective behaviour. An awareness that has taken shape thanks to the perfecting of globalization and the extension of mass media.

The problem of method - by way of a conclusion

The political preconditions for any change, whatever its form, start from a question on the place of the work of art by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin: “instead of asking: what is the position of a work with respect to the relations of production of the time? Does it accord with them, is it reactionary or revolutionary? Instead of this question, or at least before this one, I would like to ask another one ... I would like to ask: what is its place in these same relations?” The same question can dictate our conduct: what is the place of democracy in a global manner and the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in a particular manner in the current political relationships of force? That is what we have tried to explain in this contribution.

Russia: The Protest Movement is Younger, Poorer, and More Left Wing

27 April 2019, by **Ivan Ovsyannikov**

There have been three waves of protest in Russia over the last decade: protests in response to vote rigging in 2011 parliamentary elections that

stretched into 2012; anti-corruption rallies of Alexei Navalny supporters in 2017; and actions by opponents of pension reform in the summer and fall

of 2018. The largest of these protests involved, according to estimates, more than a hundred thousand of people.

"The situation today is fundamentally different than 2011, when people were pleasantly surprised to discover they weren't alone in the streets. The composition and structure of the protest has since changed," notes Oleg Zhuravlev, a researcher in the Laboratory of Public Sociology and Professor in the School for Advanced Studies at Tyumen State University. Researchers studying the Russian protest movement for several years agree.

Moral Protest

The 2011 protests on Moscow's Bolotnaya Square are often described as a "middle class revolt," "a revolution in mink coats" or as rallies of the "creative class" or "office hamsters" (minor office clerks). While the protesters did, indeed, appear wealthier and more educated than the general population, sociologists have disputed the idea that the protests were at the hands of the middle class. Protesters' social-economic backgrounds were more modest than initially assumed.

According to a Levada Center poll, forty percent of the participants in the 2011-2012 protests in Moscow said that they could afford fancy things, but not a car, an item considered a marker of Russian middle-class life. Thirty percent admitted that they skimp on food and clothing, and only three to five percent stated that they don't refuse themselves anything. Most of the protesters were between 25 and 40 years old with a college education.

In fact, the protesters tended to avoid associating themselves with any social group and rejected demands that could break the unity around a universal slogan of fair elections. After years of no mass protests, the diversity of participants was a revelation in and of itself. "It showed that not only could we go to work and live our personal lives, but we could also protest together. People reinvented the public sphere anew," says Oleg Zhuravlev.

According to Artemy Magun, a professor of political theory and democracy at European University,

many protesters identified with the people (in the sense of the nation or ordinary people) or with "those who cared." As Alexander Bikbov, a sociologist with the Independent Research Institute, noted "poverty and social stratification were peripheral for protesters compared to values of honesty and dignity.

The Fleeting Unity of Differences

According to Oleg Zhuravlev, post-Soviet protests are de-ideologized and reactive ("Protect the trees," "Every vote must be verified.") and imbued with moral rhetoric. "In 2011, people invested morally in the act of voting. Everyone knew Russian elections are falsified, and no one gave a damn, but now many decided that their vote had been stolen and gathered in the streets as a result."

"The sudden unity of differences was the essence of the Bolotnaya protests. It was important for many protesters. For example, such people voted in elections for the opposition Coordinating Council (a body established in autumn 2012 to direct the protest movement) and "ticked" a ballot for a leftist, a liberal or a nationalist," a source told Eurasianet.org. The failure of the protests, the repression of their participants, and the subsequent annexation of Crimea led many to forget about the protests and the euphoria of the time. Many participants in the protests turned away from the opposition. Protest activity declined or transferred to local activist groups created by former "Bolotniki" [participants from the Bolotnaya Square in which tens were tried and imprisoned]. Participants in such initiatives usually devoted themselves to urban renewal and ecology, and split over the question of taking on the annexation of Crimea and the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine. According to Zhuravlev, however, this split was not as much a death knell as previously thought. "Since activists were engaged in specific causes, they decided that "events in Ukraine were not important. It was better to not talk about them to avoid conflict," says the sociologist.

New Youth

In 2017, the protest movement again loudly reared its head. The anti-corruption slogans largely repeated the demands of 2011's "Snow Revolution." Yet, observers were impressed by the massive involvement of teenagers, which stood in contrast to the stereotype of the protester as an educated, middle-aged professional. They quickly christened the events the "revolt of the schoolkids."

Not everyone agrees. Immediately after the protests in late March 2017, Alexander Bikbov argued that the proportion of teenagers among the protesters was no larger than in December 2011. According to Svetlana Yerpyleva, who studies youth political activity, it wasn't so much the number of students in the protests, although their numbers undoubtedly increased. It was their role in the movement.

"After the 2011-2012 protests, politically active teens took actions considered 'suitable for children.' As one teenage respondent from a local activist group explained, 'I usually do something small. For example, I distribute flyers or send emails . . . I can't do anything meaningful because of my age,'" Yerpyleva notes.

Today's high-school students act without regard for adults, who are often conservative or have lost any hope for change. Teenagers not only attend protests, but often organize them, give speeches, and resist pressure from police and school administration. "None of the eleven teenagers I surveyed thought that people under eighteen were 'stupid' or 'less mature' than adults. On the contrary, they stressed that they are citizens and should be allowed express their grievances publicly; that it's teenagers' future that is at stake," says Yerpyleva. In her opinion, such changes in self-consciousness sharply distinguish millennials from the young members of the movement for fair elections raised in the 1990s.

Oleg Zhuravlev finds nothing

surprising in the politicization of today's youth. It's merely a reaction to the invisible but unavoidable presence of opposition politics in our lives. Today's teens are growing up in a politicized environment, unlike their older brothers and sisters, who were timid when it came to protests.

From Liberalism to Populism

It's not just age. The class composition of opposition protests is also changing. If the metropolitan middle class were the predominant participants in the 2011-2012 protests (or, at least appeared so in eyes of most of the population), then the lower classes were entering the political stage in 2017-2018. "The interviews we conducted at Navalny's rallies show that they had more poor people, young people and poor teenagers. The protest's rhetoric also shifted to the left. This is connected both with the change in their social composition and with Navalny's leftward shift. He's sensitive to and anticipates public sentiment. By

shifting from criticizing dictatorship to criticizing oligarchs, he clearly understood that going beyond a narrowly liberal or nationalist fringe would allow him to expand his constituency and become the sole leader of the opposition," Oleg Zhuravlev believes.

Navalny's rhetoric shifted even more to the left after the protests against raising the retirement age in which over 200,000 mostly provincial residents participated last summer and fall. Experts, however, say Navalny is not very pleased with this since it undermines his liberal socio-economic program. In his analysis of the pension protests, Ilya Budraitskis says the main reason for their defeat was the lack of united action, both from the "systemic" opposition of the Communist Party and the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, and from Navalny, who is disinclined to unite with other oppositionists.

The pension protests had the potential of becoming a "unity of differences," says Oleg Zhuravlev, if the opposition were capable of broad political alliances as in the days of the

Bolotnaya protests. "The reform impacted the basic interests of various social groups, but [because of the time it would take to go into effect] it was not a shock for them. It took a lot of work to mobilize people to protest," he notes.

The populist leadership of the modern Russian opposition movement strikingly distinguishes it from protests at the beginning of the decade. However, according to commentators, the situation may change again. "Since social groups in Russia don't have a clear identity, the protesters are highly susceptible to the rhetoric of leaders." "But," Oleg Zhuravlev adds, "I wouldn't call the Navalny movement personalistic. A great number of people interviewed at his rallies say: 'We don't personally like Navalny, but his protests are the only ones around.' Today, an increasing number of people think not only in emotionally charged moral categories, but also in terms of group interests. It's possible, there is already a critical questioning of Navalny from the most radical young protesters."

Source *LeftEast* 19 April 2019.

"President and Government should be held responsible for Easter Sunday carnage"

26 April 2019, by **Vame Handa (Left Voice)**

We express our sorrow to the families of the affected. It is disclosed that this attack was carried out by National Thowheed Jamath, an organisation based in Sri Lanka. In the meantime, Islamic State (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for this atrocity.

Full responsibility for all the damages to lives and property in this tragic violence should be taken by the Government of Sri Lanka. Even though intelligence information including the identity of some of the individuals who exploded the bombs were received by the police around 4

April. The government did not inform the public of this credible threat nor take any preventive steps to stop this disaster. The Secretary to the Ministry of Defense (who has since resigned following public outrage) confirmed that he was aware of this intelligence but didn't act on it, believing it to be exaggerated.

While the public is rightly criticizing the entire government for its criminal irresponsibility, the President and Prime Minister are passing the buck onto others including each other. The opportunity for Sri Lanka to become a

bombing ground has been created by the unstable political situation for which both leaders are responsible.

It is necessary to understand the socio-economic roots of this type of extremism among young Muslims. Sinhala chauvinist forces which strengthened after the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, considered the local Muslim community as its next antagonist.

The Muslim community, especially in the Eastern province, is economically disadvantaged. The post-war

campaigns against halal food certification and the slaughter of cows as carried out by Sinhala racist forces were actually campaigns against Muslim commercial interests. The war-time Secretary to the Ministry of Defence (and brother to the former president), Gotabhaya Rajapakse protected the Bodu Bala Sena (â€˜Buddhist Army Force') movement who led those racist campaigns. He aspires to be the next President of the country with the backing of those same forces.

The Muslim businessmen of Colombo city have been under threat from Sinhala racists who organize boycotts of their stores as well as attack them, with no protection from previous and present Governments. It appears that some of the suicide bombers were well-educated children of rich businessmen. The context of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia has clearly helped ISIS and other reactionary groups to penetrate into the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

The present opposition leader and ex-

president Mahinda Rajapakse has stated that he too was aware of the possibility of terror attacks. He complains that the present government enabled this situation through arrests of a few intelligence personnel implicated in abductions and disappearances during his regime. Now all three parties, the President, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition are committed to strengthening the security forces and police by introducing new oppressive laws. The President has declared a state of emergency which threatens democratic rights. Other authoritarian steps include blocking access to social media platforms and the cancellation of May Day rallies next week.

The crisis in the present Sri Lankan Government (Ranil-Sirisena) which developed since 26th October 2018, has now shattered the Sri Lankan state. It is now an opportune moment to rally round all the forces to push this Government out of existence which is strongly echoing in the peoples' sentiments demanding the Govt. to resign. If we delay in the task

of defeating this Government, a right wing coup will be hatched in the very near future.

A dangerous turn is that the government has requested the support of imperialist countries such as the United States, labeling them as international terrorist activity. At this moment operatives from FBI & Scotland Yard are active in Sri Lanka. We should not exclude the possibility of imperialist intervention in the name of crushing terrorism.

The most dangerous situation is the possibility of attacks against Muslims all over the island by racist forces. The Left forces should take the leadership to avoid this type of situation. One important step towards such activity is to hold the May Day despite the state ban. Further, progressive forces should come forward to defeat the government's open invitation to foreign intervention.

Linus Jayatilake

Leader - Left Voice Organization

Colombo, 26 April 2019

Defeat the BJP Strengthen the Working Class, Left and All Progressive Movements

26 April 2019, by **Radical Socialist**

A: Five Years of the BJP Rule

In 2014, the National Democratic Alliance, headed by the BJP, won 38.5% votes, but, due to India's first past the post electoral system, that was enough for it to get 336 out of 543 seats. The BJP itself got 31% votes and 282 seats. This had a dramatic effect. It meant, that while there was a coalition government, it was now firmly under the grip of the BJP, which no longer needed the Vajpayee type of conciliatory mask. The core RSS agenda could be brought forward without any hesitation. The push for

Modi for Prime Minister had been funded by a considerable part of the Indian big bourgeoisie. Thus, the rise of Narendra Modi was also connected to Indian big capital. To assess the five years of the Modi-led government, therefore, we need to grasp the totality of the following elements: a sluggish neoliberal economy mired in cronyism, a sharp attack on democratic rights, attacks on Muslims and Dalits, a determined Hindutva pushed and a splintered opposition to these developments.

The Economic situation: Cronyism, mismanagement and widening inequality

A general economic malaise

The five years of BJP rule has not been a period of sustained high growth. Certainly a few favoured cronies of the ruling dispensation have profited tremendously. Adani's growth has been staggering and most remarkable of all industrial houses. In 2017 alone the Adani group grew by 124.6%. In the run up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the helicopter personally used by Narendra Modi was provided by Adani. In the economy as a whole, however, much of the capitalist class has not done spectacularly. Overall growth rates, despite much massaging of figures, have remained well short of

the performance of UPA I. Investment in the economy has remained low, with the Gross Fixed Capital Formation falling as a percentage of GDP over the period. Agrarian distress has sent even large landholders on protest marches in Delhi and Mumbai. Employment generation, one of the BJP's signature poll promises, has been tellingly absent. The latest NSSO data, leaked despite government efforts to bury it, reveal that there has been a shrinkage in the male workforce for the first time since 1993.

Indeed, each of the BJP's signature economic measures have been conspicuous failures.

- The biggest of these was demonetization. It was carried out supposedly to check black money. The claim about recovering black money has been demonstrated to be false. The Reserve Bank of India has confirmed that 99.3% of demonetised notes were returned to the bank. The sudden decision had a massive negative impact on the Indian economy, including a slowdown in employment of labour and a dip in overall farm incomes. Growth slowed down to a four-year low of 6.7%.

- Though planned by the Congress, the BJP executed the imposition of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which, besides causing a further decline in growth rates, effectively enhances the dependence of states to the centre, by replacing the state controlled Sales Tax in favour of an all India GST, whose rates are decided by a GST council where every state is just one member, together with the Centre, and therefore quite powerless to alter the rates it can charge, it is clearly taking away states' powers.

- The much touted Make in India scheme has, so far, floundered on the falling rate of investment by the private sector. FDI as a percentage of GDP has remained limited to around 2 per cent. Only a minuscule proportion of this has gone to the manufacturing sector.

This government has hardly proved an able steward of the economy, even by the standards of the capitalist class.

Rising inequalities

While growth in the economy has been sluggish and concentrated in a select few companies, smaller firms have been hit by Modi's penchant for spectacular authoritarian gestures. Demonetisation – an utterly ineffectual measure – devastated Small and Medium Enterprises, while leaving big capital relatively unscathed. The much touted Mudra loan scheme aimed at the former, has had a risible average loan of just over Rs. 45,000. Smaller business continue to limp back to normalcy while Gautam Adani waltzes into the list of the world's richest people.

Among the ordinary people of this country, too, wealth has continued to concentrate among those at the top. The Global Wealth Report 2018 published by the Credit Suisse, an investment bank, says India now has 343,000 persons owning over one million US dollars, or about 7 crores of Indian rupees, worth of wealth. According to the World Inequality Database, the income of the top 1% of the Indian population was Rs 33 lakh per adult or Rs 275,000 per month, while the income of the bottom 50% of the population was Rs 45,000 per year per adult, that is Rs 3750 per month.

Spiralling inequality is an outcome of the effort to wind up or curtail welfare expenditures. After its initial frontal assault on India's fledgling social safety net – the PDS and MNREGA – failed, the BJP settled for death by a thousand cuts. Overall welfare expenditure has increased only marginally while tall claims have been made about the pathbreaking nature of schemes that were essentially re-launches of existing government measures. There have been no countervailing expenditures by the state to check the growth of inequalities.

Rampant Cronyism

Cronyism, then, has been a keynote of this government. This has not been a regime that has spread wealth far and wide across even corporate India. Instead, a chosen few have been consistently favoured for positions of power and direct benefits transfer. The Planning Commission was

replaced by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Ayog, which has already identified 74 central public sector undertakings (CPSUs) – including 26 for downright closure and 10 for strategic disinvestment. The government has appointed Reliance Mutual Fund Managers to provide consultancy and execute its project of quick selling 10 CPSUs strategic to the national economy, including ONGC, GAIL, Oil India Limited, Indian Oil Corporation, Coal India Limited, BHEL, Bharat Electronics Limited etc through the Exchange Traded Fund (ETF). So the Ambanis, who are among the corporates sector closest to the BJP, are asked to oversee privatization. The numbers of Non-performing assets held by corporate houses has increased steadily over the period of the BJP government and have contributed to making the position of the financial sector one of the most tenuous in the current economy.

Government figures themselves inform that every year, the national exchequer is robbed of not less than Rs 5 lakh crore through non-repayment of loans and tax fraud. In 2015-16 alone, direct tax evasion amounted to Rs 6.59 lakh crore. In mid 2017, the bad loans of India's nationalised banks amounted to about 10 lakh crore rupees. The top ten business group borrowers alone accounted for 5 lakh crores.

- The Rafale Scandal is too well known to need a detailed discussion. In place of giving the contract to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, it went to the Anil Ambani owned Reliance Defence Limited, which has no experience. The cost of the aircrafts went up from what had been originally negotiated. The final version of the deal, in September 2016, saw India signing an inter-governmental agreement with France, in which India will pay about Rs. 58,000 crore or 7.8 billion Euros for 36 off-the-shelf Dassault Rafale twin-engine fighters. According to Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie (dissident BJP leaders, not leftists) along with Prashant Bhushan, the total price of 36 aircraft is about ₹60,000 crore, which works out to be Rs.1,660 crore per plane. This makes the price more than double the original 126 Medium Multi-Role

Combat Aircraft proposal.

Any question about the scam has been answered by accusations that asking such questions threaten India's national security. We do not accept the bourgeois nationalist perception of national security in any case, where increasing military hardware is the main task. But even when that line of argument is advanced, we want to ask, if it was true that India needed 126 aircraft, buying 36 at a higher price benefits whom?

Why is BJP the chosen vehicle of the capitalist class?

If economic mismanagement, rampant cronyism and rising inequalities have characterised the current government what are we to make of the consolidation of the capitalist class behind the BJP? This is best captured in the vast gulf between the incomes of the BJP from any other political formation. According to an Association for Democratic Rights report, the BJP accounted for 80% of the income of national parties for 2017-18. For donations above Rs. 20,000 the BJP received 93% of such donations (Rs. 437 crores) while the INC received Rs. 26.6 crore of such donations. This gulf in funding is one of the many indicators of the capitalist consolidation behind the BJP. What explains such a one-sided choice?

The answer lies not so much in the performance, but in the promise of the BJP. Plans for over 11 industrial corridors lie with the current government. The scale of these plans is instructive. The largest of these currently ongoing is the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor; at \$100 billion, this is easily the largest infrastructure project ever in India. It spans the states of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. This project alone will urbanise an estimated 12 per cent of India over the next 30 years, displace 20,000 families. Other industrial plans on this scale and larger include the Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic corridor, Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial corridor and Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial corridor. Most of these will require the firm and cruel hand of the government of the day as millions of people are

displaced.

On this count, the BJP government has made all the right noises. With the dilution of environmental clearances, the continual surveillance of people's movements and the demonstrated willingness to use the coercive apparatus of the state to put down opposition, the BJP has repeatedly demonstrated both ability and desire to carry through repression on the truly mass scale that this industrial push will entail once investment picks up.

The Congress, initiator of most of these industrial plans, may feel a petulant envy at the favour the BJP currently enjoys with Indian big business. For Left and Progressive forces, however, this only underlines the need to think more comprehensively about our strengths and weaknesses in the coming battles.

Democracy Under Threat

To the authoritarian stamp needed to push through neoliberal measures, this government has also added its own Hindutva twist. Attacks on democratic rights and constitutional provisions have increased since 2014. The secular and democratic elements of the constitution are being whittled down at the expense of the Hindu-tinged, communal and scholastic orientation.

Decimating Political opposition

There has been a concerted and systematic marginalization of the opposition typified by the slogan Congress mukt Bharat. Whenever possible, they have subverted democratic content within the parliamentary form to wipe out the opposition; but even otherwise they have not stopped at brazen attacks if needed.

The election of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi was one of the first electoral setbacks to the Modi regime. There has been an unremitting assault on this regime through a shameless campaign of obstruction using the peculiarly complex structure of the Delhi government. The lengths to which the BJP has gone have included the refusal of the Delhi Development

Authority (controlled by the centre) to provide land to the Delhi Government for neighbourhood clinics. The Lt. Governor has repeatedly refused transfers of officials requested by the AAP government. Municipal services (controlled by the BJP through the municipal corporations) have been repeatedly interrupted through non-payment of the wages of municipal workers.

Elsewhere, money power and the governor have been used to subvert democratic mandates. Take for instance the 2017 Assembly elections in Goa. The BJP got 13 seats (reduced from 21 in the previous Assembly elections) compared to the Congress's 17 and yet Manohar Parrikar was asked to form a government by Governor Mridula Sinha. The situation was reversed in the Karnataka Assembly elections when the BJP had more seats than the Congress, but the Congress-JDS post-poll alliance had more numbers than BJP. The drama unfolded on live television for the next few days as people could witness the brazen horse trading of MPs and recorded audio tapes of Yedurappa offering money to buy MPs.

More generally, opposition figures have been repeatedly painted as anti-national and betrayers of a supposed national consensus. Questioning the government in parliament has been painted as efforts to destroy the nation. This is, of course, when parliament has even functioned. The average duration of past Lok Sabhas has been 468 days. The 16th Lok Sabha compares badly, with 331 days of sitting in its entire life. Meanwhile, there was a mainstreaming of aggressive hate speech. Hate speech by MPs, MLAs and Ministers, defined as statements that are clearly communal, casteist, or calls to violence, rose by 490% between May 2014 and April 2018. 90% of such comments were by BJP politicians.

As socialists we have always maintained that bourgeois democracy is limited and partial at best, but guarantees of even limited political democracy are now being rolled back.

Capturing and Undermining Institutions

A bourgeois democratic system is of course first and foremost a democracy for the bourgeoisie. In other words, a major difference between bourgeois democracy and bourgeois authoritarianisms of various kinds is that in the former all sections of the bourgeoisie have greater access to the corridors of power and get opportunities for accumulating capital. But this government is characterized by weakening of all forms of democratic institutions. The institutions of the state are suborned and subverted to suit the narrow goals of the Sangh Parivar – a steady lurch towards a Hindu Rashtra.

Of these the first is the massive attack on the judiciary. In early 2018, four judges of the Supreme Court took the unprecedented step of holding a press conference to voice their protest against the arbitrary allocation of cases by the then Chief Justice of India. This was not mere factionalism within the court, but a revolt against how the CJI was allegedly distributing cases to suit the Modi Government.

A second institution under siege is the system of higher education: at the level of the university as well as the umbrella body of higher education the UGC. Right after getting elected in 2014, the BJP has relentlessly targeted the central institutes of higher education, most prominently JNU, HCU, etc. Vice Chancellors in these universities have transformed structures of university governance, ridden roughshod over Teachers' Associations and threatened students. Structures of participatory and consultative administration are fast being replaced by a culture of bullying and intimidation of faculty and staff.

Along with branding any independent critical assessment of the regime as anti-national, the present government has tried to remove the very basis of assessment. By manipulating the figures put out by autonomous statistical institutes like the NSSO, a complete control over information has been sought. Data increasingly are either not released at all, or else are – massaged – to a point that strains credulity. This has been true of the controversial GDP figures, data about demonetisation and its effects and, most consistently, data about

employment. The resignation of two non-governmental members of the National Statistical Commission (NSC) points to the direct government intervention in the workings of the statistical institutes.

The CBI has completely become a tool of the government to harass opposition party members. It must be recognized that unlike the courts, or civil society organizations, the CBI cannot even be thought of as any kind of pro-people institution. Furthermore it must be recognized that the independence of the CBI has always remained compromised no matter which government is in power. But, the functioning of the CBI has sunk to depths not seen in the past. It has been used to target opposition parties, and arm twist opposition leaders to change sides, etc. This of course shows the poor moral and political standards of such opposition politicians – like Mukul Roy, who switched from being a high ranking Trinamool Congress leader to the BJP – but this also shows that the CBI is not probing corruption or crime. Instead, it has become an instrument for turning tainted or dubious opposition leaders into BJP leaders.

Crackdown on Civil Society Organisations

For workers, peasants, dalits, adivasis, religious minorities, attacks on other organisations matter more. There has been a relentless attack on civil society and human rights organizations, human rights activists and NGOs like the Greenpeace, INSAF, etc. Selectively using bureaucratic and legalistic mechanisms like the application of FCRA regulations the government has pushed human rights activists and NGOs to the margin by accusing that they take foreign funding, when the irony is that it is the Sangh Parivar which is one of the highest recipients of foreign funding from NRIs.

There has been seen a massive use of undemocratic laws against workers, dalits, adivasis, Muslims. The singling out of the Dalit protests over Bhima-Koregaon is particularly significant as a symbolic action. After violence on the peaceful gathering at Bhima-Koregaon by Hindutva provocateurs

fake claims about their programme being Maoist was used to widen the net, and arrest many civil rights activists, seize laptops and plant fake “evidence”, seize books containing keywords like Marx, Lenin or Mao, etc. Between April and August 2018 there was a broadening of the net, with the arrests of artistes like the Kabir Kala Manch, civil rights activists like Professor Shoma Sen, SudhaBhardwaj, Gautam Navlakha, Arun Ferreira, Vernon Gonsalves, poets like Varavara Rao, activists like Sudhir Dhawale, the editor of the Marathi magazine Vidrohi and founder of the Republican Panthers, etc. However, the FIR the arrests were based on related to the violence that followed the Bhima-Koregaon event. In other words, there is an attempt to attack Dalit activists and civil rights activists as Maoists, and to say that if you are a Maoist then you have no democratic rights.

The cases have increasingly been made under the UAPA along with various sections of the Indian Penal Code. The UAPA is an act that allows ferocious violence on the accused. GN Saibaba, a wheelchair-bound teacher with 90 per cent physical disability, along with five others, were convicted by Suryakant Shinde, a sessions judge at Gadchiroli District Court, Maharashtra, under Sections 13, 18, 20, 38 and 39 of the UAPA and Section 120B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The UAPA, by its own definition, does not arrest citizens for committing a crime. It does so to prevent them from doing so. But what constitutes an “unlawful activity”? Just about any action that either “disclaims, questions, disrupts or is intended to disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India” or causes or is intended to cause “disaffection against India”. Left intentionally vague, these words manage to cover almost any action that the “Designated Authority” feels can constitute a threat against the nation, thus justifying the drive to a police state.

Hate Crimes: Terrorising Minorities and Dalits

Most striking of all has been the free rein given by the BJP government to vigilante groups affiliated to the Sangh Parivar to carry on a campaign

of terror and intimidation against minorities and dalits. Designed to keep these groups fearful and simultaneously rouse the social base for Hindutva, the incidence of these crimes has mounted steadily. Government data on communal violence shows a spike of 28 per cent between 2014 and 2017. In the name of beef ban and cow protection, there have been repeated attacks, murders.

Even more serious, the state has acted in favour of organised mobs carrying out such lynching activity. Thus, in 2015, Mohammad Akhlaq was murdered after being accused of beef eating. The police, instead of targeting murderers, wanted to investigate whether the meat in his home was beef or not. And Modi, after keeping silent for several days, issued an ambiguous statement, instead of an outright condemnation. In October 2015, amid protests spurred by rumours of cow slaughtering, a truck was attacked with a petrol bomb, killing one Muslim man in Jammu and Kashmir. In March 2016, two Muslims were killed and hanged in the tribal state of Jharkhand after being accused of smuggling cows. On June 22, 2017, three Muslims were killed in West Bengal state after being accused of cow smuggling. On June 27, a Muslim dairy owner in the state of Jharkhand was attacked by a mob after being accused of killing a cow; the man was rushed to a hospital in critical condition after the police managed to save him from his attackers.

These were not accidental and stray incidents. The UP government of Adityanath made a ban on beef one of its first tasks. Cow protection, a Brahminical agenda, has been used to systematically generate violence on Muslims and Dalits.

There have, thus, been threats to democracy at every level: from the parliament to the grassroots. The effect has been a cumulative one: fuelling an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among dissenting groups while emboldening the cadre of Hindutva.

Pushing the Hindutva Agenda

The last issue discussed brings us to the BJP-RSS offensive in pushing the

Hindutva agenda. Many parties and organisations on the left, when they use the term fascism against the RSS, do not recognise that fascism or fascist-like itself implies two simultaneous dimensions – the economic offensive against the common people and in favour of the big bourgeoisie, and the ideological offensive of aggressive nationalism. In India, that means pushing the Hindutva agenda and generating hyper nationalism, against particularly Pakistan. It is not that only one of these is a “real” agenda while the other is a diversion. The strength of the RSS lies in the forces it has generated in civil society, basing themselves on aggressive Hindu nationalism. This is not the belief of all Hindus, but a very aggressive nationalism, where the nation is defined as Hindu. Its strength lies partly in the previous Hindu inflection of the nationalist movement, and the consequent Hindu bias in aspects of the Constitution itself. But the Constitution, and the nationalist movement, were both the result of compromises. The RSS was a purely aggressive Hindutva force. And in the last five years it has pushed its agenda very far, in numerous ways. It has attacked all major secular democratic institutions of higher education, and especially humanities and social sciences, because these teach youth to look at society critically. It has degraded science, by stressing fake ancient science.

Pushing the Hindutva agenda has also meant violence on rationalists. The murders of Kalburgi, Dabholkar, Pansare and Gauri Lankesh show the extent to which the aggressive Hindutva forces are willing to go. The degree of their impunity has grown. When in some cases they are checked by law and court orders, as in the Sabarimala case, they attack the secular and democratic laws. Thus, in the case of Sabarimala, Modi attacked the state government of Kerala for doing the little it did to protect the women who wanted to enter the temple. In other cases, they have pushed the Hindutva agenda in other ways. Thus, the Supreme Court had struck down instant triple talaq. That is enough to make it illegal. But the passage of an Act that makes it a criminal offense and prescribes a jail

term for the offending man, does not actually protect Muslim women, who in such a case would not get security, while the criminalisation would go against the reconciliation that they presumably seek. In no other religion are men (or women) flouting legal divorce procedures criminalised in this way.

Finally, pushing the Hindutva agenda means taking a far more aggressive stance on Kashmir, as well as on Pakistan. On Kashmir, by pulling out of the alliance with the PDP and establishing President’s rule, they have the province under their control. At the same time, by their collaboration with Israel and the extensive use of techniques originally used by Israel against the Palestinians, they have shown how violent they will be. And the Pulwama incident shows how aggressive nationalism will turn to war threats, even while there is the risk of its escalation between the two nuclear powered neighbours.

The Pulwama event and its aftermath are major electoral campaign issues of Amit Shah, Narendra Modi and their cohorts. So let us look at some questions dispassionately. Why was the warning of an attack ignored? And why did 80 car loads of soldiers go in such a huge convoy, making it a tempting target? Third, why is the question never posed of what has made Kashmiri youth turn to militancy for decades or why so much violence is inflicted in Kashmir? The attitude is – the territory of Kashmir is an integral part of India, but the people of Kashmir do not matter. Their rights to maximum autonomy, promised in 1947 when India also promised a plebiscite, have been long betrayed. Today, even their elementary democratic rights, are violated by keeping lakhs of armed personnel there and continuously exercising violence against them.

Following Pulwama, in place of examining these issues, the government claimed to have carried out a bombing of a major terrorist camp deep inside Pakistan. This was accompanied by a campaign of nationalist fervour in the media. In the face of this aggressive nationalism a left perspective must stand implacably opposed and demand a focus on the

rights of Kashmiris.

Working class and progressive social movements

The period of the current BJP government has not been one of working class strength. While there have been important workplace struggles in a number of places, The working class has not emerged at the forefront of opposition to the rise of Hindutva. More significant progressive opposition has come from a variety of groups: students, dalits, peasants and women.

The Working Class

The period has seen ominous labour law reforms being proposed which would make it harder to unionise and reforms to social security of organised workers. The Labour Code on Industrial Relations Bill was so draconian that it was rejected by the RSS's own union (the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh). The 2018 Draft Labour Code on Social Security would similarly marginalise unions from negotiations over social security.

Despite this clear attack, the period has not been one in which militant labour struggles have been launched or supported by the established trades unions. Major strike actions have been largely symbolic one or two day actions with little impact, though participation has been impressive. The divisions among the larger trades unions have deepened with the BMS often relying on its special connection to the government to bargain.

Outside the central unions also there have been militant struggles. A wildcat action on a huge scale (1.25 lakh workers) by largely women workers in the garment sector of Bengaluru points to the continuing intensity of, both, exploitation and the fight back against it by workers. Less sporadic, more sustained and militant struggles have also occurred. Struggles have emerged along the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor: those in Manesar and Neemrana by workers from Maruti, Honda, Daikin and other companies were particularly important. In this context, the effort by some of the unions leading militant working class struggles in those

regions have come closer to form larger platform – Mazdoor Adhikar Sangharsh Abhiyan (MASA)'. Similarly, building bases for united militant working class struggle and politicising these struggles elsewhere are critical tasks ahead.

Rather than from the working class, the sharpest opposition to the current regime has come a number of other sections.

Students

Among the earliest opposition to the NDA regime came from students in universities across the country. Beginning with protests in FTII, the emergence of Ambedkar-Periyar Study circles in IITs to the Ambedkar Students Association at Hyderabad Central University. These were determined and militant struggles against which the state took severe measures, including those that led to the death of Rohith Vemula. The struggle of students at JNU took on a wider scope with the effort to term students seditious. These major sites of revolt were mirrored by impressive student struggles in Jadavpur, TISS, and a number of other campuses.

The suppression of each of these movements has proceeded apace. But, through actual networks of solidarity, and through force of example, the students' movements have tended to spread and support each other. Most recently, struggles against the state's efforts to, in effect, nullify reservations among faculty have also sparked pitched battles on campus.

The unrest on university campuses are not the result of some greater awareness of students. The People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Spaces has revealed the breadth of actions required to transform India's higher education into the neo-liberal university. High handed university authorities are required to create the more quiescent, pliable, and professionalised public university desired by the Hindu Right and neo-liberals alike. An agenda of surreptitious privatization has also been pushed. There has been a steady decline in the funds invested in higher education as a proportion of GDP, a reduction in enrolment of MPhil

students, and in 2018, for the first time in India, the enrolment of undergraduate students in private institutes has exceeded those in the central institutes. Meanwhile, universities are also the sites of other social transformations. As the Saksham Committee report has revealed, with 47 per cent of students in higher education being women, this is nearly the only place in the entire economy where men and women are present in equal numbers. The OBC reservations have made universities more representative than ever before. Graduate employment prospects continue to be dismal.

University campuses are churning as a result of larger structural forces. Student agitations on university campuses seem likely to continue and a perspective of politicising and connecting them to other struggles is crucial.

Dalit Groups

Protests by Dalit groups have, in this period, continued to have a radical edge that has worried the BJP regime. As mentioned, Dalits along with Muslims, have been direct targets of cow vigilantism. The incident at Una, Gujarat of publicly flogging Dalits sparked a grassroots mobilisation in that state. Earlier, Dalit groups were among those at the forefront of protests against the institutional actions that led to the death of Rohith Vemula at HCU. Most impressive of all, perhaps, was the response to the April 2018 Bharat Bandh call against the dilution of the SC/ST Atrocities Act. Particularly across North India, there was an unexpectedly large response which shut down many cities. Similarly impressive was the Maharashtra Bandh called by Prakash Ambedkar in response to the attacks by Hindu nationalist groups on the Dalit commemorations at Bhima-Koregaon.

The state and Hindutva groups more generally have adopted a two-pronged approach vis-a-vis Dalit Groups. On the one hand, to attack these movements and mobilisations. The sordid attempt to deny Vemula's Dalit identity, the arrests and crackdowns against the protestors involved in the Bharat Bandh and the brutal attacks

on the Bhima-Koregaon protests followed by efforts to imprison many of the organisers for being ‘Urban Naxals’. The second prong has been to try to assimilate and Hindu-ise Dalits. Partial veneration of Ambedkar (as an anti-Muslim thinker), the appointment of Ram Nath Kovind, a Dalit, as President, patronising high-visibility stunts like the PM washing the feet of Dalits, and being prepared to bring in ordinances and legislations on SC/ST atrocities and the university appointments roster are all examples of this more conciliatory approach.

It is important to recognise that no Hindutva approach will successfully and stably incorporate Dalit demands. The ethos of the RSS is a fundamentally brahminical one and that will not change. It is equally important that historical suspicions, where they exist, between Left and Dalit groups must be overcome. Joining together in struggles – particularly working class struggles – are crucial for this to happen.

Peasants

Agrarian distress has reached a critical point and peasants have been on the march. Impressive mobilisations have happened in Mumbai, led by the All India Kisan Sabha and in Delhi with a coalition of various groups. At more local levels there have been agitations of farmers as well. Discontent about non-payment of dues to sugarcane farmers has put the BJP on the backfoot in Western Uttar Pradesh.

The farmers’ agitations have brought together a coalition of farmers. This includes rich farmers and marginal ones. The existence of this coalition reflects the depth of the crisis in which the agrarian sector finds itself. This has, moreover, been a long time coming. With the an industrial push in place, it seems quite clear that band-aids are all that is on offer for the deep gashes inflicted on the agrarian sector over two decades. The concessions won by the movement – the government’s announcement of Rs. 6000 per year to land holders – represents one such band-aid with little hope of addressing the underlying crisis in agriculture.

Women’s movements

These past few years have also seen a remarkable explosion of popular energies on issues of women’s rights in public and private. Beginning from the mass mobilisations following the 2012 rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, the issue of gendered violence, sexual harassment, rape and unequal work conditions for men and women have been brought to centre stage. Women have protested in academia, journalism, and a number of other professions. The debate has also posed the issue of caste-based forms of gendered violence with particular force.

While these movements have not taken direct aim at the BJP regime, their far-reaching exposure of the forms of male dominance in public life have brought a new generation of women (and some men) into radical activism. These were the actions and energies of the Pinjratod movement against the confinement of women through curfews in university hostels, the demand for the creation of safer workplaces through the Me Too movement and other protests such as the ‘Garima Yatra’ of survivors of sexual violence across 24 states. Even in BHU, often seen as a bastion of Hindutva organising, women’s protests have shaken the establishment. There is a fundamental incompatibility of the demands for equality and freedom being articulated in these struggles and the masculinist ethos and atavistic values promoted by the Sangh Parivar. Strengthening these movements will form a critical part of a resistance that points towards a more liberatory future. Indeed deepening the intersectional vision and connecting them to working class struggles will be critical to the winning of these ends.

These varied movements have given some hope of the persistence of a spirit of struggle. At times they have even been able to roll back this or that aspect of the Hindutva juggernaut. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that these are not much more than the starting points of a potential alternative. There have been important fissures between these various movements. A broader vision of strengthening Left and progressive

movements through strengthening the working class is necessary.

B: Is Congress the alternative?

There is considerable agreement over many of the issues we have discussed in the foregoing sections. However, the situation in India today calls, not for academic discussions, but concrete political actions. And this is where a wide range of views and perspectives come up.

The Liberal anti-BJP standpoint has as its principal axis the desire to replace a BJP parliamentary majority by a different majority. For many liberals, particularly the English speaking elite, the main target is to have a favourable outcome in the elections of 2019. This has made the Congress their principal choice. Indeed, even the parliamentary left seems enamoured of this option. The calculation is purely arithmetical. To block the BJP there has to be a firm parliamentary majority of 290 to 300. Unless there is at least one party as the core of the opposition bloc capable of getting at least 130 to 150 seats, no alternative government would be able to be sworn in. It is worth remembering that the Election Commission now has at its helm people aligned to Modi, that the President is an RSS man, as is the Vice President. With dice loaded so much, mainstream liberals have become admirers of the Congress. Rahul Gandhi, once mercilessly trolled as ineffectual, he is now constantly held up as a mature politician and contrasted favourably with Modi.

A minimal gloss of welfarism is given to this basically ‘mathematical’ affirmation of the INC. One measure referred to is the NYAY scheme announced just recently. This is a minimum income support scheme, to pay Rs. 12,000 per month to the 20% families in the poorest of poor category. The Congress’s own lack of interest in the scheme is indicated by how poorly it has been thought through. Proper estimation of household income cannot be done through NSSO household consumption surveys. Past experience has demonstrated that this kind of

targetting generates huge errors: by including undeserving recipients while excluding those that need and qualify for support. Finally, the Congress has not said how it is going to raise funds for this scheme estimated at Rs. 3.65 lakh crores over the 5-year government term. Given the Congress's fundamental neoliberalism, it is unlikely to raise taxes on corporates or the rich. Instead, the most likely approach will be to wind up other social welfare schemes to pay for this one. Nor is there likely to be any serious move to do what is most needed: prioritize the creation of free, universal, quality healthcare; make available quality public primary and secondary schooling for all; install adequate social security and pension for the elderly; massive investment on public housing and transport and so on.

There are some extremely important problems with support for the Congress. One or two may not trouble liberals overmuch, but they must trouble anyone claiming to be a socialist and to standing on the grounds of class struggle. There are troublesome problems even if we were to stay close to the premise of the liberals.

As socialists, we need to ask, apart from the demonetisation issue, and leaving aside Hindutva for a very short while, can we discern major differences between the BJP and the Congress? If we look at the period 1991-2018, the Congress was in government for fifteen years. The dismantling of the state sector, the destruction of the Public Distribution System, the privatisation of banks, all began under Congress governments, even if the BJP has been able to push these through with greater success in the last five years.

The plan for the GST, which we have seen takes away the autonomy of provinces, in the name of national unity, was also planned by the Congress. So was the UID scheme, now known as Aadhaar — a step in creating a police state. At the same time, it is unsafe, as leakages have already shown. In other words, not only does the state gain massive control over people, but the data can be leaked to private corporate players.

It is not surprising that the Congress criticisms about Aadhaar were all minor and over technicalities. It has not, and cannot, put up any principled opposition to the UID scheme as a whole.

A second problem that socialists should have is the attempt at moving the discourse to personalities and to a two-party system. On one hand, we are constantly asked to consider who will be the better Prime Minister, Modi or Rahul Gandhi. Or, we are asked, if an alliance wins, will there not be instability due to too many contenders for the position of Prime Minister? This is an attempt to move India more and more in the direction of a plebiscitary and a presidential style politics. Revolutionary socialists have always insisted that socialist democracy must be more democratic than bourgeois democracy. So we cannot support a shrinking democracy by making it a Modi versus Rahul Gandhi fight, but by fighting for proportional representation, so that any party getting 1 per cent vote gets five seats in the Lok Sabha, and by making it a transferrable ballot, so that no vote is wasted. If the party of first choice does not get 1 percent then the vote will be transferred to the party of second choice. We must remember, also, what US leftist activists say about the Republicans and the Democrats — the bosses have two parties, we have none. The two party system is a conscious attempt to create a false choice for the masses, while the bosses and elites control both the parties.

The other problem with seeing the Congress at the core of a supposed secular-democratic alliance is, that it is neither very democratic, nor deeply secular. If we look at how the Congress has used the Constitution and other laws, it becomes clear that from the outset there was an attempt to strike a 'balance' between secular and Hindu communal tendencies, along with a centralising tendency which carried a whiff of the Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan politics. This is evident if we look at the Constitutional promise to promote cow protection: a Brahminical demand dressed up in a pro-agriculture garb. This is also evident when we look carefully at Schedule VIII, with its promise of

developing Hindi, and the concept that this would necessitate drawing resources from Sanskrit. The collapse of the Hindu Code Bill was likewise the result of a compromise with Hindu communalists.

But it is not merely a matter of the past. In the last few years we have seen that the Congress has taken the view, that secular liberals have no option, but to vote for the Congress and neither do the Muslims. It therefore sees its task as one of wooing the Brahminical forces. On a significant range of issues, the Congress has reverted to a policy of soft Hindutva. In very recent times, two of its actions describe this clearly. One is the Congress response to the Supreme Court verdict on Sabarimala. In Kerala, it tried to compete with the BJP in mobilising Hindu communal forces, since it hoped that this would weaken the CPI(M) in the province. And in Delhi, when Congress(I) MPs from Kerala wanted to stage a protest, Sonia Gandhi effectively told them not to do these things in Delhi. In other words, for the Congress High Command it was a tactical matter. In Delhi they had to compete against the BJP. In Delhi they had to negotiate with the CPI(M), and with secular liberal forces. So in Delhi the support to Hindu communalism should not be played up.

Another Congress action we can talk about is the support given to the call for building a Ram Temple by several Congress leaders, such as Harish Rawat, former Uttarakhand Chief Minister, or Kripashankar Singh, former Maharashtra Minister. Obviously, there is a difference between a party that has made the Ram Temple one of its signature campaign themes and a party that uses it as part of a huge set of issues. But these people clearly show that Hindu communalism will not die out if the BJP is ejected from power.

That the Congress is willing to support not just Hindu communalism but even people who kill in the name of religion was on display when they made Kamal Nath, one of the main accused in the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom case, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh after the recent elections there.

So if the arithmetic alone is considered, key political issues are discarded. It is a matter of recognising how far to the right the political terrain as a whole has shifted. Only then can we acknowledge, that while we would oppose the Congress unhesitatingly, many exploited and oppressed people in several provinces may find that they have no option but to vote for the Congress (I). That might well be the choice facing Muslims, Adivasis, Dalits, in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and other provinces and union territories where they do not find significant alternative forces for whom to cast their votes.

We are not in the business of giving political advice to bourgeois parties. However, revolutionaries need to make sober estimates of political situations. The soft Hindutva of the Congress is one of the major impediments to cobbling together a "secular" front against the communal agenda. Just as the deep rightwing economic commitment of the Congress is one of the major impediments to cobbling together a "people's front" against the economic offensive mounted simultaneously by fascism. So, when we are accused of being politically irrelevant forces who out of a misplaced purism oppose voting for the Congress, we ask, what is the programme for which we are voting? If the actions of the Congress over the past three decades, if the utterances and deeds of Congress leaders over the past five years, are any indication of the things they would do in power, it is clear that:

- Congress in power would also be hawkish against Pakistan

- Congress in power would now go for further militarization, with Rahul Gandhi accusing Modi of causing a slowing down of purchasing the Rafale planes

- Congress would not fight openly against communalist forces on the ground, being content with cosmetic surgery, such as changing a few officials in certain academic and other bodies (UGC, ICHR, VCs of JNU, HCU etc) rather than passing severe anti-communal laws, banning the RSS and VHP under the same laws and for the same reasons which have been used to

ban organisations like the SIMI, which have actually been able to inflict far less damage to the fabric of secularism and democracy in India, or taking up thoroughgoing struggles against the Brahminical ideology of the RSS.

- Congress would continue along the path created by the BJP in centralisation, since the BJP in turn took over many of the weapons forged for previous Congress deeds.

In short, a Congress-led and Congress dominated government may keep BJP out for five years. But first, once the politics of the Congress are clear to the majority of toilers, to Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims, they would hesitate to vote, which itself would make the coming of such a government more difficult. And secondly, such a government (even if it were to last that long) would restore the credibility of the BJP for 2024, since people would see that the economic policies of that government would not benefit them, while the BJP, out of power, would be able to use its forces to on one hand mobilise the oppressor castes on a Brahminical plank, while on the other, mobilising the toilers by pointing to the failure of the Congress. And since the front that the Congress aspires for, is a front that would include most of the opposition parties, its collapse would be the last throw of the dice. The RSS would be able to campaign openly for a full blooded Sangh regime, with majorities in both Houses, opening up real prospects for making decisive changes in the Constitution.

C: What about a Federal Front or a Third Front?

In different forms, this is the call that has been going round. This has two shapes, and we need to look at both. One is the very rightwing call for a Federal Front given by West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee. This has of course not materialised in a formal way. What most regional parties know is that their role will be finally determined by how the

seatshares that emerge. So they are mostly content with province to province arrangements. But we must be aware that the TMC has been one of the most aggressive right wing parties in India after the BJP.[1] We have identified it as such a long time back, and that was why, unlike many parties and groups on the far left, who in their so called struggle against "social fascism" supported the TMC in 2009-2011, we have never called for any political support or even any grassroots collaboration with the TMC. It has struck violently against working class struggles, fighting against every all India general strike called by Central Trade Unions since 2011, imposing a terrible "settlement" on tea-garden workers in West Bengal, refusing to pay Dearness Allowance twice a year to government employees and other workers paid by the government, and has waged war against the left forces (both parliamentary left and radical left), including arrests, false cases, deaths due to violence by party goons, deaths due to police action, deaths in prison due to action (or inaction, as when Sudip Chongdar, arrested on the charge of being a CPI Maoist leader, was allowed to die without treatment after he suffered a stroke).

The TMC has also been a partner in earlier NDA blocs, including being in an NDA government. Its current electoral opposition to the BJP stems from bourgeois political compulsions. At present the BJP is a rising force in West Bengal, while the Congress and the Left Front are both seemingly on the backfoot. Consequently it has formally declared its opposition to the BJP. The dubiousness of this opposition can be seen from many developments. Supposedly, TMC goons have repeatedly beaten up Dilip Ghosh, the BJP leader. Yet not once has he even had a few days of hospitalisation. This appears to be a TMC-BJP mutually agreed and staged "show". It enables the TMC to act the role of opponent of the BJP at low cost, and it allows the BJP to also appear to be the real opponent of the TMC. Despite all its failings, in West Bengal, as the 3 February 2019 mobilisation showed, the Left Front is capable of really massive popular mobilisations. At election times, however, massive hooliganism at the

grass roots level can have the effect of cutting down the transformation of that support into votes.

That the TMC has no principled secular agenda can also be seen from its use of Bengali chauvinism rather than democratic politics as a mobilising strategy. Its supremo, Ms. Banerjee, has as her declared goal the winning of all 42 seats from West Bengal, hoping this will make her party the strongest in a very fragmented parliament. And if that hope does not work out, she still expects that a lower tally will make the BJP turn to potential allies, possibly dump the Modi-Shah duo for a "secular" and "moderate" face (Gadkari, for example, has already been making the right noises), in which case she can provide her support for or even join a new NDA government in exchange for some of her key demands along with a few token gestures that she can hold up as great victories for secularism.

The second model of the Third Front/Federal Front is one that is more tilted against the BJP. This is a conception that many activists have been hoping to achieve in reality but has little basis in the political calculations of significant electoral formations. This is an Indian version of a rainbow coalition. It is put forward by activists who do not see class struggle as central, but at most as one identity ("class identity") along with other identities. They believe that a coalition of the BSP, the Dravidian parties, the RJD and the SP, etc would highlight caste, regional and ethnic aspirations and create a more democratic space.

It is true that Dalit-Adivasi-Bahujan oppression is a major point of struggle. But India has seen the performance of the United Front Government too when the Left participated in it but was certainly not in the driver's seat. Without stronger struggles being generated on the ground, a rainbow coalition will not lead to a rainbow government. Rather, first of all, the sheer numbers show that at least in 2019 such left-of-centre rainbow coalition government is impossible. In several provinces, the Congress is either a partner in such a rainbow, or the Congress is the major

opposition to the BJP.

Moreover, such a coalition is unlikely to develop a coherent programme, even for the exploited and oppressed whose votes it is banking on. The refusal of Mayawati to have anything to do with Azad and the Bhim army shows that the BSP is trying to get a constituency under its hegemony rather than fight for Dalit rights. While some intellectuals keep talking about a rainbow, there are no significant gender or class slogans emanating from most of these parties.

D:What Strategy for the Left and Working Class

Conditions in India have worsened in a number of ways. The organised left – parties, unions, other mass organisations, have less striking power than they did thirty years ago. Our benchmark needs to be set at 1989, as a starting point, because that was when the BJP launched its new strategy. Our current has been arguing about that since then. In Parliament that year, the CPI, CPI(M), Forward bloc, Indian Peoples' Front and Marxist Coordination Committee had 54 seats and had between them polled 10.49% votes. The organised working class had a bigger striking power.

Indian capitalism had begun its turn to a neoliberal, privatised economy some years earlier, but at a slow pace. 1990-91 saw a drastic shift. A balance of payments crisis was used as the plea to ram through devastating pro-market, pro-rich policies. And the minority government of P.V. Narasimha Rao could do that, constantly holding the left at bay by raising the bogey of the BJP. The left had 58 seats and about the same votes as in the previous parliament. But its persistent policy of lesser evilism, of making a distinction between fighting class battles and fighting fascism, meant that it dealt gently with the Rao government. The result was a further massive growth of the BJP, and its ability to forge alliances with other regional bourgeois parties. In 1996 the BJP won 161 seats, and its allies a

further 26. The Congress won 140 seats, a decline of 92 seats and nearly 7.5% votes. The Left Front won 52 seats with just over 9 per cent votes.

What was significant through all these years was the determination with which the parliamentary left clung to its illusions about progressive bourgeois parties. This was revealed in 1996 when the United Front Government was formed. The CPI entered the government, while the CPI(M) and RSP supported it from outside. This government showed absolutely no difference in its economic policies. P. Chidambaram as its Finance Minister presented a budget which Indian big business described as a dream budget. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, one of the principal market advocates of the government, wrote, in a paper for the Planning Commission in 1999: "That a consensus of sorts has evolved is perhaps reflected in the fact that the reforms initiated by the Congress Government in 1991 were continued by the United Front coalition which came to power in 1996 and have also been broadly endorsed by the BJP led government which took office in 1998".

This popular frontism cost the left heavily in the end. Its last major opportunity had come in 2004. The BJP had gone into the 2004 elections with an arrogant, openly upper class campaign, talking about "India Shining". The national level perception went against the BJP, as did its local level alliance pacts. The left won 61 seats. But that was followed by the Left Front deciding to give "support from outside" to the Congress led UPA based on a Common Minimum Programme that was hailed as a great step forward. But in fact, the CMP did not do certain things. The CMP did not promise natural justice to the victims of the Gujarat Genocide. In the NDA period Murli Manohar Joshi had ensured the rewriting of text books. When Manmohan Singh, in a rotten balancing act, called for equal rejection of left fundamentalists as well as Hindutva fundamentalists, the left parties did not stand fully with the secular historians and their scholars fighting against the glorification of Savarkar, Hitler and the denigration of the Russian Revolution as a coup in

school text books..

Nor is it the case that the left took stronger positions over bread and butter issues. It has been a persistent failure of the left to recognise that the strength of the left, even the non-revolutionary left, is primarily based on extra-parliamentary mobilisations. Despite the left parties not being in power in many provinces, it is the AITUC, CITU etc that have repeatedly mobilised vast numbers of workers in general strikes that have been considered the biggest in the world. But the left parties in the UPA period did not fight all out for the rights of workers and peasants, being satisfied with such sops as the MNREGA, which only offered 100 days of low paid work for one member of each family. Had the left fought resolutely, primarily outside parliament, but also using its MPs in Parliament, for full restoration of the PDS, for universal health care for all, for state funded education and teachers who are state employees, rather than farming it out to NGOs and ill paid workers, they could have both snatched greater gains from the ruling class for the exploited, and made possible a strengthening of their base. After all, the German Social Democratic Party in the period 1890s-1910 won victories, rights for workers, and parliamentary seats, through major trade union mobilisations. The CPI in the period 1951-1962 progressed in much the same way. The experience of being in government has so reoriented the reformist left that it has stopped being able to understand even this. Instead of solidly linking the parliamentary battles to the extra-parliamentary dynamics, the majority of left parties and leaders create separate calendars. They have mobilisations of workers, peasants. But that calendar ends and a separate electoral calendar begins once the elections are announced. As a result, thereafter the class battles are ignored. Absolutely current instances are the struggles of tea garden workers and the elections, or the struggles of School Service Commission applicants, both in West Bengal. With the BJP putting up John Barla as a candidate, what was absolutely necessary was to fight for tea garden workers' rights NOW. Similarly, with Mamata Banerjee and the TMC deeply implicated in turning

the SSC into a shady racket, there was a need to make the struggle far more visible and to sharpen its focus, instead of leaving it to the handful of protestors.

In addition, the left continues to have a narrow vision of the class struggle that mirrors the politics of the identity politics forces. Where they see class as one among so many identities, the left sees a narrow economism as the class struggle. It does not look at the links between class struggle and caste oppression (and when it tries, it ends up with the failed theory of semi-feudalism). The left reduces gender and sexuality issues to a dogmatic definition of class struggle. As a result, whatever the potentialities, in fact the politics of the left remains a marginalised politics.

Our criticism of the left is based on that. We have an understanding of the class struggle that is potentially unifying. But to be actually capable of unifying the various exploited and oppressed masses, there is a need to develop theory and practice together, to struggle for every sector of the oppressed and exploited, and to connect that with the parliamentary struggles. Unless the struggles are linked, unless the left moves out of its eternal search for progressive bourgeois allies and fights together with the oppressed and exploited, there can be no revival of the left even in the parliamentary sphere. And only a stronger left in the parliament can resist the fascists. If we have to rely on chance combinations of bourgeois parties we constantly give ground to the fascists.

The left, whether the reformist or the radical left, needs to understand that the failure to make a Marxist analysis with a proper action programme for caste-gender-sexuality issues leads to either a wooden Marxism of the sectist type that alienates Dalits, Adivasis, women activists, queers, or leads to a post-modernist influenced collapse of the Marxist outlook.

From this perspective, we say that the real United Front in today's perspective has to be a United Front with mass organisations of workers, peasants, Dalits, Adivasis, mass women's struggles, queer movement

organisations etc. A left alliance should be one that has candidates from such mass movements as well as from left parties, rather than candidates of non-BJP bourgeois parties, as the people we are asked to vote for.

In the concrete situation, our slogans are:

- Defeat BJP.

- Defeat all the most right-wing parties regardless of whether regionally they are in alliance with the BJP or not.

- We understand that in seats where there is an essentially BJP vs Congress stand-off people will feel compelled to vote for the Congress. But we do not see that as the road out of the crisis. The road forward requires treating elections as part of the process of generating mass movements.

- Hence we call for a vote for Left and progressive candidates.

- Fascist type forces have never been defeated by bourgeois parties. Other bourgeois parties claiming to fight the BJP are neither anti-neoliberal nor capable of permanently defeating the politics of Hindutva. But they too are now opposing the BJP as they realise that its final victory could be their death knell. The Congress is an ugly rightwing party which cannot be a serious barrier to the progress of Hindutva in the long run but is not a far right fascist force. Because it cannot be a serious opponent of the politics of neoliberalism or Hindutva we cannot call for a positive vote for Congress even as we do call for a vote against BJP/Sangh as our principal political electoral slogan.

The Struggles to Which We are Committed, before, during and after the Elections

FOR A DEMOCRATIC ELECTORAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

1. Proportionate peoples representation in parliament, legislative assemblies and local governments, instead of current first-past-the-post system for a true reflection of people's aspirations.

2. Thirty three percent reservations for women and people of other sexuality in parliament, legislative assemblies and local governments and gradually raising the same to fifty percent in timebound plan.

3. Total state funded electoral system free from the evil of money, muscle, bribes and other ill practices, including media practices. EC should be appointed by multi-member constitutional committee.

4. Legislative change in appointment and removal of top brasses in CBI, CVC, NIA, CAG through parliamentary committee without any extra weightage and advantage to the ruling party/(ies) and constitutional guarantee in their independent function without govt. interference and control.

5. Non-Parliamentary top executive to be appointed/removed/replaced mandatorily by the legislature through committee of members from ruling and opposition parties without any extra weightage and advantage to the ruling party/(ies).

6. A legally binding mandatory framework for pre-legislative consultation to ensure participation of the citizens in process of making laws which affects them for.

7. Restore in the Electoral list the names of lakhs of Muslim and Dalit voters, who have been eliminated in the last five years.

8. Scrap the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Bill.

9. Fix income for both governmental and private sectors at the maximum ration of 1:6. Bring back a progressive income tax up to a highest tier of 80%, restore the property tax and raise the tax on corporate profits.

FOR PRESERVATION AND EXTENSION OF DEMOCRACY

1. Repeal (completely and

unconditionally) the anti democratic laws and sections of laws/acts viz. UAPA, NSA, AFSPA, Article 124(a), 499 of IPC etc and administrative detention.

2. An effective whistle blower's protection law.

3. Legislative enactment of accessible, decentralized citizen's grievance redressal mechanism to provide time bound redressal of citizen's grievances with provisions for auditability & accountability and compensations.

4. Constitutional guarantee of fund, functionaries and authorities for the local self-governments without discrimination for democratic and effective governance, as per the spirit of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment with mandatory provisions for highest authority of the Gram/Ward Sansad in decision making, overseeing and action taking.

5. Legal framework for punishable offence with respect to assault upon individual or groups reflecting diverse culture and identity, like food habits, religious practices, caste hierarchy, gender differences etc, mostly minority and weaker stratum and protection of victim(s) with compensations.

6. Independent statutory body with quasi-judicial power to oversee and protect political and social opposition to the government and the state with right to protest, organise events without discrimination with equal opportunity as the ruling party.

7. Any aggression or offence by the ruling party or administration, formal or informal with the patronage of the government should be dealt with proper and quick response actions by independent statutory body empowered for the same.

BASIC OF RIGHTS

1. Constitutional guarantee of 'Right to Work' for living to all adult people, with compulsory unemployment wage equivalent to minimum wage, upto the age of sixty.

2. Universal 'Right to Pension' at the age of 60, equivalent to last drawn wage.

3. Declaration of national floor level minimum wage in consultation with trade unions, nutritionists, social activists with bi-annual upward auto-revision enabling based on CPI; irrespective of nature of work and employment. Mandatory revision of minimum wage with legal obligation after every five years.

4. 'Right to Food' act for universal (nutrition and health compliant) subsidised PDS.

5. Universal basic health and healthcare system by easy accessibility of safe drinking water, nutrition, housing, end-to-end free medical services with ensured quality and availability at all levels..

6. Every school must be complaint of RTE. Every childhood education and care should be integral part of it. ITI must be increased in huge numbers followed by setting National Village Education Fund to support Government to improve quality of education in rural areas. Provide residential facilities for under privileged at least up to college level. No communalisation of education system.

7. Strict implementation of existing labour laws including accountability and actionable provisions upon violation, with progressive reforms over time in favour for employees to minimise the difference in power and authority between employer and employee.

8. Statutory assurance of remunerative prices as per Swaminathan Committee's recommendation for the peasants and their land distribution support for farmer's collective, sustainable/ecological agriculture promoting and full implementation of land acquisition Act, 2013.

9. Recognition of local communities specially forest dwellers as custodians and share holders of local eco-system and natural resources of that area and legally empower the relevant local assemblies to govern the system while the forest department should be restructured to assist them. An independent and empowered environment commission should be set

up to judge environmental standards and make regulations and ensure compliance.

MEDIA, JUDICIARY AND JUSTICE FOR VULNERABLE SECTIONS

1. An independent institutional framework for accountability of the media and licensing power free from government control and independence of public service broadcasters.

2. An accessible and accountable judiciary which can deliver justice for all. A full time body independent of government and judiciary which can examine is highly needed to make judiciary accountable and implementable..

3. Establish an Equal Rights

Commission through a law that all can easily understand and that covers all aspects of social inequality. Ensure through this the structural inequalities and the injustices that are faced by helpless social groups. Thereby ensure proper solutions. Reservation in public and private sectors for jobs and education only for the socially oppressed and repressed groups of peoples.

4. Recognise the rights of all marginal sexualities as equals by creating law respecting self-identification by transgenders.

ENVIRONMENT, FOREIGN POLICIES ETC

1. All natural wealth must be controlled neither by the government

nor by corporate sectors. They must belong to the people. The direct producers must have rights over land.

2. Maintaining the ecological balance in utilising natural wealth must be given proper weightage. Scrap all industries that destroy the environment.

3. India must tread the path of friendly and fraternal relations among the peoples of South and South East Asia and West Asia, in order to achieve general development of the peoples of these regions, rather than developing conflict-based relationships. Halt war madness, reduce military expenditures. Stop the use of nuclear weapons and nuclear power.

Source: *Radical Socialist*, 19 April 2019.

The Left Bloc 20 years on

25 April 2019, by Josu Egireun, Manuel Garí

Twenty years after its foundation, the first thing that catches our attention is the small area occupied by the Bloco in the thinking of our political current. However, there have been occasional ruthless criticisms when evaluating certain initiatives or positions of the BE, without waiting to find out the reasons and the concrete terms of the position adopted - for example, regarding the agreement with the Socialist Party in 2015.

One of the reasons for this "forgetfulness" may be the country's size in terms of population (10.3 million) and the weight of its GDP with respect to that of the European Union. Even so, given its activist structure and the political and social dimension that the Bloco has acquired on the Portuguese political scene, it is difficult to understand. Therefore, we take advantage of this 20th anniversary of its foundation to revisit the history of the Bloco and highlight what we find the most interesting aspects of this experience.

By borrowing - and transferring with

great caution to the socio-political field - Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm, the Bloco as an organization has obtained more success than other different and alternative proposals in constituting a mass anti-capitalist force with electoral and social weight in one country. Throughout these twenty years it has been able to solve some of the main problems that leftist groups encounter in moving from a propaganda group to a party with mass influence. This is verifiable in Portugal, where none of the political formations located on the same spectrum at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th have survived, while the different splits that the Bloco has experienced *to the left* (a good part of them sectarian and doctrinal variants) or *to the right* (in search of an arrangement and alignment with the Socialist Party) have ended up irrelevant or disappearing. But also, in other European countries where throughout these twenty years we have experienced the implosion of

important experiences such as Italy's Partito della Rifondazione Comunista or the striking emergence of the NPA which is, however, currently going through a period of significant difficulties, or the rise and decline of the Left Front, in France.

Therefore, this 20th anniversary is a good opportunity to question the characteristics of this experience that, with its ups and downs, presents elements of interest to those from currently marginalised revolutionary alternatives that seek to transform themselves into political forces capable of acting in the social and electoral sphere, appealing to activists, but above all to broad social sectors, as an alternative to the existing parties.

This dimension of credible alternative was the driving force of experiences like Podemos or la France Insoumise. Experiences that are currently in difficulty due to both the model of organization chosen and its erratic political wanderings, and the absence of links with the social movement.

Therefore, the first feature that stands out from the Bloco is its resilience, understood as the ability to overcome critical moments and adapt to unexpected and unusual situations, which has allowed its continuity and development during the twenty years of its existence. And which explains currently why the *Geringonça* or, the “contraption”, a contemptuous expression used to refer to the agreement between the Portuguese Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Bloco and the Greens - has lasted three years in spite of the attacks of the oligarchy.

But, as in science, the fact that a paradigm is more successful does not mean that it can obtain satisfactory results faced with all problems or obtain complete success, nor that it retains its status indefinitely.

Against all odds

The foundation of the Bloco took place in 1999 after an unforeseen defeat the

previous year of the mass movement in the referendum on abortion, precisely when the end of the long political cycle opened on 25 April 1974 was already obvious. It is not usual that new parties emerge in times of regression and defeat. They usually emerge at times of advance and after the scent of possible victories. The constitution of the Bloco was made by the agreement of three organizations with different ideological roots and little practical experience in common: the PSR (Partido Socialista Revolucionário, the Portuguese section of the Fourth International) the UDP (União Democrática Popular, of Maoist origin) and PXXI (21st Century Politics, a split from the PCP. And it happened in a country with a great tradition of politicization and militancy in parties, but with a notable weakness and fragility (in comparison with, for example, France, Italy or the Spanish state) of the social movements and organizations that give them shape. Even in the trade union sphere, which is very important,

Portuguese trade unionism does not have the capacity for affiliation and political autonomy existing in other countries.

Thus, in 1999 the political situation in Portugal had no parallels with the conditions that, in 2014, for example, allowed the emergence of Podemos in the Spanish state, with the window of opportunity opened by the mobilization of 15M. And yet the agreement of these three forces made it possible. What was the element that allowed this step to be taken by three political forces, with distanced ideological origins and very little experience in common?

Taking up the explanations of Francisco Louçã in his interview with Miguel Romero, after the defeat in the referendum on abortion, there was a very general perception that an era had ended, and a bold proposal emerged: to create a political movement whose strength and unity would be established going beyond ideology. [