

Political Economy of Apprehensions

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The global economy is getting integrated very fast and new modes of production relations are emerging. In this transition process, 'national' institutions like parliaments are becoming increasingly redundant as many of the vital decisions (say type of the energy to be used) are now being taken at the multilateral bodies where transnational corporations (TNCs) play dominant role in the formulation of various agreements. New multilateral institutions like the World Trade Organization and agreements like Kyoto Protocol have been framed to accelerate this transition process. Within this broad framework, another trend has become very distinct. Few global initiatives have been taken in the recent past to build innovative space for the expansion of the market by creating a new 'economy of apprehensions'. International consensus has been developed to wage wars against various apprehensions like (i) climate change (ii) terrorism and (iii) deadly virus like AIDS. There are widespread apprehensions about the 'possible rise in sea level' and 'drought like situations' due to climate change, 'possible loss of innocent lives' due to terrorist attack, and 'the possibility of getting infected with HIV virus' due to AIDS epidemic.

Preventive measures against these apprehensions have created a huge new economy of its own and it is growing very fast. It is not denied that global warming or terrorism is not threats to mankind, but instead of addressing the real cause, hype are being created by whipping the apprehensions so that a new market could be established out of these abstracts. After the end of the cold war the capitalist economy, which thrives on war preparedness, was badly in need of an enemy for its existence and expansion. In absence of a suitable political enemy, 'war' was declared against climate change, AIDS, terrorism etc. It may be noted that commencement of these 'global alliances' coincided with the fall of communist governments in USSR and East Europe.

As the President of the world's largest economy, Barak Obama has appealed for 'a global response to global challenges'. To substantiate his view he, in his address at the UN General Assembly (September 23, 2009), has cited the example of the 'coordinated international response of over \$2 trillion' stimulus package to overcome the global financial crisis and the US led joint effort, during the G8 Summit in July 2009, 'to launch a \$20 billion food security initiative' over next three years to help farmers in poor nations. President Obama has also assured the World about his government's commitment towards fighting climate change and AIDS. According to him, US have already invested \$80 billion in clean energy and America has 'moved from a bystander to a leader in international climate negotiations'.

Alliance Against Climate

Business has overtaken the science of climate change and new business opportunities are being explored everyday to address this problem. The signing of the Kyoto Protocol in December 1997, which came into force on February 16, 2005, was the first major initiative to this effect. As of December 2006, a total of 169 countries and other governmental entities have ratified the agreement. Thus

a global alliance against global warming was formed and a huge market for clean technology and trading of 'hot air' has been established.

The Kyoto Protocol (KP) tried to establish specific and binding emission reduction commitments for the industrialized countries and economies in transition (EIT). Together, these two groups are termed as Annex I Parties. These countries must meet the agreed level of emission reductions over an initial commitment period between 2008 and 2012. But developing countries (Non-Annex I Parties) are exempted from any such binding obligation. However, initial figures indicate that compared to 1990, emission of the Annex I Parties was 5.5 percent lower in 2006. But between 1990 and 2004, the GHG emission worldwide had increased by around 24 percent implying that during this period, there was a strong possibility that emission got transferred to Non Annex I developing countries. Thus the Annex I countries became 'green' at the expense of 'non Annex I' countries which turned to 'blue' (like Lord Shiva who became 'neel kantha' – blue necked, swallowing all venom to save Earth) by absorbing the pollution of the developed "North".

EU and US have taken two distinct approaches in tackling the climate issue and seize the advantages of the new business opportunities it has offered by creating a new economic space. The EU has taken the 'mitigation strategy' and is trying to address the main cause (emission of green house gases) of global warming by promoting clean technology and alternative fuel. The British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's statement (March 2009) on this is a case in point. According to him, investment in "green" projects will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and could help put the world's ailing economy on the path to recovery. Spending money on environmentally friendly infrastructure and new technology will create 400,000 new jobs in Britain alone over the next eight years. The investment will form part of a global "Green New Deal" that aims to restore growth while dealing with climate change and energy security. "(It is) an opportunity to tackle our over-dependence on oil and to meet our three interlinked objectives—energy security, climate change and job creation—together", he said.

As a late entrant to this emerging market, the USA has put its thrust on 'adaptation strategy' to reduce the adverse impact of climate change on food production. Being the driver of the 1st green revolution, USA continues with their strategy to remain focused on global food market, especially in the densely populated Asian and African regions, where the demand for food has been growing steadily. As before, the present push is on mass production through diffusion of new farming technology, including genetically modified seeds (GMS), across the globe.

Apprehension of a 'drought like situation' due to climate change has given an opportunity to introduce genetically modified seeds and launch the second green revolution to feed the hungry mouths of Asia, Latin America and Africa. US biotech giants like Monsanto is trying to capitalize this opportunity by aggressively promoting its GM seeds as a solution to this emerging crisis. In Copenhagen climate conference (CoP15) Monsanto has been lobbying hard for carbon credits for their 'Roundup Ready' crops, which are being grown for agro

fuel. 'Roundup Ready' soy doesn't need ploughing because it can be heavily sprayed with herbicides.

Not ploughing the fields leaves more carbon dioxide in the ground, but the vast spread of soy monocultures in Latin America have caused deforestation, the displacement of people, and massive amounts of toxic weed-killer being used instead. Monsanto also wants GM soy to be funded under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) which would allow polluting industry in the developed world to offset their emissions by buying credits from GM soy projects.

Obama administration sees 'chronic hunger' as a key priority of their foreign policy and according to the US administration, 'food security' is not only about food. 'It represents the convergence of complex issues: drought and floods caused by climate change, swings in the global economy that affect food prices and threaten the fate of vital infrastructure projects, and spikes in the price of oil that increase transportation cost'.

It may be recalled that in Dr Norman Borlaug, the architect of the 1st green revolution which transformed the traditional agricultural practice by replacing it with the water and energy intensive agricultural technology comprising high yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his accomplishments in India and Pakistan and for his role as "Father of the Green Revolution." Among Dr Borlaug's greatest accomplishments since his selection as a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate were his long (over 30-years) relationships with China as that country's agriculture was transformed and take the leading role in spreading new agricultural technology to Sub-Saharan countries.

IPCC's first report in 1990, projected global averaged temperature increases between about 0.15 and 0.3°C per decade for 1990 to 2005. Against this the actual rise in average global temperature per-decade was 0.2°C compared to the projected average of 0.225°C as predicted in the 1st Assessment Report of IPCC in 1990. As if to justify this optimism, on June 20, 2007, the *Times of India* quoting agency sources reported, "There are interesting points and data that keep suggesting global warming has stopped. The accepted global average temperature statistics used by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change show no ground based warming has occurred since 1998. Oddly, this 8-year long temperature stasis has occurred despite increases of 4% in atmosphere CO₂ over the same period'.

The business moguls have turned the 'climate science' into a 'religion' by generating 'apprehensions' about people's common future. However critical views, based on scientific findings, against such apprehensions are also being raised. For example, Russian critics of the Kyoto Protocol, say that the theory underlying the pact lacks scientific basis. Under the Theory of Anthropogenic Global Warming, it is human-generated greenhouse gases, and mainly CO₂, that cause climate change. "The Kyoto theorists have put the cart before the horse," says renowned Russian geographer Andrei Kapitsa. "It is global warming that triggers higher levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, not the other way round." The Russian researchers made this discovery while studying ice cores recovered from the depth of 3.5 kilometres in Antarctica.

The Indian government has also challenged the western research findings that say global warming has hastened the melting of Himalayan glaciers. According to a research report released by the Indian Environment Minister Jayram Ramesh, the doomsday prediction of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore, a former US vice-president, is not correct. The new report goes against the IPCC's claims that most Himalayan glaciers will vanish by 2035.

It is now an established fact that the possible impacts of global warming are sometimes exaggerated. One day before the announcement that Al Gore was adjudged a co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (2007), a British High Court judge ruled that Gore's global warming film, "An Inconvenient Truth," while "broadly accurate," contained nine significant errors. The film's "apocalyptic vision" was not an impartial analysis of climate change. High Court Judge Michael Burton said that the film was "substantially founded upon scientific research and fact" but that the errors were made in "the context of alarmism and exaggeration."

Alliance Against Terrorism

In September 2001, the then US President George Bush had called for a 'global alliance against terrorism'. Consequently, Tony Blair started a campaign for 'a global alliance for global values' (2006) and now Barak Obama has appealed for 'a global response to global challenges'.

For the 2009 fiscal year, the base budget of the US Department of Defense rose to \$518.3 billion. Adding emergency discretionary spending, supplemental spending, and stimulus spending brings the sum to \$651.2 billion. Defense-related expenditures outside of the Department of Defense constitute between \$274 billion and \$493 billion in additional spending, bringing the total for defense spending to between \$925 billion and \$1.14 trillion in 2009 a substantial part of which will be used to fight against 'terrorism'.

The war against terrorism has given a much needed boost to the recession hit economy. According to SIPRI's Year Book (2009) on 'Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security for 2008', the world's military expenditure has reached to over \$1.46 trillion in 2008. Compared to 1999, this amount was around 45% higher.

The US military expenditure accounted for 41.6% of the total defense expenditure of the world. It was distantly followed by China with 5.8% share. Most importantly, the United States accounted for more than two-thirds of foreign weapons sales in 2008. Despite the global economic recession, US weapons sales jumped nearly 50 percent in 2008 to \$37.8 billion from \$25.4 billion the year before. The United States also led in arms sales to the developing world, signing 70.1 percent of these weapons agreements, at a value of \$29.6 billion in 2008.

Alliance against HIV/AIDS

During last two decades or so, a huge market for preventive gadgets/medicines has been created to save human being against highly contagious diseases like HIV, H1N1 etc. As these epidemics could spread very quickly across the globe, a global alliance has been sought to prevent any such disaster. Mr Obama has assured the World that his government has set aside \$63 billion to carry forward

the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and polio. US have also joined other countries in the WHO project on H1N1 vaccines.

However, it is alleged that although developing countries have been the main contributors of samples of avian flu viruses to the WHO collaborating research centers and laboratories, many of the drug companies (largely from the West) which manufacture the vaccines and prevent easy access to them by the imposition of rigorous patents, have been profiting at their expense by their unauthorized access to such samples for their own research. The result is that developing countries are, in a situation of high prices and limited supplies, unable to stockpile sufficient supplies of such vaccines to meet any pandemic outbreak.

Every minute, a child dies of pneumonia in India, followed by Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Annually, two million children under five die from it, and pneumonia contributes to almost 20% of childhood mortality cases—more than AIDS, measles and malaria combined. So says WHO data published in the *Lancet Journal* in September 2009. Lack of good nutrition, polluted air and poor hygiene are the main causes of pneumonia.

Unlike AIDS, H1N1, and Polio, pneumonia is not contagious. So there is very limited scope of creating a preventive market for vaccines and other products by exploiting the apprehension of pneumonia infection. Little attention is paid towards the eradication of non contagious diseases like this which primarily affects poorer section of the population with limited buying power.

No takers for the global alliance against hunger!

In 2000, world leaders had subscribed to the UN Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of hungry people by 2015. Now more than 1.02 billion people remain hungry everyday not due to poor harvest but because of soaring food price, lower income and increasing unemployment. In every six second, a child dies of malnutrition. More than 265 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa and 42 million in near East and North Africa remain hungry and are malnourished. The corresponding figure for the Asia and pacific region is 642 million. If the global map of the AIDS epidemics is analyzed, a direct causal link between the malnourished population of Asia and Africa and the AIDS victims of these regions, exhibiting the 'acquired immune deficiency syndrome', could be inferred.

Though a global alliance against hunger is badly needed and various such initiatives have been tried over the last few decades, no serious efforts have been made to make 'hunger a history'. The previous food summits organized by FAO, including the one held in November 2009, were long on rhetoric and short on actions and most of the promises made have largely gone unfulfilled. Mere allocation of \$20 billion for the 'launch of food security initiative' indicates about the low priority it receives from the world leaders. It demands a solemn resolve to fight a war against the crude reality of market, not any war preparedness against an abstract apprehension.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009 is to be awarded to the US President Barack Obama for 'his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.' The Nobel Committee has argued that Obama has, as President, created a new

climate in international politics and multilateral diplomacy has regained a central position, with emphasis on the role that the United Nations and other international institutions could play. According to them, under his leadership, the USA has been playing a more constructive role in meeting the great climatic challenges the world is confronting. The Committee has also endorsed Obama's appeal that "now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges."

Dismayed and shocked to this announcement, Howard Zinn, the noted historian and author of 'A People's History of the United States', has commented that the Nobel Committee perhaps had made the assessment based on the eloquent 'promises' made by the US President.

By selecting Barak Obama as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009, the Noble Committee has consciously tried to endorse the initiatives taken by him to save the US economy in particular and the global economy in general. As the President of the USA, Obama has promised to amend the unilateral approach the US governments have been following for decades. He is trying to make the US policies compatible with the realities of the 21st century when the 'destiny is shared and power is no longer a zero sum game...no world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will succeed'. □□□

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