

War Against Indian People

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[Following is a slightly shortened version of a speech delivered by the author at the public meeting in London, June 12, 2011. 'Discussing the solidarity with people of India' meet was organised by the International Campaign Against war on the People in India]

IN 'THE HINDU' ON JUNE 3RD I read an article by Markandey Katju, a Judge of the Supreme Court of India. He there quotes a speech delivered by P Sainath, Rural Affairs Editor of *The Hindu* and Magsaysay award winner, on September 6, 2007 in Parliament House in the Speaker's Lecture Series:

"The mass reality in India (which has over 70 percent of its people living in the rural areas), is that rural India is in the midst of the worst agrarian crisis in four decades. Millions of livelihoods in the rural areas have been damaged or destroyed in the last 15 years as a result of this crisis, because of the predatory commercialisation of the countryside and the reduction of all human values to exchange value. As a result, lakhs of farmers have committed suicide and millions of people have migrated, and are migrating, from the rural areas to the cities and towns in search of jobs that are not there. They have moved towards a status that is neither that of a 'worker' nor that of a 'farmer.' Many of them end up as domestic labourers, or even criminals. We have been pushed towards corporate farming, a process in which farming is taken out of the hands of the farmers and put in the hands of corporates. This process is not being achieved with guns, tanks, bulldozers or lathis. It is done by making farming unviable for the millions of small familyfarm-holders, due to the high cost of inputs such as seed, fertilizer and power, and uneconomical prices."

This growing Indian discussion is now beginning to be reflected in large media even outside India. On June 7th the English language website of *Aljazeera* published a very important article by dr Vananda Shiva, the recipient of "the Right Livelihood Award" [Alternative Nobel Prize] in 1993:

"The great land grab: India's war on farmers. Land is a powerful commodity that should be used for the betterment of humanity through farming and ecology."

In this article dr Vananda Shiva says: "Financial capital is hungry for investments and returns on investments. It must commodify everything on the planet—land and water, plants and genes, microbes and mammals. The commodification of land is fuelling the corporate land grab in India, both through the creation of Special Economic Zones and through foreign direct investment in real estate...."

Colonisation was based on the violent takeover of land. And now, globalisation as recolonisation is leading to a massive land grab in India, in Africa, in Latin America. Land is being grabbed for speculative investment, for speculative urban sprawl, for mines and factories, for highways and expressways. Land is being grabbed from farmers after trapping them in debt and pushing them to suicide.

.....Across the length and breadth of India, from Bhatta in Uttar Pradesh(UP) to Jagatsinghpur in Orissa to Jaitapur in Maharashtra, the government has declared war on our farmers, our *annadatas*, in order to grab their fertile farmland.

Their instrument is the colonial Land Acquisition Act—used by foreign rulers against Indian citizens. The government is behaving as the foreign rulers did when the Act was first enforced in 1894, appropriating land through violence for the profit of corporations—JayPee Infratech in Uttar Pradesh for the Yamuna expressway, POSCO in Orissa and AREVA in Jaitapur—grabbing land for private profit and not, by any stretch of the imagination, for any public purpose. This is rampant in the country today.

Today, a similar situation is brewing in Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, where 20 battalions have been deployed to assist in the anti-constitutional land acquisition to protect the stake of India's largest foreign direct investment—the POSCO Steel project. The government has set the target of destroying 40 betel farms a day to facilitate the land grab. The betel brings the farmers an annual earning of Rs 400,000 (\$9,000) an acre. The Anti-POSCO movement, in its five years of peaceful protest, has faced state violence numerous times and is now gearing up for another—perhaps final—non-violent and democratic resistance against a state using violence to facilitate its undemocratic land grab for corporate profits, overlooking due process and the constitutional rights of the people.

...The use of violence and destruction of livelihoods that the current trend is reflecting is not only dangerous for the future of Indian democracy, but for the survival of the Indian nation state itself. Considering that today India may claim to be a growing or booming economy—but yet is unable to feed more than 40 percent of its children is a matter of national shame.

....Handing over fertile land to private corporations, who are becoming the new zamindars [hereditary aristocrats], cannot be defined as having a public purpose. Creating multiple privatised super highways and expressways does not qualify as necessary infrastructure. The real infrastructure India needs is the ecological infrastructure for food security and water security. Burying our fertile food-producing soils under concrete and factories is burying the country's future."

Such texts by scientists, journalists and officials in India should be spread in our countries in the West. When necessary translated. They give a true perspective of India and the public discussion in India. I have taken these long quotes because they make plain the difference between the real discussion in India and the reporting on India in a country like Sweden, a country in the Western block.

A primary responsibility in organizing a solidarity movement with the peoples of India in our countries is overcoming what in reality is a news blockade in our official media. There is nothing strange in the way our official media behave. In fact those among you who—like me—have been active in peace movements or active on the so called "left" for some sixty or seventy years know it well. Those of us with an interest in history can also go to the libraries and read through the newspaper files these last two centuries. Nothing is new in this media behaviour.

But there are three points to keep in mind. The first is one of degree. It was possible—but dangerous—to inform publicly about the real situation in Wilhelmine Germany during WW1. It was not possible in Hitlerite Germany in WW2. At present it is difficult but not impossible to publish real information about the situation in India in the official media in a country like Sweden.

The second point is that there are determining material and ideological reasons behind the lack of media interest in the real situation in India. The tourist one—that it is enough if India is depicted as the extremely fascinating country with a great cultural heritage that it is not decisive. The economic one is more important. Sweden is not only Bofors, you know. The iron ore and the hydrology resources in the guerrilla zone where people are defending

themselves are of extreme interest to also the Swedish capital groups. The media under their influence are thus supposed not to write too much about that.

There is also an ideological aspect. It is very clear to the leading circles in India that if the struggle of the poor and down-trodden for their rights (especially if it is armed) can be defined as extremism and terrorism they will benefit by depicting their policies against the peoples of India as being a part of the global war against terrorism.

Remember that "the West" (including officially up to recently "nonaligned states" as Sweden) is engaged in at least three open wars in what they call "the Middle East"; officially against terrorism and for democracy and feminism but in reality—as I and many of us see it - for more material and imperial interests such as oil, trade routes and spheres of military influence. Like during other wars in our era individuals and parties (Norway gives good examples) that have made their career during struggles against wars, against NATO and the United States are now directly and profitably engaged in these new wars. If the ruling circles in India can present their war against adivasis and dalits as part of the general war on terrorism they will get stronger political support.

We should also be conscious about the terms we use. Even in India words like adivasis and dalits carry casteist overtones and are being used by the ruling circles to utilize unconscious traditional prejudices (as in our languages when we take over colonial expressions like "tribal" and "outcaste").

We should keep in mind that "adivasis" has nothing to do with either "primitive" or "terrorism". They are indigenous, have lived here long before any Indian states had been created. "Adivasis" and "dalits" are parts of the peoples of India and now officially Indian citizens. The government in waging war against them are truly waging war against its own people.

But they are a part of that large section of the peoples of India that have been robbed of their rights by the ruling circles and their government and are struggling to regain their human, social and political rights.

Exotism is an ideological tool used by colonialism, imperialism and the present day ruling classes.

Many, maybe even a majority of writers and TV-personnel, also in our countries are reasonably good and honest and would report honestly if they got the possibility. The difficulty is getting correct reporting past the gate keepers. Many of those gate keepers, i.e. "responsible editors", in my country Sweden were more than a generation ago part of the so called "youth revolt". Several of those that now are highly paid and responsible editors in our media have in one way or another repented after in their youth having described themselves as some kind of "marxist-leninists". There is nothing strange about this. It was the same in the United States sixty years ago. Then many intellectuals repented their ideological sins during the "New Deal years".

To understand this one ought to look up the "law on editors" ("Schriftstellergesetz") that Goebbels instituted in 1934 after the Jews and communists had been cleaned out and ask how many of these Schrifts tellers/editors were brought to justice according to that Nazi law during the years to 1945. The answer is very clear. Not one. It was not the Gestapo that kept the editors in line; it was their salary, their car, their house or flat.

But there were still at that time many honest German journalists. I knew several. Our situation is not that of Germany in WW2—or even West Germany during the Adenauer time. It is possible —though not very easy—to get real news on India printed or produced on radio

and television even in our countries in the West. Though to do this one should remember the injunction of Jesus to the disciples: "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves". For me that advice is probably too late, I should have thought about it nearly seventy years ago.

But if the ruling economic (and thus political) circles in our countries are closely bound up (competing and struggling of course but still bound together) with the ruling groups in India will a solidarity movement with the peoples of India be able to have any real impact?

We can go back in history and find the answer. Take the slavery issue of the nineteenth century. There were in the United Kingdom very strong economic interests in the slave trade and later on for the support of the South during the Civil War in North America. The arguments against the slave trade were often ideological and/or religious. Still the anti-slavery movement step by step succeeded during the nineteenth century and on December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where article 4 states:

"No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

There are several such examples. I think we did—despite the uproar in much of the official press—manage to stop the outbreak of a nuclear war around 1952/3. The movement against the United States war in Indo-China also was a determining factor in forcing an end to that war.

The lesson is that it is possible through broad based solidarity movements to change the political reality. Not that it is always possible. Most of us have probably gone in such mass demonstrations as those against the then coming war against Iraq. Still, even those were of vital importance.

Another lesson has been that often those individuals who for religious or other ideological reasons seem far from us—bishops for instance who often have been brave in their opposition to unjust wars—stand up when political comrades and friends on the official Left look to their own good and crumble.

It is now seventy years since I read my first serious book on India—R Palme Dutt. "India Today", 1940—what he there wrote on "Indian poverty" is still as true as then:

"Two facts stand out in the present situation of India. One is the wealth of India—the natural wealth, the abundant resources, the potential prosperity within reach of the entire existing population, and of more than the present population. The other is the poverty of India—the poverty of the overwhelming majority of the people, a poverty beyond the imagination of any accustomed to the conditions of the Western world. Between these two lies the problem of the existing social and political order in India."

It is more than fifty years I first came to India and it is now thirty years ago I—together with my wife and daughter—went to Andhra Pradesh to visit and report on the oppression, the violence against women and the armed squads of that time (See "India Waits"), now I was invited to the Eastern Ghats to meet and discuss with the leading comrades of the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Much has happened in these years and the horrors of the onslaught of the ruling class against the oppressed (and their women) are if possible worse.

It is not for me - as a non-Indian - to tell those that are struggling against this oppression what to do. I will always try to remember what Rewi Alley told me in China during the turbulent time of the Cultural revolution: "Remember it is their country!" □□□