

frontier

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War Drills

EVEN WITHOUT A WAR, A WAR-LIKE SITUATION CAN ALWAYS be created through war-drill, a dubious, if not vulgar mechanism, for war-mongers to assert their military might. Right now all the major powers with their multi-billion dollar defence budget are conducting war exercises in different parts of the globe, displaying their high-tech and newly invented weapons to threaten their enemies, imagined or real. America and its allies have made the Indo-Pacific a new theatre for their periodic war - drills with thousands of men in uniform testing their skills in handling missiles, rocket-launchers, air-craft carriers, fighter jets, war ships and all that. Russia and China are not far behind. They too are resorting to dress rehearsals in the same region with a lot of propaganda. In truth Russia is doing drills in other parts of the world to send message to the Uncle Sam and his associates that it is not a one-way traffic. Russia is doing military exercises along with China and Iran, a new configuration changing the existing geopolitical equation. Recently China's spy ship visited Sri Lankan port which has virtually been sold out to China through a 99- year mortgage. The very presence of Chinese spy ship created a lot of furore in India as also in the West. The hawks in India lost no time to demand similar action to exhibit India's naval might. And Prime Minister Modi didn't disappoint them as he would launch India's indigenous built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant a few days later to show India's rivals that India's defence system is gearing up.

The most obnoxious thing in India's defence culture is the announcement of joint India-US military exercise in Uttarakhand in October near the LAC--Line of Actual Control. The Chinese see it as a provocation. By inviting American troops at the border New Delhi is going to strain relations further with Beijing. In case of a hot war with China America will never come to rescue the beleaguered Modis. Russian support is out of question. In 1971 America sent seventh fleet to help Pakistan against India. It was the Soviet submarine that neutralised the advance moves of America.

One of the purposes of much publicised war drills of America and its allies in the Pacific and Indian oceans is to create a market for Washington's arms industry. They have built tensions and war hysteria in the South China Sea to such an extent, as if a count-down for a war between China and Taiwan has already begun. America is now dumping huge arms and ammunitions in tiny Taiwan Island in anticipation of an imminent war.

Taiwan is spending billions of dollars on arms; the beneficiary is American military-industrial complex. China is also a new player in global arms market. For one thing by continually violating Taiwan's air space they are no less responsible for aggravating tensions in the region. A Chinese drone has recently been shot down by Taiwan's air defence unit. If China invades Taiwan, the possibility of which doesn't look bright despite war propaganda by both sides, America is unlikely to commit troops to Taiwan as they have not done it in Ukraine, albeit Ukraine is now a proxy of America's war with Russia while Europe has no option but to oblige their White House boss. The Russia-Ukraine war is prolonging

because America wants to keep its defence industry buoyant. Then the European war-lords say they won't allow Russia to win this war. So they are buying weapons from America only to re-sell them to Ukraine. In the end ordinary Ukrainians are paying the price.

Right now Russians are not winning in Ukraine but they are not losing either. In a war attackers suffer maximum casualties. So at the start of the war the Russian army suffered heavily. As the war lingers they are now more in a position of defender, minimising casualties.

No doubt Putin's invasion has created a living hell in Ukraine, destroying its industrial base, built mainly during the Soviet era. In six months

Russia has succeeded to capture only half of Donbas, the industrial hub of Ukraine in the east. Without a negotiated settlement Ukraine's president Zelensky, a comedian turned politician, is making post-war reconstruction of Ukraine impossible.

Coming back to war drills, America is searching for a new flash point after Ukraine and China is obliging by agreeing to keep the pot boiling. These military exercises change people's psyche and prepare ground for militarisation of society. It is too naïve to say that joint India-US military drill in Uttarakhand near LAC is not going to affect people. Peace activists across the world do hardly oppose war drills and their adverse impact on civil society. □□□

COMMENT

August Deluge

SOUTH ASIA IS DEVASTATED BY deadly deluges. Afghanistan, Pakistan and North India have witnessed unprecedented rainfall and floods in recent weeks. It's climate change. Whether they admit it or not the climate change is dangerously changing the monsoon pattern in South Asia and making floods more likely. Right now one third of Pakistan is under water.

Hotter air, an unusually heavy monsoon, melting glaciers and a poverty-stricken population living with infrastructure incapable of protecting it—the recent floods in Pakistan, Afghanistan and north India were due to a number of factors. But the most important cause is, undeniably, the climate crisis.

South Asia has always been a victim of a hostile climate, but this year is turning out to be one of the worst for the region. Even traditionally arid regions in north India faced severe floods.

For one thing India and Pakistan

were hit by the worst heatwave on record—made 30 times more likely due to the climate crisis—and now, multiple cycles of heavy downpours since June have sparked calamitous floods in August.

More than 1,191 people, including 399 children, have been killed so far, while 33 million people or 15 percent of Pakistan's 220 million people have been affected.

"Monster monsoon" has also affected neighbouring Bangladesh, yet another populous country of South Asia this year.

The entire region is responsible for only a minuscule level of carbon emissions, with Pakistan and Bangladesh producing less than 1 per cent, but it is a "climate crisis hotspot", as highlighted recently by UN secretary general António Guterres and previously in reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Early estimates put the damage from Pakistan's floods at more than \$10bn (£8.6bn).

Pakistan has never seen an unbroken cycle of monsoon [rains] like this. "Eight weeks of non-stop torrents have left huge swathes of the country underwater. This is a deluge from all sides."

Pakistan has received nearly 190 per cent more rain than the 30-year average in the quarter from June to August this year, totalling 390.7mm (15.38 inches). July was the wettest month for the region on record since 1961.

Pakistan's Sindh province, with a population of 50 million, has been hit the hardest, getting 466 percent more rain than the 30-year average. Major rivers such as the Indus are overflowing and low-lying areas around it have turned into swamps and lakes.

Surface air temperature has increased in the past century all over Asia, causing stronger, more frequent and longer heat waves. Both India and Pakistan had their highest temperatures on record this year during the deadly heatwave in April and May.

With a warming planet, such episodes are likely to become much more common in the coming years.

There's an unusual trend in the monsoon pattern in the region, which contributed to increased rainfall in Pakistan—a trend that has increasingly become visible over the last five years, “The two back-to-back monsoon depressions [low-pressure system in the monsoon] travelled right from the Bay of Bengal via central India to south Sindh and Balochistan in Pakistan”. Experts think it is a rare event—as people usually do not see weather systems travelling in such a direction.

The long-term melting of the gla-

ciers of the Himalayas already worsened by the record heatwave this year, also exacerbated flash flooding in Pakistan as more water raced downhill throughout the summer to contribute to the deluge.

Pakistan is home to more than 7,200 glaciers, more than anywhere outside the poles. They are a source for rivers that account for about 75 per cent of the stored water supply in the country.

Melting of glaciers is another impact of a warming planet. □□□

[Contributed]

NOTE

Environment Activism in Punjab

Bharat Dogra writes:

IN RECENT MONTHS THERE have been growing signs of increasing assertiveness of environmental movements in Punjab.

There was an impressive and successful mobilisation recently to save the Mattewara forest in Ludhiana from the onslaught of an ill-conceived industrial project. Less attention has been drawn to another welcome protest against the pollution caused by a liquor factory near Zira in Ferozepur district. There are early signs also of people getting mobilised in Ropar district to protect environmental concerns in the context of an upcoming paper mill near Budha River and Sirhind canal. In this context the setting up of paper mills and distilleries near rivers and canals has come in for special scrutiny as these industries are known to be particularly problematic in the context of water pollution.

All of these movements have raised important issues and this increasing assertiveness of environmental movements should be widely welcomed. In fact at no other time in its history has Punjab faced so much and such many-sided environ-

mental degradation as during the last 55 years or so. Hence a strong environmental movement in Punjab is clearly a very important need of these times.

The forest cover in Punjab is very low. Even when afforestation and tree planting work is taken up, there is often a tendency to go in for exotic species and monoculture plantations which can never provide the same protection as natural forests. Hence bird and animal life has also suffered much loss. Birds have also suffered a great loss due to excessive use of poisonous agro-chemicals in farms, orchards, gardens and lawns, leading to very sad episodes of large-scale death of birds including parrots.

The impact of excessive use of agro-chemicals on human health has been very serious, due to direct exposure as well as contamination of both groundwater and surface water sources. The increase in the incidence of cancer in several parts of the state has been very tragic in this context.

From a somewhat longer term point of view the harmful impact of excessive and indiscriminate use of

AUTUMN NUMBER 2022

will be out in the first week of October 2022.

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agro-chemicals as well as reducing biodiversity/increasing monocultures on soil health, and hence on nutrition and health of people, is no less disturbing.

Water level has been falling in most areas, and as water level falls beyond a point the risk of arsenic and other contamination also increases. Ponds and village water bodies which helped to store rain water and recharge groundwater have diminished greatly. Many rivers are polluted while some of the smaller rivulets face perhaps even more serious threats of survival and identity. As several rivers are threatened in various ways also in the upper Himalayan catchment areas by excessive dam building and in other ways, problems have increased.

Time honoured crop rotations and mixed farming systems have been badly disrupted. Even such a more obvious need as maintaining the cereal-legume rotation and inter-cropping was ignored, leading to a rapid loss of free nitrogen fixing abilities of

legumes. This happened despite legumes being such an essential part of the diet of local people and the most accessible form of protein. Increasing water intensity of new cropping patterns has played havoc with groundwater resources which have depleted faster in the last 50 years than in the past 5000 years. All this has been happening in the name of great progress. Unwise changes in crop intensity and rotations as well as harvesting practices have led to a situation of mass stubble burning,

leading to loss of fodder and great increase in air pollution within rural areas, a relatively new phenomenon.

Garbage handling is an increasing problem in rural as well as urban areas, particularly with growing component of polythenes or other non-biodegradable wastes, as well as various hazardous wastes. Air pollution is another serious problem.

Punjab needs a well-coordinated environment movement with a wide enough horizon to embrace all serious environmental problems with all

their linkages and roots in distorted development and lifestyle patterns. This movement should have a good and continuing relationship with environmental activists and movements elsewhere, particularly in neighbouring states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Another very important concern is to not consider environmental issues in isolation but instead to integrate environmental issues well with justice and equality based issues.

□□□

VENDETTA CULTURE

Annihilating War

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

IN THE UNITED STATES THE situation between Ukraine and Russia is understood as a mini world war between Russia and United States with diversified participation by NATO. In the old days, from the sixties to the eighties, the ideological language in the United States translated such confrontations as the Free World versus the Communists; now, since communism, such as it was, has imploded, what is an open vendetta system is recoded as democracy versus autocracy in the interest of re-establishing US exceptionalism. The situation is made darker by the leverage of a nuclear threat around the breach of Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest nuclear reactor in Europe, located in Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine stands for “European” exceptionalism. Between these two exceptionalisms, we in the United States don't seem to care much about Israel's relationship to Palestine, about the Rohingyas we care not at all, not much about the entire collection of West Asian fronts, including Syria; and we forget that the confrontation in Kashmir has been going on for so long and is

replicated in many areas of the world such as East Timor and Papua New Guinea.

My source of instruction for Russian imperialist culture and varieties of Ukrainian identitarianism was my dear friend, now deceased, Professor Mark von Hagen. He pointed out that the identitarianism of this region went from a primordial version of manifest destiny—Ukraine is better than all local areas, to an enlightened multiculturalism. Academically, the discipline of Cultural Studies should locate this conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the largest unit in the Russian Federation, as part of a long narrative of a Ukrainian sense of identity, sometimes supported by progressive Ukrainian thinkers as multicultural—linking unity in diversity, different and the same with a cultural Russia. A later, but no less nuanced source for me was the late Professor Hari Vasudevan, who also emphasised the multiplicity of “Russian” identities, held together by an increasingly fungible imperial ideology. The temporary cradle-to-grave material sustenance of a population sustained by the descendant of a serf (close to

a chattel slave) imperfectly conscientised by bourgeois ideologues; and the results of what we would today call a STEM education where the humanities were reduced to what we would today call a toolkit version of “Marx” crumbled with Mikhail Gorbachev's light knucklerap. In fact, whatever abstract words are used, what we are witnessing today is the vendetta culture which has been the major format of most history forever. (In the US, where a very large number of people think that fetuses have personhood and should not be destroyed under any circumstances, it is ironic that tremendous amounts of advanced weaponry can be supplied to kill adults.) The distinction between soldiers and civilians, just and unjust war is ultimately spurious for those of us pacifists who would say, with W E B Du Bois, the greatest historian and sociologist of the 20th century, that “war is worse than hell, and it seldom or never forwards the advance of the world”.

Under the current circumstances, peace comes to mean three things: stopping war because one side has killed by much the largest number of people; stopping war because the side that is killing the largest number of people and has destroyed the largest elements of infrastructure has been persuaded to be diplomatic—it should be mentioned that this ver-

sion of peace is generally and immediately uncertain; and the third version, as the Scottish-German philosopher Kant said so long ago in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), is a peace that is possible when commercial connections are established between states. India cannot support the sanctions because it buys the majority of its arms from Russia; as also its oil. We now know that this last is also an instrument of the withdrawal of peace

through an imposition of commercial sanctions.

It is clear that even as this exchange of violence goes on until these sorts of peace are restored for a time, the only long-term goal is to bring in a more lasting peace, creating a collective mindset that would think of peace as the necessary absence of war—to quote Ambedkar differently—if there is an annihilation of war. Descriptive journalism and human rights activism must be

sustained by the kind of education that slowly changes mindsets at all levels and prepares for the correct use of the digital—not just for destruction and corruption. This writer remains convinced that sustaining all material change is that training in mind-changing education, ceaselessly and seriously threatened by the seduction of unregulated, unsecured informal global capitalism with the theft of surplus value hidden in forced labour. □□□

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Impact of Pandemic on Education

Anusha Paul

THE GLOBAL NATURE OF the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the whole world with the twin shocks of a health emergency and an economic recession. The pandemic has affected all parts of the world and the responses to the situation have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of society.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a drastic effect on the Indian economy. The macroeconomic effects can be listed as follows:

- **Economic Contraction:** Due to the combined effects of the demand shock and supply disruptions following the lockdown, the growth rate projections for the Indian economy for 2020-21 have been repeatedly lowered from 1.9% (in April 2020) to 1.2% (in May 2020). In October 2020, the IMF projected a 10.3% contraction for the Indian economy in 2020. For the first time in 40 years India has had a negative growth rate.
- **Rising Unemployment:** Unemployment has been growing since January 2020 when the first cases of coronavirus were detected. According to the Centre

for Monitoring Indian Economy, India's unemployment rate peaked on 16 May 2020, staggeringly high at nearly 24 percent (26% in urban and 23% in rural areas) but fell in November to just under 7%. Close to 122 million Indians had lost their jobs in April 2020 alone. Of these, 91.3 million were small traders and labourers. A significant number of salaried workers (17.8 million) and self-employed people (18.2 million) also lost work.

- **Agriculture:** Employs more than half of India's workforce and has been badly hit by COVID-19. Farmers and agricultural workers have faced major disruptions due to the non-availability of migrant labour interrupting harvesting activities, and disruptions in supply chains due to border closures and quarantine, as well as disruptions in markets, supply chains and trade. With over 70 percent of the female workforce employed in agriculture, women farmers had to bear the brunt of loss of livelihoods and incomes.

India has the world's second-largest

school system, after China. Shutting schools to maintain social distancing during the COVID-19 crisis was the most logical solution to avoid community transmission in the initial response to COVID-19, given uncertainty over transmission rates among school-aged children and the potential impact of the virus. After the first Indian citizen tested positive for COVID-19 on 27 January 2020, a lockdown was imposed by the government on March 24, which prohibited all students from physically attending schools.

Starting in mid-October 2020, schools slowly reopened in most

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states. However, this largely applied to students enrolled in grades 8 to 12. For students in lower grades, remote learning continued in most of the states. During these 7 months of school disruption, the number of people testing positive rose steadily and didn't start to decline until October 2020.

The COVID-19 has led to disruption of students' learning around the world. In India alone, it has left over 286 million students from pre-primary to upper secondary school out of school since March 2020. As most schools continued to remain closed, students, parents and educators became increasingly concerned. Evidence from past prolonged school closures shows that such disruptions could set generations of children back for life. For instance, the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan led to an average 14 weeks of school closures resulting in affected children being put behind in their learning by approximately, about 1.5 to 2 years compared to their peers in other areas. Losses during closures were likely to snowball after children return to school if lessons and curriculum do not match their learning level.

In India, in response to COVID-19 related school closures, a wide range of actors—the government, civil society, private companies, local communities and families—came together to support children through numerous channels. Actors, such as village panchayats and livelihoods related self-help groups, stepped in to fill gaps. Given below are the various initiatives that were taken up at Central level and implemented in localised manner by the States and Union Territories:

1. Guidelines on the reopening of schools
2. The facilitation of remote learning through interactive online class
3. The maintenance of the mental health and well-being of students
4. Sharing of digital content over WhatsApp
5. Distribution of textbooks and calendar-based home activities

To support continuous learning while schools are closed, the Ministry of Education shared various free digital e-learning platforms in their press release (21 March 2020). The government has made a strong effort to create a repository of learning content and has implemented EdTech interventions in partnership with several NGOs such as EkStep, Khan Academy and Azim Premji Foundation. Access to the following resources is free:

- **DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing):** An open-source national platform for learners and teachers to enable educational autonomy. Learners can access more than 80,000 e-books in multiple languages. Teachers can undergo training on the platform, access tools to help them with their lesson plans and content explanation, as well as assessment of their students. The content can be viewed through QR code on textbooks or by downloading the app from iOS and Google Play Stores.

- **e-PATHSHALA:** In this portal, the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) has deployed 1,886 audios, 2,000 videos, 696 e-books (e-Pubs) and 504 Flip Books for Grades 1-12 in different languages. A mobile app is available.
- **Swayam:** A national online education platform hosting 1,900 courses covering both school (Grades 9-12) and higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in all subjects). A unique feature of SWAYAM is that it is integrated with conventional education. Credit transfers are possible for SWAYAM courses.
- **National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER):** This portal has a total of 14,527 files including 401 collections, 2,779 documents, 1,345 interactive, 1,664 audios, 2,586 images and 6,153 videos in different languages.

The Minister of Education presented the Alternative Academic Calendar for Students (AAC) guidelines on continuing formal school education online. The AACs are a set of four documents—one each for primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary schooling—that outline measures for educators to ensure continuity in curriculum learning from the safety of students' homes through a blend of online and offline activities.

But what percentage of students have been receiving learning materials so far? Who is left out? When students have access, are they using these materials? Do they find them helpful? Which ones do they find most helpful and why? What are the barriers and enablers to remote learning tools? What kinds of support are parents and students looking for? How does all of this differ across geography, disaggregated by sex, age groups, and grade levels?

গড্ডালিকা প্রবাহ থেকে

বাংলা ভাষা তথা মাতৃভাষা বাঁচান

‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’

সাড়া জাগানো বাংলা পাক্ষিক পত্রিকা

ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ মাসিক পত্রিকা

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সব স্টলে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। ‘শুধু পূর্বাশা’ দাম ৫

টাকা মাত্র ও ‘পূর্বাশা এখন’ ২৫ টাকা মাত্র।

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The 2020 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) survey was adapted to a phone survey format that could be conducted in multiple waves, in order to capture the effects of the pandemic on different aspects of children's education. It explored the provision of, and access to, remote education mechanisms and materials in rural parts of the country, and the ways in which children, families and educators are engaging with these from their homes. Key findings from the ASER survey include:

➤ Access to and availability of learning materials and activities
Only 36 percent of all enrolled children received learning materials or activities from their teachers:

- 37 percent of children in higher grades (Grade 9 and above) received learning materials, compared to 31 percent of children in lower grades (Grades 1–2). These percentages were consistently higher for children in private schools compared to government schools across all grades.
- Among those who did receive learning materials, 67 percent of government school students and 87 percent of private school students received them on WhatsApp. Government schools tended to use phone calls and personal visits more often than private schools.
- Of the enrolled children who didn't receive any learning materials, 68 percent of parents cited schools not sending materials, while 24 percent of households stated not owning a smartphone as the reason. This number was almost 5 percent higher for government schools than private schools.

➤ Children's engagement with remote learning

Of the 36 percent of households which did receive learning materials

during the survey week, most reported that children engaged in some kind of educational activity during that week:

- For children in all schools, 60 percent reported using textbooks.
- Students in higher grades were more likely to engage with online classes or video recordings than their younger counterparts. For students in Grade 9 and above, 28 percent accessed videos or recorded classes and 16 percent accessed live online classes. For students in Grades 1 and 2 the figures were 17 percent and 7 percent, respectively.
- Recorded video lessons and online classes were more accessible for private school students, with 29 percent reporting using video recordings and 18 percent reporting using live online classes. For government school students the figures were 18 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

A report by Oxfam India indicated that children studying in government schools were hit particularly hard, with more than 80% of government school students in Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh not receiving any educational materials during the lockdown. This was mostly because of families not having access to digital devices and e-learning tools. In homes that had digital access, WhatsApp was the primary mode (75%) for delivering education in both public and private schools, followed by phone calls between teachers and students (38%). But more than 75% of parents had trouble with WhatsApp lessons because of the lack of an internet connection or the inability to afford it, and sometimes poor internet speed/signal.

A survey conducted by UNICEF in six states concluded that most respondents feel that students are falling behind compared with where

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they should be, including in social skills, fitness, job prospects etc. Some 67% of parents of students aged 5-13 and 71% of students aged 14-18 state that overall progress is significantly behind or somewhat behind, compared with what it would be in school. Kerala is an exception: about 70% of parents of both younger and adolescent students believe that overall learning progress is the same or better than it would be in school. Kerala has the greatest technology access, and it has also been among the most proactive states in supporting students: it is the only state where nearly everyone who used remote learning reports that the government has provided remote learning resources, and more than 90% report that students are speaking with their teachers.

The COVID-19 crisis has meant limited or no education, or falling further behind their peers for the ones who have already experienced barriers in accessing education—children with disabilities, students in remote locations, children of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers or those whose families have lost their source of livelihood and incomes. This had forced many children to discontinue their studies even after 'normality' was restored.

According to a survey conducted by National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People, many children with disabilities did not have access to the online services that had replaced traditional learning during this lockdown. Many of them came from families with low socio-economic profiles. Parents were also unable to help as many of these children are first-generation learners.

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In government primary schools, enrolment for girls is higher than that for boys. Given the strong gender preference, this trend usually reverses in the senior grades. However, during the economic crisis, both girls and boys were discouraged from going back to school. This was because the girls were required to help with the domestic chores or take care of sick or infirm family members. Such girls were also forced into early marriages. Boys, on the other hand, were sent to work so that the family could afford at least one square meal a day.

For children, school is more than just about attending classes. The extracurricular activities are equally formative to a child's growth and are not being catered for through distance learning. The school also provides some essential basic services such as the midday meals, immunization and health checks that are difficult to substitute. Time will reveal the non-academic impacts a year-long closure of schools had on the growth and development of a generation of students.

Data from the National Sample Survey Organisation suggested that economic factors are critical to children dropping out of school. The pandemic and lockdown accelerated the drop-out rates and have affected an estimated 40 million migrant workers and others working in the informal sector (90 percent of India's population is engaged in this sector). The migrant workers had either moved back home with their children or were unable to send remittances home this season. The move towards technology-driven distance-learning had prevented many migrant children from continuing their education during school closure. A survey across 18 states revealed 46 percent of migrant children had discontinued their education due to COVID-19. In March 2020, the gov-

ernments of 27 states launched migrant portals to track the movement of migrants and their children.

Education during the current pandemic had been a massive change for everyone involved. Students, teachers and parents are still getting used to the switch from learning in classrooms to learning from home. For the teachers, the move from interacting with a classroom of around 40 students to trying to teach from their homes via mobile phones or laptops has been a learning experience fraught with challenges. From coping with the basics of internet connectivity and India's notoriously unreliable power supply to more structural issues such as curriculum and teaching methods, educators have come under tremendous stress since India's schools began shutting down in mid-March.

- Distance learning has affected the teachers since most of them were teaching remotely for the first time, and have limited or no training to do so. Hence, the quality of teaching was affected.
- A survey by ASSOCHAM and Primus Partners shows that only 17 percent of teachers in government schools reported that they were trained to conduct online classes; in private schools, this figure stood at 43.8 percent (ASSOCHAM, 2020)
- India already faces a shortage of qualified teachers. About 14.6 percent teachers in government schools, 9.7 percent in government aided schools, 25.4 percent in private unaided schools and 58.7 percent in 15 other school categories did not have any professional qualifications (NIEPA, 2017).
- Along with online classes, teachers are also burdened with COVID duty and this has severely impacted their health and well-being.

● Many teachers, especially those in low fee private schools and also contractual teachers in government schools went through a period of economic uncertainty; many of them experienced irregular salaries, salary cuts or even job loss due to the pandemic.

Schools in India are very diverse in terms of the school board, manage-

ment, and funding, which affects the type of guidance and autonomy schools receive. Consequently, decisions regarding the teaching and learning practices are a shared responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the Indian States, and the local bodies,

Digitalisation is highlighted in the NEP and in the COVID-19 response as a means to strengthen access to

quality education, but there are multiple challenges and several reasons why it should not be the only response. These include the fact that schools perform multiple functions beyond academic learning; there is a risk of widening disparities in access to quality education due to the digital divide; and it would be extremely expensive to ensure that digital resources reach every student. □

PERESTROIKA AND GLASNOST

Thou Gorbachev, Just Like Brutus!

Farooque Chowdhury

GORBACHEV'S WAS A betrayer's life. He's the person who led a band of betrayers to dismantle the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)—Soviet Union. The biggest country in the world stretching from the Pacific to the Black Sea, from the Arctic to the Caspian Sea, with Tundra, Steppes and the Urals, was created with toil, blood and love of millions of toiling people coming from factories, workshops and farms. It was decades of struggle by the millions. This heroic people defeated armies organised by imperialists from around the world, and defied imperialist blockade. This courageous working people defeated the Nazi marauders.

But the Betrayer Band led by that person named Mikhail Gorbachev stabbed from inside—from inside the party, from inside the state machine.

Imperialists, the bourgeoisie, war traders, traders with hunger and poverty, businessmen trading death and destitution, feudal lords and their retinue, all the exploiters laughed aloud with the job Gorbachev accomplished—tear down Soviet Union, flatten all the achievements the toilers made, raze to the ground all the advancements the exploited, the prisoners of starvation made.

The exploiters named the land “Evil Empire”—appropriate to characterise by the blood suckers. It was evil to the exploiters, it was enemy to the imperialists, and it was one of the barricades to the forces organising war against peoples around the world. Gorbachev played a catalyst role in the dismantling of this enemy of the imperialists-bourgeoisie-exploiters. His position comes to daylight when enemies of the exploited praise him. So, he was like, as he titled one of his books, *Alone With Myself*. The exploited feel no sympathy, no appreciation for him. The exploited just despise him, just condemn him.

A village boy, Gorbachev, once admitted the system in Soviet Union, which very often but wrongly identified as communism, “gave him the opportunity to earn everything he had.” One can question—was betrayal to the cause of the exploited also among those earnings?

With his work, the farm mechanic, the harvester driver, at the age of 17, became one of the youngest recipients of the Order of the Red Banner of Labour—a prestigious award. He joined the Communist Party/Komsomol. Then, almost like Brezhnev, rose from ordinary position to Politburo of the party.

Brezhnev was one of his main sponsors. To Andropov, he was “My Rough Diamond”. Birds of the same feather!

Gorbachev's Uskorenie, policy of acceleration, Perestroika, reform or rebuilding, Glasnost, openness, were attempts by a faction of the ruling coterie to resolve contradictions in the economy and politics that the revisionists were promoting since usurping power in the Communist Party of Soviet Union and the state. The economy, state, and the party, communist party in name, were experiencing decay, stagnation, corruption, bureaucracy, dictatorship of the coterie. Many others outside of Soviet Union began assuming socialism has been established in the land, and all contradictions have been resolved successfully. That was a wrong assumption, an imagination, an idea that ignored reality; but the reality is in economy, in politics, within contradictions.

Gorbachev in his Perestroika cited revolutions in France, UK and USA—more than one to consolidate and refine power of the bourgeoisie. His report “October and Perestroika: The revolution continues” also had the same saying. [Brezhnev's “Virgin lands” in his *Trilogy* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980) also tells many nice words about the Communist Party, management, participation, decision making process, and heroic deed by and sacrifices of party members.] Then, what about

Soviet Union? He indicated more than one revolutions are required.

But the “visionary” failed to see, or recognise, contradictions between capital and labour, between capitals, between imperialism and people.

Within the society he was leading, the leader guided the party he was at the helm of, actually a coterie, the contradictions in favour of the money put under carpets, in favour of the coterie. Consequently, loot began, the rich and powerful informally living within the party and the state came out to daylight, and started grabbing public properties. The class struggle within the society formally moved in favour of the rich, the imperialist propaganda machine named them the oligarchs, which is the same billionaires in other imperialist/capitalist countries having different phases of origin, but all had, broadly and basically, the same primitive accumulation.

He was telling about “the sovereign right of each people to choose their social system”, in mid-1989. Imperialist masters liked it as they understood that the statement means the right to throw away socialism or post-revolutionary system with struggles to move toward socialism. Gorbachev actually accepted the masters’ interpretation. The masters loved him.

The villain of the Soviet system once admitted the reality of dismembering Soviet Union and disuniting the Soviet state.

So, it’s not strange to hear from Mr Joe Biden to praise Gorbachev: “When he came to power, the Cold War had gone on for nearly 40 years and communism had gone even longer, with devastating consequences.” To Mr Biden, Gorbachev was a “man of remarkable vision”. This helps understand the person—Gorbachev, helps understand the

interests the person secured.

Gorbachev felt the US needs a Perestroika. But, he denied admitting the fact that the system shall never voluntarily step on a stone, which will open a floodgate of its dismantling process, similar to the process of dismantling of the USSR.

Bourgeois media talks a lot about democracy, people’s voice, vote; but how many times have the media talked about the 1990 referendum in the USSR about the preservation of the union? In that referendum, the majority of the voters voted for the preservation of the USSR. But, the verdict was ignored, and the USSR was dismantled. Gorbachev was part of the process of dismantling of the USSR, of denying the voters’ verdict. It was one of his acts like Brutus—stabbing, following a conspiracy, while posing as submitting a petition. This was Gorbachev praised by the bourgeoisie. □□□

INEFFECTIVE UNHRC RESOLUTIONS

War Crimes in Sri Lanka

Thambu Kanagasabai

SRI LANKA’S EXTENT OF compliance with the Recommendations of UNHRC Resolutions passed against it since 2012 particularly No. 30/1 of October 01, 2015 to 46/1 of March 23, 2021 raises concerns to the affected Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has abysmally failed to implement the core Recommendations and has ignored the pivotal Recommendations dealing with accountability, justice, reconciliation and rule of law as they are the fundamental concepts and practices to be observed by a democratic country.

Accountability for the war crimes, crimes against humanity etc. allegedly committed by the war criminals has been totally ignored and discarded allowing the alleged war crimi-

nals to roam free and travel without any restraint except for a few security personnel who have been banned from visiting the USA and UK.

In this respect, the latest move to initiate prosecution against 58 human rights violators in Sri Lanka by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is timely and highly commendable.

In this respect, the current President of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickrema Singhe’s throne speech bodes ill for human rights as he has “Pledged to do more work to protect Buddhism” and also assured Buddhism’s foremost place in Sri Lanka. He has also promised to embark on a speedy spread of Buddhism making it “as his governments’ major responsibility”.

The above steep statements reek

with racial and religious discriminatory postures which have infused fears and uncertainties among the non-Buddhists and other communities particularly the Tamils and Muslims who practise different religions.

By this far-reaching statement, the President has openly exposed and admitted his pursuit and spread of Buddhisation which is culpably discriminatory and a fragrant violation of human rights prescribed in UN and UNHRC Charters. It should be noted that Sri Lanka is a multi-Cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-racial nation.

As UNHRC High Commissioner earlier stated “There has been a further drift towards militarisation and emphasis of Sinhala nationalism and Buddhism in state institutions becoming more visible, increasing the marginalisation and uncertainty of minority communities and undermining reconciliation”.

It will be interesting to recall the

incident in parliament on August 03, 2000 when the present President Ranil Wickramasinghe then opposition leader along with his party members walked out of parliament after tearing and burning the peace proposal of the then President Chandrika Kumaratunge which proposed an Interim Self-Governing Rule to Tamils included in the constitutional proposals. This action of Ranil Wickramasinghe exposed his apathy and aversion to settle the ethnic question with a permanent and acceptable political settlement.

Sri Lanka is a beautiful Island country in the Indian Ocean and full of resources, rain forests, long rivers, tea, rubber, coconut estates, vegetation, vast amounts of rice fields, mountains and surrounded by sea beaches and has become a popular place for tourists. Everything were ruined by the indiscriminate policies adopted by the Sinhala majority governments against the ethnic Tamil and Muslim population living in the North and East of Sri Lanka on their ancestral home lands where they are the majority in number. This country's natural wealth has been abandoned, destroyed and misused without developing properly by the successive corrupted governments who spent their full energy on

warring with the ethnic minority Tamils from the time of Independence dating back from 1948 up to date, (74 years) and still continuing in the form of structural genocide. Now the country is bankrupt and unable to pay the loans obtained mostly from China. The former Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapakse who was thrown out of power by the people's uprising on July 09, 2022 and is now staying in Thailand as a tourist. He and his brother Mahinda Rajapakse are the brains behind the war crimes, crimes against humanity etc. allegedly committed against Tamils. They are still not brought to justice and accountability as in Sri Lanka accountability prevails over justice as accountability and impunity are always remaining as anathema.

The period of Mahinda Rajapakse's rule in Sri Lanka was:

From 2004 to 2005 (2 years) as Prime Minister.

From 2005 to 2015 (10 years) as President.

From 2019 November to 2022 June 09 (3 years as Prime Minister) thrown out of power by the people uprising on June 09, 2022.

His Brother Gotabaya Rajapakse's rule:

From 2019 November to 2022

As Timir Basu is still seriously ill, he is not in a position to communicate with contributors and subscribers. Please bear with us.

—Fr.

July 09 (3years as President) thrown out of power by the people uprising on July 09, 2022.

Under their brutal rules, the Tamils have lost thousands of enormous lives and shed blood in this period of their history.

This big lapse and failure shown by the UN and its agencies including International Community encouraged even the smaller nations (like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Rwanda, Serbia, Sudan) and their leaders being encouraged to commit human rights violations and structural genocide.

As the affected victims of this genocide, the Tamils of Sri Lanka have seen, lived and suffered the agony and miseries which are still continuing, and this sad experience proves very clearly that there is little hope from the UN to prevent and stop the genocidal crimes. These lapses call for appropriate changes and restructure in the UN system to prevent any further genocide in the future. □□□

[Source:countercurrents.org]

INTERVIEW

China: "Slow Train to Democracy"?

Anne McLaren

[Over the last 50 years China has experienced tectonic shifts in its place in the world. Professorial Fellow of Chinese studies at the Asia Institute, Anne McLaren, was one of very few Westerners to study in China in the 1970s.

Over her distinguished career she has witnessed an impoverished nation with a significant democracy movement transform into a global power displaying increasing political repression. She spoke with Melbourne Asia Review's Managing Editor, Cathy Harper. Excerpts:]

Q: You were a PhD student in Beijing and Shanghai in 1978 and 1979 at a time when only a handful for foreign students were there, and months before American students were allowed to study in

China. Can you paint a picture of what China was like before diplomatic relations were established and the changes through the 1970s?

A: Australia established diplomatic

relations with China as one of the first acts of the new government led by former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in December 1972. From around 1975 it became possible for a very small number of Australian students to go to China to attend Chinese universities for one or two years. I was fortunate enough to be one of those able to go in 1978. The United States established diplomatic relations on 1 January 1979, although they had an office in Beijing a few years before that time.

In 1978, China was in a period of transition. Chairman Mao Zedong, the founder of socialist China, had died only two years earlier. His chosen heir, an obscure man called Hua Guofeng, was the new Party Chairman and he was vowing to follow whatever Mao had instructed during his life—so it didn't look like much would change.

Under Mao, China underwent 30 years of more or less continuous campaigns. The most ruinous were the Great Leap of the late 1950s, followed by three years of famine and the so-called Cultural Revolution that reached a heyday of violence and mayhem from 1965 to 1968, followed by military repression thereafter.

In 1978, the Chinese population that I saw was impoverished, malnourished and disease-ridden. Food was very tightly rationed (especially grain, rice, oil, meat and eggs). Vegetable and fruit supply tended to be limited in range and often in volume. Bolts of cloth (most people wore cotton cloth) was rationed, as were bicycles, sewing machines and much more. Many people did not have modern facilities of hot and cold water, proper sewerage or clean water to drink; Shanghai did not have heating in winter. Due to the crush of people in densely populated dwellings and the lack of basic sanitation, there were numerous health problems including tuberculosis and hepatitis.

We foreign students shared in some of the hardships. However, we were not subject to food rationing and did not go hungry, but many things were scarce and hard to buy (such as fruit). We were given vouchers to buy a bicycle. At Fudan University in Shanghai we did not have hot water in our building, only cold

water. The only drinking water came from a thermos that we filled ourselves. However, we were able to have a shower in the communal university shower block during a two-hour period most days of the week. There was very limited heating and we were often cold.

The other aspect was psychological—many of the people we met had very concrete grievances because of 30 years of stagnant economic growth and political campaigns that had disadvantaged their family. Young people in particular felt a sore lack of opportunity and many had a sense of hopelessness.

Q: Your recently-published memoir 'Slow Train to Democracy' is an account of a time in China when there was a democracy movement in Shanghai, when posters were published in prominent public places criticising the failed policies of the Chinese government, and Chinese students spoke much more freely about politics. What's your analysis of the impact and significance of this period in China?

A: The democracy movement in Shanghai and in Beijing in late 1978 was particularly interesting because it arose directly from grievances with the Chinese government and was not influenced by foreigners, it was an indigenuous movement. If we compare the poster protest movement of 1978 with the Tiananmen protests of 1989, the really big difference is that the latter drew from Western democratic symbols (the Statue of Liberty for example) and some of the student protestors drew from Western ideas. They were in fact inspired by Western notions of democracy (often heavily romanticised), but this was not the case

in 1978. At that time China had been sealed off from the outside world. The educated population did not learn English, they learnt Russian. Western literature, books of ideas, even Western music like Beethoven, were banned as bourgeois and not acceptable for much of this period.

The other interesting thing is that some of the Shanghai protestors strongly condemned Chairman Mao and implicitly the leadership circle of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Mao was blamed as the instigator of the Cultural Revolution that had ruined the lives of so many in the younger generation. They were deprived of an education as schools and universities largely shut down in the late 1960s. In the aftermath of the peak violent period, hundreds of thousands of young people were sent away from the cities to work in communes and state farms, often in desperately poor circumstances. Now they felt they had been robbed of a future.

What was really interesting about the protest movement of the late 1970s is that they called for a rejection of the agenda of the first 30 years of socialism in China. They were the first generation in China to directly condemn Chairman Mao, which they did in numerous wall posters and harangues in public sites. This was really unprecedented. Mao had died only two years before and you would have to say this was a really courageous thing to do. If you did this in China today it would not be tolerated. The other interesting thing was that this group sought to put into practice the rights theoretically guaranteed to citizens, such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to hold gath-

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erings, to establish societies, to hold rallies and to go on strike. All were united in calling for democracy, although it was unclear exactly what they meant by this. The most radical group I came across, “The People’s Democracy Forum”, told me they were interested in parliamentary democracy and hoped to establish their own party. Their leader was later arrested for “attempting to overthrow the communist party”. However, I think that for most of the protesters, democracy meant the right to hold the government to account, to voice their grievances, and have their concrete problems addressed. The more thoughtful of the protesters wanted the government to reflect on the systemic problems that had led to the disastrous campaigns of the Maoist era, particularly the cult of the Great Leader. The protest movement continued for several months but was ultimately repressed by the authorities and leading figures were arrested.

The protest movement of 1978 in Beijing and Shanghai has been covered up in China and the younger generation is not informed about these movements. Nor are they told much, if anything, about what happened in 1989, especially the brutal repression of the Beijing population by the Peoples Liberation Army in June 1989. But it is important to call these events to mind because they still frame the judgement of the CCP leadership in the present day.

In retrospect, we can say that the protest movement of the late 1970s laid the foundation for a series of political clashes between the people and the communist party. There have been numerous democracy movements in

China since 1978. In Shanghai there was another one in 1986 (which I also witnessed) then the convulsive events of 1989 at Tiananmen Square. In 2008 there was the constitutional movement led by Liu Xiaobo and artist, Ai Weiwei. Liu was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize but died in a Chinese jail in July 2017. Even this year there have been voices calling for political reform and voicing disgust with the new Chinese “emperor”. Tsinghua University professor Xu Zhangrun has written a series of essays that have been published in Chinese and in English. He has now lost his university post and even his university pension. The regime is vindictive to those who voice complaint. The 1970s movement is still relevant because the key demands of the people, that is, for political reform, protection from arbitrary justice, and greater democracy, have still not been met.

Q: The tolerance of critical views, even if brief, during your time in China contrasts starkly with the heavy crackdown on any political dissent currently being shown by the Chinese Communist Party. What are some of the factors that have contributed to this?

A: It is certainly interesting that today it is not possible to come forward in a public forum and condemn Mao Zedong or the communist party leadership in the same fashion as the 1978 protestors in Beijing and Shanghai. And, needless, to say, you can’t come forward and criticise the current Chinese leadership at all. This reminds us again that China has engaged in economic opening up and reform, but not in political reform. The young people of the late 1970s wanted both economic and political re-

form. Their hopes were not realised.

Concerning the factors contributing to the current repression in China, the CCP has never learned to trust its own people. This is why it has set up such a repressive regime under the leadership of Xi Jinping. This is strange in some ways. Many people are much better off economically and there is little organised resistance to CCP leadership. In fact, surveys point to a general acceptance of the rule of the CCP largely by default, as there appears to be no alternative. China is a big and complex country and many people still have ‘the emperor complex’, that is, you need a big and powerful leader to weld a country like this together or it will fall apart.

The CCP fears it may go the way of the former USSR if there is too much opening up and free-wheeling thinking. I think this is a big mistake. If you repress people too much there will be a push back sooner or later. This pushback may come when it is time for Xi Jinping to step down (or he may find himself pushed out of power by his numerous political enemies).

I think there are various reasons for the current situation of repression. One is that the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 led Xi to think that the West is weak. And after the GFC, even though we’ve recovered to a certain extent the US doesn’t really look like it can keep its role as the world’s leading economy for that much longer. So Xi cast aside the earlier policy of Deng Xiaoping that had been followed since 1978, which is basically ‘bide your time, lie low’ and he’s now promoting China’s so-called “peaceful rise”. From that we get the Belt and

Road Initiative, we get more diplomatic assertiveness, we get the takeover of the islands in the South China Sea, and so on. China will have grave problems in the future with climate change and food security, and its aging population. So from Xi's point of view, now is the time to move. However, the China of 2020 is not at all the impoverished nation of 1978. It's not just that

China is wealthier; the people are more highly educated and sophisticated. One could quote here the words of Li Fan, Director of the World and China Institute, and an early advocate of direct elections at village level in China. He wrote in July 8 this year: "The ideas of rule of law, civil society, freedom and democracy have been deeply planted in the hearts of the Chi-

nese people". Writing from outside China, scholar Ci Jiwei argues that the current past of Xi Jinping will ultimately lead to the downfall of the CCP and a new more democratic China. Both of them argue that civil society and self-organised groups have already taken hold in China and are pushing back against authoritarianism.

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[Courtesy: Melbourne Asia Review]

CORPORATE TYRANNY

Endless War and Culture of Mass Death

Chris Hedges

IT IS HARD TO BE SANGUINE about the future. The breakdown of the ecosystem is well documented. So is the refusal of the global ruling elite to pursue measures that might mitigate the devastation. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—Conquest, War, Famine and Death—gallop into the 21st century.

Those who rule, servants of corporations and the global billionaire class, accompany the suicidal folly by cementing into place corporate tyranny. The plan is not to reform. It is to perpetuate the corporate pillage. This pillage, more and more onerous for the global population, necessitates a new totalitarianism, one where the billionaire class lives in opulence, workers are serfs, rights such as privacy and due process are abolished, Big Brother watches people all the time, war is the chief business of the state, dissent is criminalised and those displaced by conflicts and climate breakdown are barred entry into the climate fortresses in the global north. Portions of the human species, the most privileged, will, in theory, hold out a little longer before they succumb to the great die off.

The persecuted and the aban-

doned, now in the tens of millions, know the future. For them, the future has already arrived. Julian Assange, the most important publisher of the present generation, whose extradition to the US was approved by the British Home Secretary Priti Patel, is an example of what will befall all publishers and journalists that expose the inner workings of power. His imprisonment for revealing the war crimes, mendacity, cynicism, and corruption of the ruling class, including the Democratic Party, heralds a new era. Investigations into the centres of power, the life blood of journalism, will be a criminal offence.

It does not matter that Assange, who suffered a stroke and is in poor physical and psychological health, is not a US citizen or that WikiLeaks is not a US-based publication. It does not matter that all of Assange's meetings with his attorneys were recorded by UC Global, the Spanish security firm at the Ecuadorian Embassy where Assange lived for seven years, and turned over to the US, obliterating attorney-client privilege. The campaign against Assange is a Dickensian farce, the persecution of an innocent and heroic man.

Workers, whether in the vast

sweatshops in China or the decayed ruins of the rust belt, struggle on subsistence wages without job protection or unions. They are cursed by trade deals, deindustrialisation, austerity, rising interest rates and rising prices. They, too, know the future.

The decision to raise interest rates by three-quarters of a percentage point, with new rate hikes on the way, will further depress wages, which have stagnated for decades, increase unemployment and personal debt and make food and other basic necessities more expensive. Raising interest rates usually induces a recession. But the oligarchs are more than willing to extract blood from the working class. Inflation reduces investment returns. It disrupts leveraged financial strategies.

Prices are not rising because of wages. They are rising because of supply shortages and price gouging by corporations and oil conglomerates. US corporations posted their biggest profit growth in decades by raising prices during the pandemic. Corporate pretax profits rose last year by 25 percent to \$2.81 trillion, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. That's the largest annual increase since 1976, according to the Federal Reserve. When taxes are included, last year's corporate profit rose to 37 percent, more than any other time since the Fed began tracking profits in 1948.

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monopolies would ease the strain of inflation and lower prices. Rationing would break inflation. So would a wage-price freeze. Nationalisation, reversing the capture of public utilities, the health care system, banking, and other services by corporations, would also blunt price rises. But the billionaire class is not about to impose measures that diminish their profits. They will keep their monopolies. They will keep their grip on what were once public assets.

Ukrainians, enduring a war of attrition with the infusion of tens of billions of dollars of weapons from the US and Europe, know the future. War is the chief business of the state. It enriches the arms industry. It expands the military budget. The US now spends \$130 million a day in military aid and assistance to Ukraine, part of the \$55 billion in aid promised by Washington.

The US, struggling with societal breakdown and an ailing economy, sees its military as the only mechanism left to destroy global competitors, especially Russia and China. Russia, hemmed in by an expanding NATO in Central and Eastern Europe, and China harassed by a succession of carrier groups in the South China Sea, which Washington has called a “national interest,” have been united as US adversaries. China sees the waterways of Asia and the Pacific as part of its sphere of influence, as Russia sees Ukraine and other neighbouring states. The aggressive military posturing of the US on the borders of China and Russia has provoked an unnecessary cold war, one many Washington policy makers nonchalantly expect may evolve into a hot war amongst nuclear armed nations that would potentially obliterate life on the planet.

There is an intensifying scramble for control, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s building of air bases from Japan to Australia along

the Asian littoral, giving it the ability to attack warships, including aircraft carriers, in the western Pacific. The refusal of the US to accommodate itself to a multi-polar world and to chase the chimera of unrivaled global hegemony has seen Russia and China solidify an alliance, an alliance cold warriors worked hard to prevent. The hostilities, a self-fulfilling prophecy by US warmongers, delights the Washington establishment whose goal is to perpetuate endless war.

Despotic governments need an enemy to justify the repression of dissidents, the reduction and cancellation of social programmes and the iron control of information. Wars justify the unjustifiable—black sites, kidnapping, torture, targeted assassinations, censorship, and arbitrary detention—off-the-book war crimes. War induces a state of perpetual paranoia and fear. It demands mass obedience.

“The war is not meant to be won, it is meant to be continuous,” George Orwell writes in 1984. “Hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance. This new version is the past and no different past can ever have existed. In principle the war effort is always planned to keep society on the brink of starvation. The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia, but to keep the very structure of society intact.”

The 140 million people across the globe suffering from acute hunger, a result of the pandemic, the climate crisis and the war in Ukraine, know the future, along with the families of the 15 million people who died from the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of whom with proper prevention and medical care could have been saved. The refugees fleeing failed states and climate disasters—there could be 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050 – in the global south know the future.

The Biden administration is defined by failed expectations, from its stymied Build Back Better Plan to its refusal to raise the minimum wage. It is running on fumes, using gimmicks, empty rhetoric, spectacle and fear to intimidate the electorate.

The descent is pathetic to watch, reminiscent of the moment Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu tried desperately to placate an unruly crowd from the Balcony of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania building by offering to raise pension and family allowance by \$2 a month. He and his wife were executed four days later. The discredited East German Communist Party, which like the Romanian revolution made similar empty gestures, promising to open its closed party headquarters to the public long after anyone cared.

The billionaire class, or at least many of them, would prefer to loot and pillage under the cover of the old political decorum and rhetoric. They like the fiction of paying homage to an emasculated democracy. It gives them the veneer of respectability. □□□

[Courtesy: Scheer Post. Scheer Post is edited by Robert Scheer]

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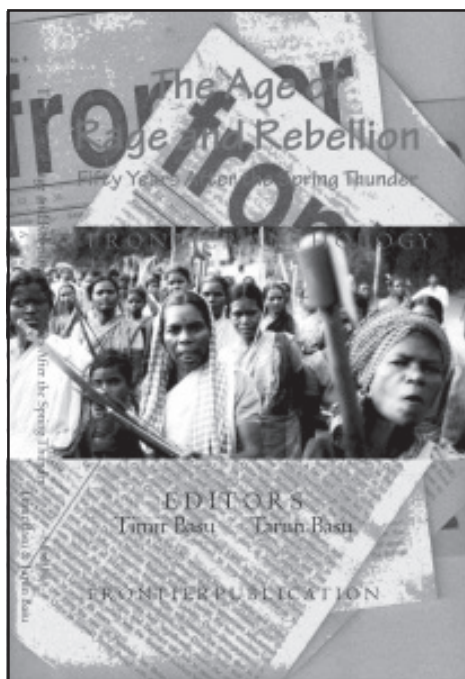
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