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The Tawang Trajectory

AFTER RAHUL GANDHI IT WAS THE TURN OF MALLIKARJUN Kharge, leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha and Congress President to grill Modi and his government on China's recent 'provocation' along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The alleged incursion bid on December 9 triggered several face-offs. As per an official statement issued by a spokesperson from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) the Chinese have been coming increasingly deeper into Indian territory for quite some time with the aim of staking claim to disputed areas. For India the ITBP is the first line of defence along the 3,488 km India-China border of which 1,346 km falls in the eastern sector where both sides are trying to define –or redefine–the contentious LAC according to their own perceptions. The very idea of creating ITBP was ostensibly to emphasise India's historic relations with Tibet, not China. So long as it was Tibet there was no border problem, it all started when Tibet became fully integrated with communist China under Mao. The latest clash between PLA and Indian troops at 17,000 feet in Yangtsee, 35 km northeast of Tawang in western Arunachal Pradesh, injured 15 to 20 Indian soldiers. The ground reality is that China has not budged an inch from its stated 1962 position on the Himalayan boundary. Unless it gets its objective achieved through diplomatic means or otherwise LAC will remain volatile and supercharged for years to come. The Gandhis are wondering why Modi was not criticised in the media for his silence on Tawang. In truth Rahul Gandhi these days looks so jingoistic that he says war with China is imminent. Whether his jingoism can fetch votes in the coming parliamentary polls in 2024 is anybody's guess. After the Galwan valley conflict of June 2020 that killed 20 Indian soldiers and at least 4 Chinese troopers the Tawang incident damaged India-China bilateral relations further at a time when military hysteria seems to have gripped Europe because of bloody war scenario in Ukraine. But the surrealistic aspect of 'Tawang game' is no less interesting: "The Chinese troops used loudspeakers to play songs of Mohammad Rafi and Lata Mangeskar to keep Indian soldiers in good humour and get them to leave Chinese posts".

It is no secret that both sides have speeded up defence build-ups in their respective areas of occupation. And in this rat race China is far ahead of India because they have been doing it since the fifties even when Indian authorities were not aware of China's logistics-related activities in the region. For India it is now too late to reclaim 'lost' territory though that

territory was never administered by Indian officials. Indian Security establishment dubbed the Tawang episode as the 'brazen provocation' along LAC. 'Provocation' it was but India's joint military drill with America near LAC might have tempted China to call spade a spade. This exercise close to LAC was deliberate, leading to escalation of tensions. The Government of India in the next five years will build a new highway in Arunachal Pradesh that will run near the India-Tibet-China-Myanmar border. At some locations the frontier highway will be as close as 20km from the international border. This is the longest national highway that the Centre has notified in one go in recent times.

India's Tibet policy is anything but diabolical since the beginning .It is more like America's Taiwan policy. Washington accepts one China policy

while continually arming Taiwan militarily and economically and treating it as an independent entity. Not that India disputes China's suzerainty over Tibet and yet the Dalai Lama government in exile is allowed to function from Shimla though they are not permitted to do anything anti-Chinese publicly. It is an attempt to legalise a legacy that doesn't stand the test of international law.

The Tibetan tragedy has no parallel in history. Today, for all practical purposes it is an internal colony of China. The red mandarins in Beijing have allegedly changed the demographic pattern of Tibet in such a way that Tibetans are a minority community people in their own homeland—Han domination is everywhere. Despite China's imperial control over Lasha, rather loose and limited control, the lamacacy of Tibet had all along maintained a kind

of semi-independent status through ages. That status ended when Mao's PLA entered Tibet and abolished the Lama authority. New Delhi wants a return to the pre-occupation state which is next to impossible unless Tibetans themselves rise in revolt.

For one thing communists who are so fond of quoting Lenin to substantiate Ukrainians' right to self-determination fail to see reason in Tibetans' demand of self-determination to the point of cessation. The so-called autonomy in the form of Tibetan autonomous region is sham. The international community that is so vocal about China's violation of human rights, has nothing to say about the plight of Tibetans and Tibetan refugees living in different countries, like Palestinians .But the Palestinians are lucky in the sense that they get international audience and recognition. □□□ 21-12-2022

COMMENT

The Merchants of Death Matter

THE BOSSES WANT WAR. BUT they preach peace. Their propagandists claim peace is their masters' dream. A few progressives here and there keep trust on the propaganda, and take such a posture that stands for the warmongering bosses.

But facts come out as like a cat's jump out of a sack.

The entire episode, told in short, is in the theatre of Ukraine, and the actors are the lords of war aspiring to retain their position of masters of the world. Actually, they are robbers always looking for something that can enrich them.

Douglas Macgregor, a retired US army colonel, claimed in a recent interview: Vladimir Zelensky, the Ukrainian President, was ready to accept Russia's conditions for peace. But Boris Johnson, the recently ousted prime minister of the UK,

prevented Zelensky from reaching a settlement with Russia.

Col Macgregor was interviewed by military historian Michael Vlahos in December 2022. It's available in YouTube. Macgregor said in the interview: We have evidence that towards the end of March, Mr Zelensky said, 'well, we could live with neutrality', and when that word reached Washington and London, people became incensed. Boris Johnson represented Washington's interests and said 'absolutely not, we will support you to the bitter end. You must stand your ground and fight for every inch of Ukraine.'

According to Macgregor, the UK was responsible for the abrupt shutting down of the peace talks between delegations of Russia and Ukraine that began in March in Istanbul. There was news of a po-

tential deal, under which Ukraine would have agreed to accept neutral status and renounce its plan to join the US-led military alliance NATO in exchange for Russia's withdrawal to pre-February battle line.

This is not the first time that such a revelation has surfaced. In September, veteran US diplomat Fiona Hill wrote: An "interim settlement" was agreed in Istanbul.

Earlier than Fiona's revelation, came another revelation from Ukraine. According to newspaper *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, Boris Johnson, during his Kiev visit in early-April, warned Ukraine officials: Even if Ukraine is ready to sign some agreements on guarantees with Putin, the West is not. In May, Ukrainian media linked the collapse of the Russia-Ukraine peace talks to Boris Johnson's pressure on Kiev.

Yet, confusion or naive's sense of neutrality may prevail among those progressives. But politicking of the masters of war doesn't depend

on the naives' imagination.

Numan Kurtulmus, deputy leader of Türkiye's ruling party recently told CNN Turk: This war is not between Russia and Ukraine. It is a war between Russia and the West. The US and some countries in Europe are prolonging the conflict by supporting Ukraine. The West is using Ukraine to wage a war against Russia. So it has gone to sabotage Turkish diplomacy to end the war.

According to Kurtulmus, Putin and Zelensky were going to sign a deal. But someone did not happen that to happen.

Referring to the negotiations, the former Turkish deputy prime minister told CNN Turk: There was progress on certain issues, and we were reach-

ing the final point, and suddenly we saw that the war accelerated. Someone is trying not to end the war. The US sees the prolongation of the war as its interest.

Now, after ignoring other facts coming out from European capitals over the last few months, it's choice of anyone: which statement, of the warmongers or the revelations, to consider while deciding party in the war to blame.

After so many revelations, is it still a mystery: Who the party that has provoked and organised this war? Isn't it the Empire-led war alliance NATO? Their preaching of peace is for clouding their war-business, a trade with death. □□□

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NOTE

Scientists against GM Crops

Bharat Dogra writes:

AS PEOPLE'S CONSCIOUSNESS about the hazards of GM crops grew, many GM products from the USA, the leader in promoting this technology, were refused by its trading partners. This alarmed leading GM companies, and gave them additional reason to push GM crops in important developing countries so that alternative sources for supply of non-GM products, or products not contaminated by GM crops cannot emerge.

People wonder why GM crops spread in the USA and from there to some other countries, even though several scientists (in addition to farmers and activists) opposed GMOs there as well. An idea of the various forces responsible for this can be had from a complaint the US Securities and Exchange Commission had filed in the US courts stating that a leading GMO company had bribed 140 officials during 1997-2000 to obtain environmental clearances for

its products. The company admitted this charge and paid a penalty of US \$ 1.5 million.

Jeffrey M Smith has explained how safety reports were prepared. The quotation below is from his book 'Genetic Roulette', a book which has been recommended and praised widely by many international experts. Smith writes, "The industry-funded studies have become notorious for using creative ways to avoid funding problems. They feed older animals instead of more sensitive young ones, keep sample sizes too low to achieve the statistical significance needed for proof in scientific studies, dilute the GM component of the feed, overcook samples, compare results with irrelevant controls, choose obsolete insensitive detection methods, limit the duration of feeding trials, and even ignore animal deaths and sickness."

The story of U K is no less shocking, adds Smith. In the mid-

1990s, the UK government commissioned scientists to develop an assessment protocol for GM crop approvals that would be used in the UK and eventually by the EU. In 1998, three years into the project, the scientists discovered that potatoes engineered to produce a supposed-to-be harmless insecticide caused extensive health damage to rats. The pro-GM government immediately cancelled the project, the lead scientist was fired and the research team dismantled.

Coming to the debate on Bt brinjal in India, Prof Pushpa Bhargava, India's top scientist on this subject who was nominated by the Supreme Court to help the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), pointed out that when Monsanto's dossier containing all the bio-safety tests that they had done was put in the public domain earlier this year (2009), there were serious criticisms of it by many scientists from various parts of the world.

The GEAC appointed a committee (EC-II) to prepare a report on such criticism. But Dr Bhargava and others were essentially given just one

day to review the 102 page report. Still on the basis of his vast experience he could quickly see that there were "internal inconsistencies in the report, inconsistencies between the report and the earlier data that had been put in public domain and outright scientific absurdities."

When Prof Bhargava recommended that adequate time should be allowed for a review meeting of eminent experts who had been involved in this issue, this proposal was completely ignored and the GEAC went ahead to give its hurried approval to Bt brinjal (although the government later imposed a moratorium on Bt brinjal following a process of extensive consultation).

A group of 17 distinguished scientists from the USA, Canada, Europe and New Zealand wrote to India's Prime Minister in 2009,

"India's regulators do not require independent bio-safety tests, but uncritically accept as evidence of safety, research conducted by the company who is applying for commercial clearance of the product. This raises serious questions regarding impartiality and conflicts of interest, which are clearly justified, based on published evidence of bias in the research conducted by industry that is contrary to accepted normal scientific conduct.

Despite all the high-power efforts to push GM crops in highly unethical ways and suppress opposition of scientists, the scientific opinion is still very much against GM crops. Dr Pushups M Bhargava, who was also the founder of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, prepared a review of the available scientific literature on this subject. Here he

stated, "There are over 500 research publications by scientists of indisputable integrity, who have no conflict of interest, that establish harmful effects of GM crops on human, animal and plant health, and on the environment and biodiversity. For example, a recent paper by Indian scientists showed that the Bt gene in both cotton and brinjal leads to inhibition of growth and development of the plant. On the other hand, virtually every paper supporting GM crops is by scientists who have a declared conflict of interest or whose credibility and integrity can be doubted." □□□

[The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include *Planet in Peril*, *Protecting Earth for Children* and *India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and healthy Food*.]

MUSTO'S COLUMN

Future Scenarios in Ukraine

Marcello Musto*

[The Russian invasion of Ukraine started in February 2022. With the aim of over-viewing what happened from the beginning of the war, to reflect on the role of NATO, and to consider possible future scenarios, Marcello Musto conducted a roundtable interview with three internationally well-known scholars from the Marxist tradition: Étienne Balibar, Anniversary Chair of Contemporary European Philosophy at Kingston University (London – UK), Silvia Federici, Emeritus Professor of Political Philosophy at Hofstra University (Hempstead – US) and Michael Löwy, Emeritus Research Director at the National Center for Scientific Research (Paris – France). The discussion summarised below is the result of numerous exchanges that have taken place over the past couple of weeks, through e-mails and phone calls.]

Marcello Musto (MM): The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought the brutality of war back to Europe and confronted the world with the dilemma of how to respond to the attack on Ukrainian sovereignty.

Michael Löwy (ML): As long as Putin wanted to protect the Russian-speaking minorities of the Donetsk region, there was a certain rationality to his policies. The same can be said for his opposition to NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe. However, this

brutal invasion of Ukraine, with its series of bombings of cities, with thousands of civilian victims, among them elderly people and children, has no justification.

Étienne Balibar (EB): The war developing before our eyes is "total". It is a war of destruction and terror waged by the army of a more powerful neighbouring country, whose government wants to enlist it in an imperialist adventure with no turning back. The urgent, immediate imperative is that the Ukrainians' resistance

should hold, and that to this end it should be and feel really supported by actions and not simple feelings. What actions? Here begins the tactical debate, the calculation of the efficacy and risks of the "defensive" and the "offensive". However, "Wait and see" is not an option.

MM: Alongside the justified Ukrainian resistance, there is the equally critical question of how Europe can avoid being seen as an actor in the war and contribute instead, as much as possible, to a diplomatic initiative to bring an end to the armed conflict. Hence the demand of a significant part of public opinion - despite the bellicose rhetoric of the last three months—that Europe should not take part in the war. The first point of this is to avoid even more suffering of the population. For the danger is that, already martyred by the Russian army, the nation will be turned into an armed camp that receives weap-

ons from NATO and wages a long war on behalf of those in Washington who hope for a permanent weakening of Russia and a greater economic and military dependence of Europe on the United States. If this were to happen, the conflict would go beyond the full and legitimate defence of Ukrainian sovereignty. Those who, from the beginning, denounced the dangerous spiral of war that would follow shipments of heavy weapons to Ukraine are certainly not unaware of the daily violence perpetrated there and do not wish to abandon its population to the military might of Russia. "Non-alignment" does not mean neutrality or equidistance, as various instrumental caricatures have suggested. It is not a question of abstract pacifism as a matter of principle, but rather of a concrete diplomatic alternative. This implies carefully weighing up any action or declaration according to whether it brings nearer the key objective in the present situation: that is, to open credible negotiations to restore peace.

Silvia Federici (SF): There is no dilemma. Russia's war on Ukraine must be condemned. Nothing can justify the destruction of towns, the killing of innocent people, the terror in which thousands are forced to live. Far more than sovereignty has been violated in this act of aggression. However, I agree, we must also condemn the many manoeuvres by which the USA and NATO have contributed to foment this war, and the decision of the USA and the EU to send arms to Ukraine, which will prolong the war indefinitely. Sending arms is particularly objectionable considering that Russia's invasion could have been stopped, had the USA given Russia a guarantee that NATO will not extend to its borders.

MM: Since the beginning of the war, one of the main points of discussion has been the type of aid to be provided for the Ukrainians to defend themselves against Russia's aggression, but without generating the conditions that would lead to even greater destruction in Ukraine and an expansion of the conflict internationally. Among the contentious issues in the past months have been Zelensky's request for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine, the level of economic sanctions to be imposed on Russia, and, more significantly, the appropriateness of sending arms to the Ukrainian government. What are, in your opinion, the decisions that have to be taken to ensure the smallest number of victims in Ukraine and to prevent further escalation?

ML: One could level many criticisms at present-day Ukraine: the lack of democracy, the oppression of the Russian-speaking minority, 'occidentalism', and many others. But one cannot deny the Ukrainian people their right to defend themselves against the Russian invasion of their territory in brutal and criminal contempt of the right of nations to self-determination.

EB: I would say that the Ukrainians' war against the Russian invasion is a "just war", in the strong sense of the term. I am well aware that this is a questionable category, and that its long history in the West has not been free from manipulation and hypocrisy, or disastrous illusions, but I see no other suitable term. I appropriate it, therefore, while specifying that a "just" war is one where it is not enough to recognise the legitimacy of those defending themselves against aggression—the criterion in international law—, but where it is necessary to make a

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commitment to their side. And that it is a war where even those, like me, for whom all war—or all war today, in the present state of the world—is unacceptable or disastrous, do not have the choice of remaining passive. For the consequence of that would be still worse. I therefore feel no enthusiasm, but I choose: against Putin.

MM: I understand the spirit of these observations, but I would concentrate more on the need to head off a general conflagration and therefore on the urgent need to reach a peace agreement. The longer this takes, the greater are the risks of a further expansion of the war. No one is thinking of looking away and ignoring what is happening in Ukraine. But we have to realise that when a nuclear power like Russia is involved, with no sizeable peace movement active there, it is illusory to think that the war against Putin can be “won”.

EB: I am terribly afraid of military—including nuclear—escalation. It is terrifying and visibly not ruled out. But pacifism is not an option. The immediate requirement is to help the Ukrainians to resist. Let us not start playing “non-intervention” again. The EU is anyway already involved in the war. Even if it is not sending troops, it is delivering weapons—and I think it is right to do so. That is a form of intervention.

MM: On 9 May the Biden administration approved the Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022: a package of more than 40 billion dollars in military and financial aid to Ukraine. It is a colossal sum, to which should be added the aid from various EU countries, and it seems designed to fund a protracted war. Biden himself strengthened this impression on 15 June, when he announced that the USA would be

sending military aid worth a further one billion dollars. The ever larger supplies of hardware from the US and NATO encourage Zelensky to keep putting off the much-needed talks with the Russian government. Moreover, given that weapons sent in many wars in the past have later been used by others for different ends, it seems reasonable to wonder whether these shipments will serve only to drive the Russian forces from Ukrainian territory.

SF: I think that the best move would be for the USA and EU to give Russia the guarantee that Ukraine will not join NATO. This was promised to Mikhail Gorbachev at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, though it was not put in writing. Unfortunately, there is no interest in seeking a solution. Many in the USA military and political power structure have been advocating and preparing for a confrontation with Russia for years. And the war is now conveniently used to justify a huge increase in petroleum extraction and brush aside all concern for global warming. Already Biden has gone back on his electoral campaign promise to stop drilling on native American lands. We are also witnessing a transfer of billions of dollars—which could be used to improve the lives of the thousands of Americans—to the USA military industrial complex, that is one of the main winners in this war. Peace will not come with an escalation in the fighting.

MM: Let us discuss the reactions of the left to the Russian invasion. Some organisations, though only a small minority, made a big political mistake in refusing to clearly condemn Russia’s “special military operation”—a mistake which, apart from anything else, will make any denunciations of

future acts of aggression by NATO, or others, appear less credible. It reflects an ideologically blinkered view that is unable to conceive of politics in anything but a one-dimensional manner, as if all geopolitical questions had to be evaluated solely in terms of attempting to weaken the USA. At the same time, all too many others on the left have yielded to the temptation to become, directly or indirectly, co-belligerents in this war. I was not surprised by the positions of the Socialist International, The Greens in Germany, or the few progressive representatives of the Democratic Party in the US—although sudden conversions to militarism by people who, just the day before, declared themselves to be pacifists always have a shrill, jarring quality. What I have in mind, rather, are many forces of the so-called “radical” left, who in these weeks have lost any distinct voice amid the pro-Zelensky chorus. I believe that, when they do not oppose war, progressive forces lose an essential part of their reason for existence and end up swallowing the ideology of the opposite camp.

ML: I would begin by recalling that one of Putin’s “justifications” of the invasion of Ukraine was an anti-communist argument. In a speech that he gave before the beginning of the war, on February 21, he stated that Ukraine “was entirely created by Bolshevik and Communist Russia” and that Lenin was the “author and architect” of this country. Putin declared his ambition to restore the pre-Bolshevik “historic Russia”—that is, Tsarist Russia—by annexing Ukraine.

EB: Putin has said that Lenin made a disastrous concession to Ukrainian nationalism, and that if he had not done so there would have

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been no independent Ukraine, since the Ukrainian lands would have been seen by those living there as part of Russia. That comes down to taking a position for Stalin, against Lenin. Of course, I think Lenin was right on the well-known “nationalities” question.

MM: Lenin wrote that, although the struggle of a nation to liberate itself from an imperialist power may be utilised by another imperialist power for its own interests, this should not change the policy of the left in favour of the right of nations to self-determination. Progressive forces have historically supported this principle, defending the right of individual states to establish their frontiers on the basis of the express will of the population.

ML: It is no coincidence that the great majority of the world’s “radical” left parties, including even those most nostalgic for Soviet socialism, such as communist parties of Greece and Chile, have condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Unfortunately, in Latin America, important forces of the left, and governments such as the Venezuelan, have taken the side of Putin, or have limited themselves to a sort of “neutral” stance—like Lula, the leader of the Worker’s Party in Brazil. The choice for the left is between the right of peoples to self-determination—as Lenin argued—and the right of empires to invade and attempt to annex other countries. You cannot have both, for these are irreconcilable options.

SF: In the US, spokespersons for social justice movements and feminist organisations like Code Pink have condemned Russia’s aggression. It has been noted, however, that the USA and NATO’s defence of democracy is quite selective, considering NATO’s and the USA record in Afghanistan, Yemen and Africom’s operations in the

Sahel. And the list could go on. The hypocrisy of the USA defence of democracy in Ukraine is also evident when we consider the silence of the USA government in the face of Israel’s brutal occupation of Palestine and constant destruction of Palestinian lives. It has also been noted that the USA has opened its doors to Ukrainians after closing them to immigrants from Latin America, though for many fleeing from their countries was also a matter of life and death. As for the left, it is certainly a shame that the institutional left—starting with Ocasio-Cortez—has supported sending arms to Ukraine. I also wish that the radical media were more inquisitive concerning what we are told at the institutional level. For instance, why is “Africa starving” because of the war in Ukraine? What international policies have made African countries dependent on Ukrainian grains? Why not mention the massive land grabs at the hands of international companies, which have led many to speak of a “new scramble for Africa”? I want to ask, once again: whose lives have value? And why only certain forms of death arouse indignation?

MM: Despite the increased support for NATO following the Russian invasion of Ukraine—clearly demonstrated by the formal request of Finland and Sweden to join this organisation—it is necessary to work harder to ensure that public opinion does not see the largest and most aggressive war machine in the world (NATO) as the solution to the problems of global security. In this story NATO has shown itself yet again to be a dangerous organisation, which, in its drive for expansion and Unipolar domination, serves to fuel tensions leading to war in the world. How-

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

—Fr.

ever, there is a paradox. Almost four months after the beginning of this war, we can certainly say that Putin not only got his military strategy wrong, but also ended up strengthening—even from the point of view of international consensus—the enemy whose sphere of influence he wanted to limit: NATO.

EB: I am among those who think that NATO should have disappeared at the end of the cold war, at the same time as the Warsaw Pact. However, NATO had not only external functions but also—perhaps mainly—the function of disciplining, not to say domesticating, the Western camp. All that is certainly linked to an imperialism: NATO is part of the instruments guaranteeing that Europe in the broad sense does not have genuine geopolitical autonomy vis-à-vis the American empire. It is one of the reasons why NATO was kept in being after the cold war. And, I agree, the consequences have been disastrous for the whole world. NATO consolidated several dictatorships in its own sphere of influence. It covered for—or tolerated—all sorts of wars, some of them hideously murderous and involving crimes against humanity. What is happening at the moment because of Russia has not changed my mind about NATO.

ML: NATO is an imperialist organisation, dominated by the USA and responsible for innumerable wars of aggression. The dismantling of this political-military monster, generated by the Cold War, is a fundamental requirement of de-

mocracy. Its weakening in recent years has led France's neoliberal president Macron to declare, in 2019, that the Alliance was "brain dead". Unfortunately, Russia's criminal invasion of Ukraine has resuscitated NATO. Several neutral countries—like Sweden and Finland—have now decided to join it. US-troops are stationed in Europe in great numbers. Germany, which two years ago refused to enlarge its military budget despite Trump's brutal pressure, has recently decided to invest 100 billion euros in rearmament. Putin has saved NATO from its slow decline, perhaps disappearance.

SF: It is worrisome that Russia's war on Ukraine has produced a great amnesia about NATO's expansionism, and its support of the EU and USA imperialist policy. It is time to re-read Daniel Ganser's NATO's Secret Armies and refresh our memory about NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, its role in Iraq, its lead in the bombing and disintegration of Libya—to mention just a few of its more recent operations. Examples of NATO's total and constitutional disregard for the democracy that now it pretends to defend are too many to count. I do not believe that NATO was moribund before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Quite the contrary. Its march through Eastern Europe and its presence in Africa demonstrates the opposite.

MM: This amnesia seems to have affected many forces of the left in government. Overturning its historical principles, the parliamentary majority of the Left Alliance in Finland recently voted in favour of joining NATO. In Spain, much of Unidas Podemos joined the

chorus of the entire parliamentary spectrum in favour of sending weapons to the Ukrainian army and supported the huge rise in military spending that will accompany the NATO summit to be held in Madrid on 29-30 June. If a party does not have the courage to speak out loud against such policies, it makes its own contribution to the expansion of US militarism in Europe. Such subaltern political conduct has punished leftist parties many times in the past, including at the polls, as soon as the occasion has arisen.

EB: The best would be for Europe to be strong enough to protect its own territory, and for there to be an effective system of international security—that is, for the UN to be democratically overhauled and freed from the right of veto of the permanent members of the Security Council. But the more NATO rises as a security system, the more the UN declines. In Kosovo, Libya and, above all in 2013, in Iraq, the aim of the United States and NATO in its wake was to degrade the UN capacities for mediation, regulation and international justice.

MM: The story we have heard from the media has been completely different, with NATO portrayed as the only salvation from violence and political instability. And, on another note, Russophobia has spread all over Europe, with Russian citizens experiencing hostility and discrimination.

EB: A major danger—perhaps the main one with regard to what Clausewitz called the "moral factor" in war—lies in the temptation to mobilise public opinion, which rightly sympathises with the Ukrainians, behind a kind of Russophobia. Media have been backing this up with half-truths about Russian and Soviet history,

and intentionally or unintentionally confusing the feelings of the Russian people with the ideology of the present oligarchic regime. It is one thing to call for sanctions or boycotts against artists, and cultural or academic institutions, whose links with the regime and its leaders have been proven. But to stigmatise Russian culture by itself is an aberration, if it is true that one of the few chances to escape disaster rest on Russian public opinion itself.

MM: A number of the sanctions against individuals have been particularly harsh and counterproductive. Some people who have never expressed any support for the policies of the Russian government are being targeted simply because they were born in Russia, whatever their actual opinion about the war. Such measures provide further fuel for Putin's nationalist propaganda and may impel Russian citizens to line up behind their government.

EB: It is frankly obscene to demand of citizens of a police dictatorship like Putin's Russia that they "take a position" if they want to continue being welcome in our "democracies".

ML: I agree. Russophobia needs to be rejected. It is a deeply reactionary ideology, like any form of chauvinistic nationalism. I would add that it is important for the internationalist left, that supports the resistance of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion, to also show its solidarity with the many Russian—individuals, newspapers, or organisations—that have opposed Putin's criminal war in Ukraine. This is the case of various Russian political groups and parties, claiming to be leftist, which have recently published a declaration denouncing the war of aggression against Ukraine.

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MM: Let us end on what you think the course of the war will be and what are the possible future scenarios.

EB: One can only be dreadfully pessimistic about the developments to come. I am myself and I believe that the chances of avoiding disaster are very remote. There are at least three reasons for this. First, escalation is probable, especially if the resistance to the invasion manages to keep going; and it cannot stop at “conventional” weapons—whose boundary with “weapons of mass destruction” has become very hazy. Second, if the war ends in a “result”, it will be disastrous in every eventuality. Of course, it will be disastrous if Putin achieves his aims by crushing the Ukrainian people and through the encouragement this gives for similar enterprises; or also if he is forced to halt and pull back, with a return to bloc politics in which the world will then become frozen. Either of these outcomes will bring a flare-up of nationalism and hatred that will last a long time. Third, the war, and its sequels, hold back the mobilisation of the planet against climate catastrophe—in fact, they help to precipitate it, and too much time has already been wasted.

ML: I share these preoccupations, especially concerning the delay in the fight against climate change, which is now totally marginalised by the arms race of all the countries concerned by the war.

SF: I too am pessimistic. The USA and other NATO countries have no intention of assuring Russia that NATO will not extend its reach to the borders of Russia. Therefore, the war will continue with disastrous consequences for Ukraine, Russia and beyond. We will see in coming months how other European countries will be

affected. I cannot imagine future scenarios other than the extension of the state of permanent warfare that already is a reality in so many parts of the world and, once more, the diversion of resources much needed to support social reproduction towards destructive ends. It hurts me that we do not have a massive feminist movement going to the streets, going on strike, determined to put an end to all wars.

MM: I too sense that the war will not stop soon. An “imperfect” but immediate peace would certainly be preferable to the prolonging of hostilities, but too many forces in the field are working for a different outcome. Whenever a head of state pronounces that “we will support Ukraine until it is victorious”, the prospect of negotiations recedes further into the distance. Yet I think it is more likely that we are heading for an indefinite continuation of the war, with Russian troops confronting a Ukrainian army resupplied and indirectly supported by NATO. The Left should strenuously fight for a diplomatic solution and against increases in military spending, the cost of which will fall on the world of labour and lead to a further economic and social crisis. If this is what is going to happen, the parties that will gain are those on the far right that nowadays are putting their stamp on the European political debate in an ever more aggressive and reactionary manner.

EB: To put forward positive perspectives, our goal would have to be a recomposition of Europe, in the interests of the Russians and the Ukrainians and in our own, in such a way that the question of nations and nationalities was completely rethought. An even more ambitious objective would be to invent and develop a multilingual, multicul-

tural Greater Europe open to the world—instead of making militarisation of the European Union, inevitable though it may seem in the short term, the meaning of our future. The aim would be to avoid the “clash of civilisations” of which we would otherwise be the epicentre.

ML: To propose a more ambitious objective, in positive terms, I would say that we should imagine another Europe and another Russia, rid of their capitalist parasitic oligarchies. Jaurès’ maxim “Capitalism carries war like the cloud carries the storm” is more relevant than ever. Only in another Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals—post-capitalist, social and ecological—can peace and justice be assured. Is this a possible scenario? It depends on each of us.□

[*Marcello Musto is Professor of Sociology at York University (Toronto–Canada). His writings—available at www.marcellomusto.org—have been translated worldwide in twenty-five languages. His most recent journal article, published by *Critical Sociology*, is entitled “War and the Left: Considerations on a Chequered History”.]

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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Tradition of Dissent in Pre-Modern India

Amitava Bhattacharyya

THE *BOOK UNDER REVIEW is a posthumous publication. From a note in the book by one of his collaborators it has been learned that Professor Ramkrishna Bhattacharya (RKB) had almost prepared the manuscript of this book before his death except a final review. The manuscript was organised on the basis of the many articles, written by RKB on that subject at different times and published mostly in international journals, after making many additions and alterations to them. This book is the diplomatic edition of that manuscript. In the preface to this book RKB states:

“This is, to the best of my knowledge, the first study of the tradition of dissent in pre-modern India highlighting the doctrine of Own Being and similar such ideas.”

This book is a very important supplement to his intense research and game-changing conclusions drawn from it, on materialism in ancient India in general and on the Carvaka/Lokayata in particular. Same research and conclusions have already been incorporated in three of his books (Studies on Carvaka/Lokayata, More Studies on the Carvaka/Lokayata, and Charvakacharcha (in Bangla)—it is the fourth one.

Through his research RKB, with ample evidence, utterly rejected the prevailing notion that India has always been a country of religion, idealism, and mysticism in every epoch of history and ideas of atheism, materialism, heresy etc. were imported here from foreign-land. In accordance with the law of dialectics a stream of atheism, materialism, heresy, though thin, had rolled

***SVABHAVA AND OTHER
VARIETIES OF
DISSENT IN INDIA**

By Ramkrishna Bhattacharya
Kolkata : Counter Era
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along from ancient ages in this country. His research is also very useful in unlearning some serious “misconceptions” predominant even in the materialist circle. These “misconceptions” are purely ahistorical and can mislead the study of history of Indian materialism and that can potentially hinder the spread of materialism at present. Here are some major contributions of RKB in the study of ancient Indian materialism in a nutshell apart from finding out new sources in ancient literature mentioning Carvaka sutra-s and reconstructing Carvaka aphorisms from the works of Carvaka’s opponents as all their sutra-works and commentaries are lost.

RKB proved that the Carvaka/Lokayata philosophy of India was neither popular nor royal (it is very interesting to note that some modern scholars in their studies firmly assert that the Carvaka/Lokayata philosophy was a popular philosophy in one breath and enthusiastically show that it was also a royal one in another breath. Their logic in connecting these two diametrically opposite views is not much tenable. RKB resolves this ambiguity.

RKB establishes that most of the popular sayings (lokagatha or abhanaka) stated in the “Sarva Darshana Samgraha” by Sayana-Madhava, which are considered as Carvaka sayings by some modern scholars and advance their studies accordingly, are not pure Carvaka

sayings; rather those are views of Buddhists and Jains.

RKB also rejects the idea of considering the term lokayata indiscriminately as identical to materialism mentioned in ancient Indian literature. He shows that before the Sixth or Seventh century the term was used to refer to mean the adherents of science of disputation (who argued only for the sake of the argument), and not the materialists. He subsequently turns down the notion, very much preferred by some early scholars, that the mention of the term lokayata in the “Mahabharata”, “Arthashastra” of Kautilya, and “Kamasutra” of Vatsyayana stands for materialism.

Opponents of materialism in ancient and medieval India branded Carvaka philosophy as the preacher of hedonism, ‘eat, drink and go merry’. RKB provides sufficient evidence to prove that this branding is false and purposeful and it was done by distorting the aphorisms of Carvaka philosophy. Another false allegation was that Carvakas only accepted perception (pratyaksha) as a valid means of knowledge (pramana). It was a very subtle tactic employed by the opponents to show that even the animals could infer but Carvakas not. RKB states that Carvakas, too, did consider inference (anumana) as a valid means of knowledge but in a limited sense. Only perception-based inference was accepted by them and not the inference drawn from verbal testimony (apta) or etc.

RKB also states that Carvaka/Lokayata philosophy had very little or no relationship with the ‘Little’ religious and philosophical traditions of India. They might be dissents to the Great Tradition in respect of abidance of the Veda but not all of their views carried any materialist trait. From this point of departure the book under discussion begins.

What is Svabhava? As to RKB:

“Among other things, it refers to ‘Own Being’ or distinct property of all objects, both organic and inorganic. The doctrine of svabhava denies the existence of any Creator; the variety of the existing things is assigned to and explained by the very nature of the objects themselves. As a floating verse says, ‘Who colours wonderfully the peacocks, or who makes the cuckoo coo so well? There is in respect of these (things) no cause other than nature’.” (p. 18)

The first use of the term svabhava can be found in the “Svetasvatara Upanishad” 1.1-2 (4th century BC). A translation of that verse runs as follows:

“What is the cause of brahman? Why were we born? By what do we live? On what are we established? Governed by whom, O you who know brahman, do we live in pleasure and in pain, each in our respective situation? (1) Should we regard it as time, as inherent nature, as necessity, as chance, as the elements, as the source of birth, or as the Person? Or is it a combination of these? But that can't be, because there is the self (atman). Even the self is not in control, because it is itself subject to pleasure and pain.” (Olivelle, Patrick (trans.). “The Early Upanisads”. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 415)

Here ‘time’ refers to kalavada, ‘necessity’ to destiny or niyatavada, ‘chance’ to accidentalism or yadricchavada, ‘Person’ for God or Primeval Man or ‘ishvaravada’, ‘inherent nature’ to ‘Own Being’ or svabhavavada. The word ‘elements’ here stands for early materialists or pre-Carvaka materialists of India, bhutavadins. Two points here are to be noted, first is that, doctrine of “Own Being” or svabhava did not accept God as the creator of the

world. The second point is very important, svabhavavada and materialism were competing rivals for propagating the First Cause of the world in fourth century BC, though a hint for one or many combination/s of those doctrines is left in the verses.

RKB states that before the inception of full-fledged six systems of Veda-abiding philosophies and six systems of anti-Vedic philosophies (three of Buddhists, two of Jains and Carvaka/Lokayata), ideas of time, own being, destiny and accident were prevalent in India. They were not philosophical school as to the proper sense of the term but were the dissenters to the Veda-s. Those dissent doctrines withered away in the course of time but “they were not altogether lost; at least some of them often appear and reappear side by side with the systematised philosophical schools. They surface and re-surface in Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit works long after their original followers had disappeared from the face of the earth” (p.16)

And from here began all possible ambiguities in interpreting the idea of ‘Own Being’ (svabhava) in the Brahminical, Buddhist and Jain schools of philosophy. Some opined that adherents of svabhava had believed in causality, RKB names them as svabhava-as-causality while some said that svabhavavadins were accidentalists (svabhava-as-accident); they had not believed in any cause of creation and natural phenomenon of the world and also even had rejected svabhava itself as the cause. Some propagated that svabhava along with accident and time made a combination while some equated svabhava with materialism and even said materialism in India originated from the doctrine of svabhava.

RKB deals with various views on svabhava in different philosophical schools at length in this book. In case of Brahminical school the phrase,

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“svabhava? bhutacintaka?” mentioned twice in the “Mahabharata” gets special attention. Citing the mention of term bhuta (elements) some ancient and modern scholars like E W Hopkins, E H Johnston and Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya firmly assert that svabhava stands for materialism here. But RKB does not agree with them, he shows that the phrase “svabhava? bhutacintaka?”, in the given context, did not refer to materialism but to accidentalism and inactivism (akriyavada, does not believe in human endeavour); they might have thought in terms of elements but that is no reason to brand them as materialists. He discusses categorically the mention of svabhava and interpretations of the word in the works of different Brahminical sects like Nyaya, Samkhya, Vedanta and medical tradition.

Views of the Jain School on svabhava is discussed in this book with special emphasis on the syncretic view of the Jain philosopher Haribhadra. All Jain works are not unanimous in their interpretations. The views of the Buddhist School also disagreed with each other in this regard; RKB discusses much on Ashaghosa’s work among them.

Modern scholarship also contains

diametrically opposite views in interpreting the doctrine of 'Own Being' (svabhava). RKB provides a precious discussion on the relationship between the doctrine of svabhava and materialism. He deals with views of modern scholars one by one on the same:

—Louis de la Vallée Poussin equates svabhava with materialism and opines that Indian materialism did not accept any causality.

—Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz equate svabhava with materialism and opine "Lokayata causality operates with material causes only, and efficient causes are not recognised."

—Brajendranath Seal states that svabhava (natural law) is a cruder school of Carvaka philosophy. The finer one did not believe in any means of knowledge.

—Gopinath Kaviraj equates svabhava with materialism, moreover, "he divides svabhavavada into two varieties: extremist and moderate".

—E W Johnston and T W Rhys Davids equate svabhava with Buddhist idea of the "Law of the Universal Causation".

—M Hiriyanna opines that Carvaka philosophy descended from svabhava.

—A L Basham defines svabhava as a sub-sect of Ajivikas.

—Dale Ripe "accepted Basham's views in toto".

—V M Bedekar calls svabhava as 'crass materialism'.

—V M Kulkarni connects svabhava with Carvaka philosophy. One of the reasons of his conclusions is tradition.

—A K Warder rehashes the view of Johnston.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya firmly asserts that the doctrine of svabhava is a materialist doctrine since its inception and endorses the theory of tradition of Kulkarni.

But the author does not accept any of the views mentioned above. After a detailed discussion on the views of ancient and modern scholars RKB concludes:

"Svabhava was one of the oldest concepts formulated somewhat vaguely before or during the sixth century BCE which finds mention in SveUp 1.2. It continued to be invoked, along with other concepts such as time, destiny, chance, karman, etc, as one of the many claimants for the role of the first cause. In the course of time, definitely before the first century, svabhava, instead of, or rather in addition to, signifying causality, became synonymous with chance or accident and was derided as an in-activist approach to life" (p. 75).

As to the relationship between svabhava and materialism RKB opines:

"Own Being was originally not a school of thought, but an approach to nature and had nothing to do with materialism. How-

ever, at some point of time, unfortunately we don't know exactly when, it became a part of the Carvaka/Lokayata, not, however, in the sense of accident, but of causality" (p. 16).

Only a great stretch of imagination can conclude that Carvaka/Lokyata philosophy descended from svabhava, historical evidence does not endorse this conclusion.

The book contains a compilation of 26 verses relating to svabhavavada collected from different ancient Indian literary sources (chapter two). The author claims,

"[T]hat the collection of verses that speak of 'Own Being' is, so far my knowledge goes, the first of its kind" (p. 16).

Chapter Three of this book is also very interesting. RKB provides here a list of twenty seven different views along with their sources prevalent in ancient India as the one and only First Cause of the world. He rightly defines them as "Rivals of God". The views and differences of Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya and Joseph Needham on svabhava are also elaborately discussed in the book. The last three chapters are devoted to the study of materialism as found in the thought of Uddalaka Aru?i in "Chandogya Upanishad" and to the astika-nastika problem. The long bibliography of the book is a treasure to the future researchers of Indian philosophy.

□□□

A TALE OF TWO ECONOMIES

Colonising the Unorganised Sector

Arun Kumar

THE CORPORATE SECTOR is doing well, as indicated by the stock market which reflects its health. But the corporates represent only a few thousand businesses out of the crores operating in

the country. Ninety-nine percent of the businesses are in the unorganised sector and reports suggest that they are declining.

The Reserve Bank of India data on around 2,700 non-government,

non-financial companies released in August 2022 shows that the sales of these companies surged 41% and net profits increased by 24% over the last year. Even if these figures are deflated by the wholesale price index (WPI) which has been rising at above 10% during this period, the corporate sector surge far exceeds the growth of the economy. If one component of the economy is rising

so rapidly, the other part, the non-corporate sector in industry, must be shrinking. The difficulty with the official data is that it does not independently capture the decline of the unorganised sector (it is proxied by the growing organised sector). If the true rate of growth could be obtained, the disjuncture between the official growth rate and the rise in the stock market would be even greater.

The government is arguing that tax collections are robust, thereby indicating that the economy is doing well. Indeed tax revenue has grown 52.3% according to the latest data. But this does not reflect the unorganised sector where most incomes are below the taxable limits and which is exempt from the Goods and Services Tax. No wonder, the survey of incomes by PRICE released at the start of this year shows the growing divide between the top 20% and the bottom 60% in the income ladder.

The divergence between the two sectors is visible. The head of the largest luggage manufacturer recently said that their growth is surging because the smaller units are not doing well. Same was said by a top manufacturer of leather goods and earlier by the chairperson of the pressure cooker industry. The annual report of Hindustan Unilever also mentioned that its market share has increased. The rapid expansion of e-commerce is at the expense of the neighbourhood retail stores. Such evidence is available all around.

It is not being argued that the entire unorganised sector is declining. Some units are suppliers to the small and medium sector units which in turn are suppliers to the corporate sector. The growth of the corporate sector should benefit these units except where their payments are delayed by the larger units.

The government has been push-

ing for digitisation and formalisation of the economy on the plea that this will curb tax evasion and as more taxes are collected, better services can be provided to the marginalised. But the unorganised sector cannot cope with these changes which increase their costs, compared to the organised sector which is already largely digitised and formalised. No wonder, demand has been shifting from the unorganised and small units to the larger ones, spurring their rapid growth. This is also true of those units that are suppliers to the larger ones.

The GST was designed to formalise the economy. But that does not mean the promotion of the small and unorganised sector; instead, it has led to their displacement by the organised sector. The market of the former is being captured by the latter. This is the colonisation of the unorganised sector by the organised sector.

Colonial powers had conquered other lands to promote their own prosperity. They looted the colonised and framed the rules of economic gains such that their produce could out-compete the produce of the colonised. While loot was often for a limited time, capturing the markets gave their economy a long-term advantage over the economy of the colonised.

The surplus from the colonised countries was drained out, which set back their development. Simultaneously, it enabled the economy of the colonisers to develop faster and helped them in developing their technology, thereby widening the gap between them and the colonised. In self-justification, the colonisers claimed to be 'civilising the barbarians'. The benefits of colonisation were listed as the setting up of institutions, universities, railways, rule of law, etc.. The fault for the poor living conditions of the colonised was

blamed on their own backwardness.

These arguments have a parallel in the claims of the government and the Indian organised sector. Formalisation of the economy is stated to be for the wider good, including the unorganised sector. It is argued that benefits of development (of the organised sector) will trickle down to the marginalised. The extraction of the surplus from agriculture, via terms of trade, both for industrialisation and the lifestyle of urban elites, is also said to be for the benefit of all, even though it pauperises most agriculturists and the rural areas.

The rules of economic gains enable the organised sector to corner most of the gains of development. The marginalised sections are expected to be satisfied with their meagre material gains. Often it is implied that the marginalised should be grateful for whatever little they have got. Rising disparities are justified on grounds of merit while glossing over the impact of skewed social development at the expense of the marginalised sections. Did the colonisers' not have similar arguments? Globalisation which benefits the organised sector is also held out as progress for the country, while ignoring its marginalising impact.

The GST, digitisation and formalisation are setting the rules of the gains in favour of the organised sector at the expense of the unorganised sector. As the production of the latter declines, the produce of the organised sector finds

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new markets for its expansion. The growth of the organised sector in a stagnant economy points to that.

Not only is the unorganised sector ignored in data, policies also ignore it even though it employs 94% of the workers and produces 45% of the output. This is the invisibilisation of this sector and quietly making its market available to the organised sector. But, the skewed development is reducing the

size of potential future markets and that will slow down growth of the economy, as happened prior to the pandemic. This would lead to further clamour for concessions to support organised sector exports. That will further narrow the home markets, in a Catch 22 situation.

The labour code being introduced is another concession to businesses which will further marginalise the already marginalised workers.

In brief, neither the colonisers earlier nor the policy makers promoting the organised sector now are concerned about social justice. It is myopic of the organised sector that they are not only unconcerned at the decline of the unorganised sector but seem to be celebrating it. □□□ [Arun Kumar retired as professor of economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and is the author of 'Indian Economy's Greatest Crisis: Impact of the Coronavirus and the Road Ahead', 2020. Courtesy: The Wire.]

THE DEFEAT OF THE CONSTITUTION

A Tragedy for the Chilean Left

Richard Seymour

THE RESOUNDING DEFEAT of the campaign to introduce a new, post-Pinochet constitution in Chile is a tragedy for the Left.

The draft constitution would have redefined the Chilean state as "a social and democratic state of law" that is "plurinational, intercultural, regional, and ecological. It is constituted as a solidary republic." That would have provided the basis for an expansive welfare state, ecological rights, sexual rights and indigenous rights, repudiating decades of constitutional neoliberalism.

The polls suggested the rejectionists would win, but the margin, with 62% voting against the constitution, was bigger than anticipated. Most difficult to swallow will be that the rejection was strongest among lower income and indigenous communities. There was more support for the constitution in the "upper class" (who still rejected it by about 60.5%) than among any other demographic. The margin of rejection reached 45% in the communes with the highest proportion of indigenous voters.

There will be better analyses coming, and there is a lot that appears obscure for the moment. For now, these are the main factors worth drawing attention to and learning from:

First, there is a pattern of political realignment and reconsolidation of the old oligarchy in which the far-right Kast's ascendancy has been crucial. The Left had benefited from the discombobulation of the elites during Piñera's reign, but Kast was able to channel a backlash against the movements on nationalist, racist and law-and-order grounds. On that basis, he won the first round of the presidential election before losing to Boric. Although Kast was careful not to publicise his support for rejection, realising that this would polarise the issue in a way that would potentially strengthen the Left, his Republican Party played a key role in political mobilising, fund-raising and disinformation.

A crucial moment in the rejectionist campaign was the claim, made on 31st March on the front page of *Las Últimas Noticias* by convention delegate and conservative economist Bernardo Fontaine, that the draft constitution would expropriate workers' pension funds. This, as far as I can tell, was straightforward disinformation. But it was skilfully exploited, and it turned the tide in favour of rejection. There began a months-long campaign using both national media and social media

accounts – with \$116.7m spent on Facebook and Instagram pages over two months – suggesting that the convention was going to appropriate privately owned homes, and put the largely privatised healthcare system at risk. This fed into narratives that the Convention had abandoned "what we asked for". Conservative fear of pension reforms and a national healthcare system formed the basis of a lot of opposition to the draft constitution. And 'approve' never regained its lead.

Second, there is the role of the vocal and disproportionately publicised "centre-left for rejection" platform, representing elements of the old *concertación*. On the basis of a cynical slogan, "Rechazo con amor" (I reject with love), they embraced and fought for a 'Plan B' scenario enjoined by the conservative parties such as the UDI (Independent Democratic Union, the Pinochetist right) and RN (National Renewal, part of the Piñera coalition). In 'Plan B', if the draft constitution was rejected, parliamentary forces would negotiate a more moderate constitutional reform. The Right would have a stronger hand, and its starting point in negotiations would be continuity with the 1980 Pinochetist constitution. That would severely limit the social and democratic rights that could be obtained. The centre-left rejectionists were able to get their spokes-people on national media in a manner far

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outweighing their depth of social or even electoral support. This made rejection a 'safer' option for voters who would otherwise reject the Right.

Third, there is the role of the Boric government, which may have become an impediment to the campaign's success. Boric formally took office in March, with a net approval rating of over 20%. Within weeks it had fallen to -20%. Why? Boric was in a weak position from the beginning. He had won, in part, by tempering his demands and reaching out to the centre. His party, Convergencia Social, has no seats in the Senate and has only ten in the lower house. He was dependent on less radical coalition allies. He was thus unable to do much about soaring inflation and sluggish growth. The Constitutional Convention was working until the beginning of July, meaning campaigning was paused until there was a document to campaign for. And since support for the constitution became strongly correlated with support for the government, this strengthened the hand of the centre-left-to-far-right coalition.

By mid-July, the Boric administration was deeply worried about the polling trends, and began to tout its own 'Plan B'. In the event of rejection, a new convention should be elected to modify or reformed the proposed constitution. One result of this was that, when it came to the vote, there were in practice four different options: "approve, approve to reform, reject and reject to renew. Thus, in one of the latest public surveys before the plebiscite, carried out by Cadem, 17% of respondents declared themselves in favour of rejecting, 35% of rejecting to renew, 32% of approving to reform and only 12% of approving and applying the new text as it came out of the Convention". A strong lead for approve had turned into a confused smorgasbord, in which just over ten percent of voters would declare themselves unambiguously for the constitution.

Finally, there is some criticism of the Constitutional Convention itself. According to the critique offered by Ukamau, the urban social movement fighting for decent housing, the Convention lost touch with the core con-

cerns of the 2019 social uprising, focusing more on "international law" and "specific transversalised claims" than the concerns of "large working majorities". The Convention, on this account, became insular, got ahead of themselves, and allowed the centre and right to take the initiative.

This is a decisive moment in a long cycle of social struggles, constitutional and electoral campaigns in which the Chilean Left has made significant gains, but has now experienced a major setback. This defeat may not kill off a new constitution, but anything that emerges now will be far weaker and more safeguarded against democratic and social gains by the popular majority. The Boric government, elected last November after defeating the far-right Kast campaign by a surprisingly large margin, is now much weaker.

In Chile, where the 1980 constitution was nothing less than a neoliberal iron cage, it could not be more obvious. So, this result is a tragedy, for everyone who wants a socialist way out of the crisis.

□□□

LETTERS

Behind Bars

Iran is now the world's third-largest jailer of journalists according to new data from NGO Reporters without Borders (RSF). Since the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody in mid-September that triggered nationwide protests, 31 journalists have been imprisoned, adding to the 14 already detained. But violence against journalists is also on the rise globally.

South America has been a hot spot for killings this year, while China and Myanmar lead the charge for detentions. India is not far behind. Western governments must call out attacks on the press everywhere. But they raise [the issue] when it's conve-

nient for them. They are willing to raise it with certain places and not with others. The killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi is a case in point. A free press means better-informed people and a fairer society. The democratic world needs to do everything it can to make it a priority.

The Monocle Minute

EWS Reservation

I feel this provision is good and beneficial to the poor sections among the forward castes/communities. However, as I repeatedly made clear, the reservations system itself should be gradually eliminated. I would rather prefer 20% reservation on EWS basis to one and all—without excluding any caste/community from

this ambit—and only up to 30% reservations to other castes/communities on SC, ST or OBC bases. This naturally means the reduction of existing reservation quotas being given to SC/ST/OBC accordingly. And after 20-30 years no reservations on the basis of caste/community should remain at all. Only about 20% of seats and posts be allotted for any reservations whatsoever—primarily on EWS and physically, mentally etc. disabled or aged categories basis.

**IM Sharma, Advocate,
Editor, Law Animated World**

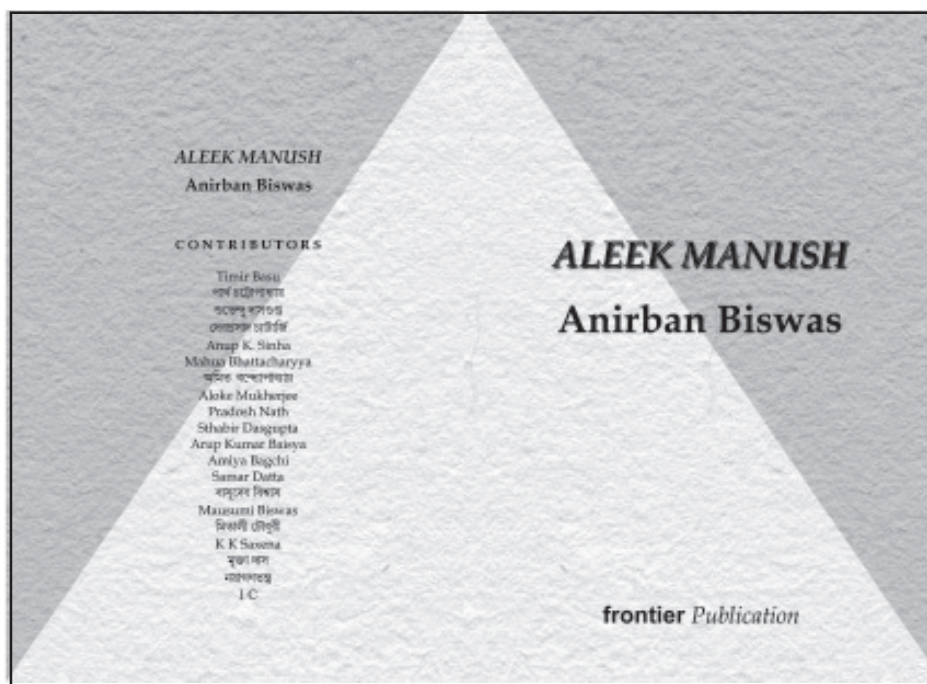
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