

Growing Class Resistance against “Globalization”

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The term “globalization”, though much used, is extremely misleading, as is its presumed “other”, “nationalism”. This is because both terms are used as blanket terms without any reference to their class content, as if there can be only one kind of “globalization” and only one kind of “nationalism”. Using concepts detached from their class content is a favourite ploy of bourgeois ideology: what it amounts to is to confer universality on concepts that essentially belong only to the bourgeois discourse, as if this is the only universe of discourse possible and all choices are confined only to alternative trajectories within this universe.

This non-class use of portmanteau terms then makes it possible to set up antinomies, so that whatever exists appears better than anything else, as the most reasonable thing that can possibly exist. It amounts to endorsing what the conservative side of Hegel had said: “The real is reason”. Thus an antinomy is set up between “globalization” and “nationalism” where the former appears progressive, open, democratic and as the carrier of “modernity”, while the latter appears reactionary, closed, anti-democratic to the point of being fascistic, and anti-“modern”. Any opposition to what exists (i.e. “globalization”), is then dubbed, within this binary, as a reactionary move, a withdrawal from a march towards “modernity”, to an oppressive anti-democratic traditionalism. Resistance against oppression within the current regime of “globalization” is thereby sought to be discredited as a reactionary throwback to a horrendous past.

Since such thinking also permeates certain sections of the Left, they too see the resistance to an oppressive “globalization” (where the oppression arises because of the class content of such globalization) as a retreat to a reactionary nationalism, and develop a lukewarm attitude towards it. This ironically serves to act as a self-fulfilling prophecy: the very lukewarm-ness of segments of the Left towards the resistance against “globalization” provides an opportunity to reactionary Right-wing and even fascist forces to position themselves as friends of such resistance; and this actually appears to give such resistance the very reactionary character that these segments of the Left had been anticipating from the beginning.

The real point therefore is to look at terms like “globalization” by taking account of their class content, and also the class content of the resistance to it. And here the unmistakable fact emerges that the current “globalization” which represents the hegemony of international finance capital and which has brought acute misery to the working people all over the world, viz. the workers in the advanced capitalist countries, and the workers, peasants, petty producers and agricultural labourers in the underdeveloped countries, is being challenged by them everywhere. A resistance, the like of which has not been seen for decades, is growing, which, though confined within countries, has a nonetheless a wide pervasiveness across countries. And what is more, this resistance is now increasingly being led by the Left, as it shrugs off everywhere its earlier ambivalence towards finance-led globalization.

The U.S. Presidential elections had brought to the fore a self-proclaimed socialist Bernie Sanders who had clearly taken a stand cognizant of the acute misery being

heaped upon the American workers by finance-led globalization, and who had been doing extremely well in the run-up to the polls and might even have defeated Donald Trump, until he was hustled out of the race by the Democratic Party establishment (and lacked alas the grit to fight it). The French Presidential elections brought to the fore Jean-Luc Melenchon, a candidate of the Left (supported by the French Communist Party) who got nearly 20 percent of the vote (19.64), just a shade less than what Emmanuel Macron the eventual winner got in the first round (23.75). And now the British elections have brought to the fore a Labour Party led by an avowed socialist Jeremy Corbyn, who had been systematically derided not just by the Conservatives but by the Blairites within the Labour Party who had captured that Party for decades and were ardent advocates of the neo-liberal policies being pushed by finance-led globalization.

The British election results, apart from being a rebuff for Theresa May whose Tory government was reduced to a minority, and the Blairites, also cut to size the UKIP, the Right-wing anti-immigration Party that had been so prominent a supporter of Brexit. It got just 1.8 percent of the votes and not a single seat; its vote share fell by as much as 10.8 percent compared to the previous general election. One of the planks of the Liberal establishment's opposition to Brexit had been that it was a campaign of the Right from which UKIP would gain. But clearly the British working class which overwhelmingly supported Brexit, did so because of the economic oppression of the EU and not out of any sympathy for UKIP; indeed it had scant regard for UKIP, and once the Labour Party had got rid of the Blairite influence upon its leadership, it flocked to the banner of Labour. Corbyn may not have actually won the election, but he has rebuilt the bridge between the Unions and the Labour Party which will strengthen working class intervention and resistance against finance-led globalization.

All these are developments in the electoral arena in the advanced capitalist countries, reflecting working class opposition to globalization. But even in India, a strong peasant resistance against the plight to which the neo-liberal regime under finance-led globalization has pushed them, has surfaced now after a very long time, though it is too early yet to find any reflection in the electoral arena. The peasant movement that has emerged in at least three states, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan (all ruled by the BJP which is the current instrument for the imposition of the diktat of the corporate-financial oligarchy linked to international finance), whose demands include remunerative prices and a debt-waiver, comes after an interregnum of nearly four decades. During these four decades, there have been peasant suicides but no large-scale peasant struggles against the policies leading to their impoverishment. There no doubt have been struggles on specific issues in specific pockets but no generalized synchronized movements.

A general movement across several states of the country demanding remunerative prices had occurred only in the late seventies. The background to that movement is worth recalling here. The late sixties and the early seventies had been a period of massive inflation in India, with the inflation rate in 1973-74 touching 30 percent in the wake of the first oil-shock (though oil-shock had only added to the fury of inflation that had already been underway). The drastic squeeze on the working class imposed by this inflation had been a major factor behind the wave of strike-struggles of the workers at that time, of which the 1974 Railway Strike had been the most

prominent. Disaffection because of inflation had also been responsible for Indira Gandhi's Congress losing the Assembly elections in Gujarat.

Indira Gandhi's government had therefore been under pressure to do something about inflation. It sought to control this inflation by turning the terms of trade between agriculture and the non-agricultural sector against the former, which meant in effect controlling inflation by squeezing the peasants, and, via them the agricultural labourers (since peasants "pass on" their distress to labourers). The period of Emergency was noteworthy for the terms-of-trade shift it gave rise to, so much so that many researchers have seen the political economy of the Emergency as consisting in the imposition of an anti-peasant "stabilization policy" for combating inflation. It is this anti-peasant stance that had called forth massive rallies of peasants (including at the Boat Club in Delhi) and an upsurge of peasant struggles across the country in the late seventies and the early eighties.

But what Indira Gandhi's government had done in a specific context within the dirigiste regime has now become the norm within the neo-liberal regime. The neo-liberal policies imposed by finance-led globalization have entailed in effect the permanent adoption of a set of anti-peasant policies, not just for keeping down inflation (which is nowhere near as high now as in the early seventies) but for affecting a process of primitive accumulation of capital for the enrichment of the domestic and foreign monopolists.

Such a process of primitive accumulation of capital at the expense of the traditional petty producers also has the effect of squeezing the working class, including its organized segment. The displaced peasants and petty producers, who flock to towns in search of jobs, find no jobs. At the most, the existing jobs are shared among more workers through processes of casualization, outsourcing, informalization, and such like, all of which amount to a swelling of the reserve army of labour. And such swelling keeps down the bargaining strength all workers, including even of the organized workers. What happens to the workers in an economy like ours within a neo-liberal regime is thus not independent of what happens to the peasants. A process of primitive accumulation at the expense of the latter also serves to squeeze the former.

There is however a second and even more important way in which primitive accumulation affects the workers. Since the reserve army of labour expresses itself not in terms of a simple dichotomy between some who are employed and some who are unemployed, but rather through phenomena like "disguised unemployment" and causally or intermittently employed workers, a swelling of its ranks entails an increase in the fragmentation of workers, and hence a further weakening of their capacity to resist. And any such weakening in the capacity to resist of the working class spreads to other segments of the population as well, leading to a lowering of class resistance in general.

What we are witnessing all over the world today is a reversal of this trend. Neo-liberal capitalism has now reached the point where its spontaneous tendency for keeping down class resistance, through the promotion of fragmentation, is no longer sufficient to do so. And class resistance, once it begins to manifest itself, has a way of spreading rapidly and widely.