

## The Inhumanity Engendered by Capitalism

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Georg Lukacs, the renowned Marxist philosopher had once remarked that “even the worst socialism was better than the best capitalism”. That remark made in 1969 and repeated in 1971, no doubt on the basis of Lukacs’ perception of actually existing socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with which he was familiar, had been treated sceptically even in Western Left circles at the time. But the entire recent episode of deportees from the United States, including women and children, being brought back to India and other third world countries, in shackles and handcuffs in military aircrafts, brings back that remark to one’s mind. There were at least two obvious appealing features of the actually existing socialism of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that set it apart from *any* capitalist country.

One relates to the sheer contempt, in fact the sheer racial contempt, underlying this deportation on the part of the leading capitalist country of the world, of which the socialist countries had been *officially absolutely free*. One is aware of course that racial prejudices would have lurked among the people even in the socialist countries at that time, notwithstanding all governmental positions to the contrary, prejudices that are coming to the fore after the collapse of socialism there; one is also aware of the immense efforts being made by progressive forces in advanced capitalist countries in recent times to produce a more tolerant, including racially tolerant, society there. Indeed many would attribute the inhumanity of the deportation not to capitalism *per se* but to *Trumpism*, that is, to the utter inhumanity of the neo-fascist clique that currently holds the levers of power in the US.

While it is certainly true that *Trumpism* is not identical with capitalism *per se*, it would be a mistake to see *Trumpism* as a completely separate and alien phenomenon. Racism in modern times is a product of imperialism, and capitalism as a mode of production is *inconceivable* without imperialism. Even the progressive tendencies under capitalism do not repudiate imperialism as an exploitative and repugnant phenomenon belonging to the past; they see it rather as a phenomenon that brought progress and “modernity” to distant societies. Implicit in this view which sees such societies as being incapable of achieving progress and “modernity” on their own, which sees imperialism as a benign entity, is a belief in the superiority of the race engaged in the imperialist project. No matter how good the intentions of the progressive tendency in the contemporary metropolis, as long as it does not repudiate imperialism, it cannot free itself of the taint of racism; and the fact that it does not repudiate imperialism is evident even today in the broad support extended by even the progressive elements to the two recent wars supported by *all metropolitan powers*, one a genocide against an entire people, and the other an outcome of Western imperial expansion.

Racism in other words remains latent in metropolitan countries, not just as a lingering prejudice, but even within the ruling circles, including the liberal elements within the ruling circles. And in periods of capitalist crisis, it acquires a fresh impetus as monopoly capital uses it to “other” some hapless immigrant groups to bolster its position against threats to its hegemony, and to divide the working class. By contrast, in the erstwhile socialist countries, the ruling political formation was totally opposed to racism and suppressed any expression of it in society. This, many would argue, was an imposition. But the point is: whether or not an imposition, it left no scope for the ascendancy of a *Trumpist* position.

Let me now come to the second aspect in which the erstwhile socialist countries demonstrated themselves to be superior, and that is the achievement of full employment, which incidentally also eliminated a major material factor, namely unemployment, that typically underlies the animosity towards immigrants one witnesses in advanced capitalist countries.

The reason that people from third world countries wish to migrate to countries like the USA is the rampant unemployment in their countries of origin. True, those who migrate are not necessarily the ones who are utterly destitute; the fact that each migrant had to cough up as much as Rs 4.5 million to middlemen to arrange his entry to the US through the “donkey route” shows that he had some means at his disposal. But certainly his desire to migrate arises from two factors: the absence of sufficiently rewarding (as distinct from *any*) employment; and the existence of enormous inequality in the society to which he belongs that makes him dissatisfied with his material status. And both these factors arise because of the project of building capitalism in the country. No matter how rapid the GDP growth-rate of the country, no matter how many trillions of dollars the size of its GDP becomes, these factors will always remain, as will the desire to migrate on the part of a section of the population.

It is a disgrace that more than 75 years after the country’s independence, we still have a society out of which people wish desperately to migrate, even when the risk associated with such migration entails being treated like animals and sent back home, in a caged state. This is the inevitable result of building a capitalist society in a third world country today.

At the other end, the reason why a Trump can deport such immigrants with impunity, even though the American society itself came into being through immigration, with the European immigrants taking over the land belonging to the indigenous population, is the existence of mass unemployment. Bourgeois economic theory makes the wholly bogus claim that the long-run growth of a capitalist economy depends upon the rate of growth of its labour force. If this claim was true, then immigrants into America should have been welcomed as the means to boost the growth-rate of that economy; but it is not, and the scourge of unemployment makes even Trump’s hardline on immigration popular. In fact the irony of the situation is such that the most Left-wing Party in Germany, the party of Sahra Wagenknecht, which broke from the parent Left party Die Linke because of the latter’s tacit support to the wars being conducted by NATO, has to take a position on immigration no different from that of the right-wing German establishment. The scourge of unemployment that is so pervasive, afflicting both the countries of origin and the countries of destination of the migrants, and that *necessarily* accompanies capitalism throughout its existence and takes a virulent form in a period of crisis as at present, underlies the inhumanity we witness, an inhumanity that treats people like cattle and deports them in chains.

By contrast, the erstwhile socialist societies were totally free of this scourge. In fact they faced not unemployment but labour scarcity. Janos Kornai, the well-known Hungarian economist, *who was incidentally not a socialist*, had followed Kalecki’s lead and drawn a distinction between “demand-constrained” and “resource-constrained” systems; he had pointed out that while capitalism was a demand-constrained system, socialism was a resource-constrained system. One implication of this was that the erstwhile socialist societies were characterised by shortages, rationing and queues: with full utilisation of resources the amount of goods they could produce was less than the purchasing power in the hands of the people at the prevailing prices; it *did* mean however that resources, including the available labour-force, was fully utilised. In fact these socialist societies have been the only ones in modern times that have experienced full employment, so much so that the labour force had to be augmented by a

significant increase in women's work participation rate, which in turn had very profound social implications. And, quite apart from earning the income that employment provided, the workers in those societies did not have to suffer the loss of self-esteem that inevitably accompanies unemployment.

Much has been written against those actually-existing socialist societies, including even by Left-wing writers; and with the collapse of that system, an impression has been created that there is no alternative to capitalism in societies like ours. The truth however is that as long as we pursue capitalism, while we may be producing billionaires, the ignominy that was associated with being a "lower class" Indian in the colonial era will never leave our people. Ordinary working people will continue to be treated like cattle; and as they leave our shores to look for a better life elsewhere, as some of them inevitably will, they will be bundled back into the country in handcuffs and chains. Only a socialist society, which we are in a position to build better in our country by learning from past mistakes, can overcome the scourge of unemployment, and the fate of our people being treated like caged animals.

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