

Me Marx, You Foucauld!

Inclusion is a difficult process. Almost impossible for the left, for the 'good', for those who feel strongly about something.

Efforts at inclusion and collaboration are often met with skepticism. A more extreme reaction is outright rejection of the other "line" as being a total sell-out to the enemy.

The most recent example has been the characterisation of the World Social Forum as "part of an imperialist plot to divert the struggle". Some others, though remaining involved, maintain their distance by saying that some of the constituents, like say NGOs, have doubtful antecedents. So everyone is busy trying to prove their revolutionary credentials.

These attempts at collaboration finally end up moving away from developing an inclusive politics, based on programmes and actual action, and emphasise differences, divisions and suspicions!

Never mind that most campaigns, networks, coalitions and struggles have failed to sustain their momentum. Never mind that the radical left, far left, socialists, social movements, NGOs, mass-based organisations have failed to show any significant growth in membership, institutional development or social action. Never mind that our helpless response to the most important calamity of today, the Gujarat riots, showed up our emasculation.

James Petras analyses precisely such fragmentation at work in the lost opportunity in Argentina, how fighting for narrow interests led to the alienation of the people, and finally led to the resurgence of a right wing party, much like our own situation at home.

Amiya Bagchi however does derive some hope in recent trends in struggles on the Narmada Dams and on issues like environment and sustainable development he sees a gradual rapprochement of the 'false' divide between Marx and Foucauld.

The Parameters of Resistance by Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Analytical Monthly Review, Volume 55, Number 3, July-August 2003 [C.ELDOC1072281] 

Future Perspectives for Popular Social and Political Movements by James Petras, Economic and Political Weekly - Commentary Vol XXXVIII No.23 June 7-13, 2003

The Parameters of Resistance

by Amiya Kumar Bagchi

As the forms of protest and resistance have multiplied, the problem of choosing an appropriate political strategy has become that much more difficult.

Is the resistance to be mounted only globally?

Or are we to fight every little tyranny everywhere the corruption of municipal officials, the arrogance of party bosses seeking to control local democracy, and the callousness of public hospital authorities?

The Divide – political vs. moral

In much of the Third World, including the subcontinent of South Asia, a line seems to divide the anti-systemic or anti-imperialist struggles into two groups.

On the one hand, there are those who believe in the necessity of squaring up for battle against global transnational capital and fighting to reverse the policies that have allowed it to subvert and control all major governments. The adherents of this view think that long-term strategies for capturing state power have to be pursued toward that end.

On the other hand, there are others who are convinced that the fight against tyrannies that are crippling the lives of people has to be conducted here and now.

In fact, the **political activists**, if that is a name we can give to the first group, have to deal with local issues and they have to prove their sincerity and competence in dealing with them. Such constructive engagements are necessary, in addition to their ideology, for them to build their base of support and strengthen popular resistance against the oppression of capital and the state apparatus.

There are also some among the **moral resisters**, to give a name to the other group, who are not averse to seeking the help of the state apparatus to right the wrongs they are fighting against. But there are some moral resisters who

think that the state, as such, is an evil institution and its embrace is to be avoided at all cost.

This division, however blurred at the edges, between the political activists and the moral resisters has often made it difficult for resistance movements to unify in the past. The division has generally been described as one between those movements whose ideologies focus on the control of state power and those that often seek to remedy evils without bothering about who controls the state.

By and large, so-called neutral academics have approved of the moral resisters in preference to those they see as seeking power.

The division has also been described as a divide between the communist or socialist view of resistance movements and the Foucauldian view, with its

| Political activists | Moral Resisters |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anti-systemic, anti-imperialist approach | Fight the here and now, in your backyard issues |
| Focus on control of state power | Not concerned with state, sometimes even works with government; or anti state |
| Communist/Socialist view | Foucauldian view |
| Intersection | |
| Fight against imperialism is needed at all levels, including the local. | |
| Every local struggle is connected to the global in this age of the "other" globalisation | |
| Every struggle represents and is connected to the other | |
| Left parties are now closely associated with environment, Common Property Resources, decentralisation, and gender struggles | |
| Common Agenda | |
| State is being made weak, but can be the only provider of roti, kapda, makaan | |
| Recovery of Political Spaces | |

focus on the cellular nature of oppressive structures and their inevitable appearance under any state, however benignly it may try to operate.

A False Divide

I have never been able to accept this dichotomy as a valid representation of today's resistance to imperialist capitalism, that is, the actual capitalism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The fight against imperialism must encompass all aspects of life including the forms of ideology, the state apparatus, and the so-called civil society as well. That fight has to be fought by uniting all genuine anti-imperialist formations.

The immense diversity of human existence, and the many different ways oppression burdens that existence, must be part of our understanding of why different forms of resistance will arise in different contexts.

The overwhelming nature of the onslaught of imperialism in its latest incarnation has convinced many in the social movements that it is not enough to fight local tyrannies and local oppression. Instead, it is necessary to seek allies who are prepared to fight the system in all its ramifications attacking the taproot of imperialism.

In the age of imperialism, all local struggles have an international dimension. The recovery of the dignity of labor as part of human freedom by the workers of the first world is also an integral part of that struggle. Solidarity with genuine anti-imperialist movements across the globe is absolutely essential.

Foucauld and Marx can converge

The ecological movement in India, for example, which began as a protest against the indiscriminate felling of trees by timber merchants, endangering the livelihood and water resources of the people and women in particular, was then taken up by all left-oriented groups resisting the environmental devastation by profit-hunting capital. The ecological movements were present in strength in the recent Asian Social Forum held in Hyderabad, India.

One of the unfortunate legacies of the actually existing socialism, and the political parties associated with it, was a fascination with big factories, big dams, and big projects in general. They symbolized for them, and for many noncommunist nationalists, the drive of all oppressed people towards industrialization and their search for freedom from degrading poverty.

However, many of the factories and dams were located in sites that had provided shelter and livelihood to the peasants and forest-users of interior India; those people were displaced and derived few benefits from the projects that destroyed their homes. Various groups gave voice to the discontent and desperation of the displaced, but there was a tendency among organized communist movements to look upon these protests with suspicion.

However, when the Silent Valley in Kerala, one of the richest habitats of subtropical flora and fauna in the world, was threatened by a hydroelectric power project, the movement to protect it was spearheaded by the Kerala Sahitya Shastra Parishad. This body was organized chiefly by communist activists, which sought to spread literacy and raise the awareness of science and health care among ordinary people. Because of the protests, the project for generating hydel power was dropped by the government and the Silent Valley was saved.

The movement against big dams came to a head, attracting global attention, with the movement against the construction of a dam across the Narmada River in western India; the movement was known as Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada). The main leaders of the protest movement, Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, have built around it the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM). There was mutual suspicion between the NAPM and the organized left parties in the beginning, but fortunately, in the face of the common enemy of unbridled globalization by the rich, of the rich, and for the rich, they are now fighting shoulder to shoulder against the WTO and the structural adjustment and privatization programs of the central government in India.



The Foucauldian movements and the Marxist political parties can come together after all.

The Enfeeblement of the State

There is an illusion among some activists that the disempowering of the national state is always a good thing. However, in poor countries, it is ultimately only the state which can provide universal primary education, primary healthcare, basic sanitation, and food security for the poor, and protect common property resources. Getting the state to make these provisions is part of the democratic struggle throughout the world.



This public provisioning function requires the state to have adequate financial and administrative resources. Most nation-states have been deprived of all financial clout as a result of their indebtedness. Their powers of recovery have been destroyed because creating state enterprises, interfering in markets or taxing the rich are actions considered, by global capital and its henchmen, beyond the bounds of their legitimate authority.

Colonisation of Local Spaces

Just as most states of the Third World have been rendered powerless by ensnaring them in debt bondage, structural adjustment, and privatization programs, so also the forces of imperialism are penetrating these local bodies.

The architecture of financial domination by big capital erected by the transnational corporations, the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and G7 powers often remains invisible to grassroots workers, until they are hit by the kiloton bombs of the stealth bombers and their lives are totally destroyed.

Local bodies are increasingly deprived of the funds needed to look after the basic human needs of people under their jurisdiction. With increasing debt burdens and depleting disposable revenues, they must then turn to aid agencies such as the World Bank and its many satraps, the U.S. Agency for International Development or Britain's Department for International Development for funding projects.

As they take up these projects, they inevitably get entangled in their conditionalities and thus many a left-oriented political authority begins objectively to act as an agent of transnational corporations. The proliferation of foreign-funded NGOs also hastens this development.

Hence the resistance against the forces of global capital and imperialism needs to be both local and global. People must agitate against the activities of transnational and domestic big capital, against the strengthening of repression and the deliberate exacerbation of regional armed conflicts in the name of defense, and against the operation of undemocratic organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO.

All over the Third World, people are fighting for their rights over water, land, forests, and livelihood, and local organizations are often born out of their need to carry the fight further.

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, workers won a famous fight to prevent a transnational corporation from usurping all the rights of the local residents to water for irrigation, water for sanitation, and water for drinking.

In India, fishermen have won the right to fish in the Ganga against waterlords trying to monopolize the fishing facilities in that river. In struggles scattered across India, many local groups have demanded and obtained the right to govern themselves in most areas of life. In India, a structure of local governance had been in partial operation through a system of municipal corporations and village panchayats.

Casualisation of Labour /Fundamentalism

In Gujarat, perhaps the most developed capitalist state in India, beginning in February 2002, Hindutva-based fascism used the state apparatus to orchestrate a genocide of Muslims. These fascist forces perpetrated unheard of brutalities against men, women, and children (including those in the womb).

The enfeebling of the workers' struggle in the towns and workplaces provided an opportunity for the Hindutva formations in Gujarat to recruit the poorest and most disadvantaged of the workers into their campaign of extermination against Muslims.

Not only have wrongs committed more than a thousand years ago by one particular invader with a professed faith in Islam been invoked by the Hindutva forces, but the actual events in that ancient feud have been embellished, manipulated, and falsified to poison the minds of the Adivasis as well as those of caste Hindus and Dalits.

Resistance and Recovery of Spaces

Protests were mounted against that genocide all over India; women's organizations and organizations led by women spearheaded the protest activities at national, regional, and international levels. It is recognized that fascism in India as in Bosnia and Kosovo uses the bodies of women as the markers of ethnicized "honor" and as targets of attack on enemy territory.

In India, even though most of the left political formations are still dominated by men, they have had to recognize the struggle for equal rights for women as an integral part of the people's struggles for equality and justice.

South Asia, along with West Asia, and several countries of East and Southeast Asia, remain bastions of male chauvinism. A principal marker of religious and ethnic fundamentalism is their tendency to revere women as icons while oppressing them as human beings. One of the most hopeful signs of the unfolding of people's consciousness of their rights as human beings in South Asia during the closing decades of the twentieth century has been the growth of the women's movement against gender, class, and state oppression, and exploitation based on women's seclusion at home.

The movement has demanded the reservation of positions for women in local governments, in state assemblies, and the central parliament.

At the same time, the anti-imperialist workers must struggle to establish the rights of fishermen to fish in rivers and coastal waters, of Adivasis to the use of water, plant and animal resources in their locality, of town dwellers to clean water and air, and of children to grow up as fully competent world citizens.

Resistance lives! As we say in India, Inqilab Zindabad! ▶