
Democracy against Hegemony

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Women studies in India, on the other hand, she thought, kept power and change in focus of their project. Women studies groups have remained rooted in political and social movement, and have constantly expanded their political space. To this extent, she thinks, the feminist movement in India has reached a higher stage of development than the mainstream social science research as well as subaltern studies works.

In his final presentation, Javeed Alam argued that in India there were certain communities who were unfree. At this particular juncture, he said, it is these communities who are fighting the greatest battle for bourgeois democracy. The colonial construction of caste, he said, has to a large extent been overcome by these communities. His concern is to find out the conditions that stand in the way of forming a radical movement. In the context of globalisation his other related concern is to find the sites available to us to fight the capital. His assertion was that the nationalist platform against imperialism is one such possible site where one can fight globalisation as well as defend the rights of citizens which globalisation is attacking. The Indian state, which is, after all, the state of the ruling class, will not create this platform. It can be raised only through the united struggles of peasants, workers and the toiling people.

The middle class in India, he said, is for globalisation and have become its spokesman. Secondly, he said, the contradiction between regional capital and pan-Indian capital, so distinct in the 1960s and 1970s, is no longer there. Regional capital now is as eager as pan-Indian capital to collaborate with global capital. There is also a disjunction between economics and politics in India at this moment. Formations like OBCs, etc, he said, have been allowed by the ruling classes (at the centre) to function at the regional level and carry their political projects, social engineering, etc, on the condition that they (these formations) do not interfere with the economic policies of the ruling class at the centre. The understanding of this disjunction between economics and politics is very crucial in putting up a fight against globalisation.

In her counterpoint, Gayatri Spivek pointed out that new definitions of peoples' movements are coming up in south Asia and south-east Asia – non-governmental organisation is a description given by the other side. It is not a definition. The essence of a definition of these peoples' movements would be whether their work is substantially truncated or not when foreign help is stopped. These nationalist movements (the peoples' movements) were not part of the old nationalist movement.

To the extent that there is a national movement, we have to think of the nation. But that national movement is dissolved when the networks – the third world net-

work, women network, etc – combine and that becomes the front for struggle. To this extent, she said, there has been displacement of nationalism in the global struggle.

Democracy against Hegemony

Samir Amin

There can be no question of human rights and self-determination as long as the US's iron fist continues to enforce its economic preponderance.

THE March 28 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* contains an informative article on US political strategy. Its content is summed up by an eloquent image that takes up one page of the publication: a boxing glove in the colours of the American flag, accompanied by the following caption: "what the world needs now – for globalisation to work, America can't be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is". The reason for the announced punches is elucidated in these terms: "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps." The writer of these words is not a provocative joker, but none other than Thomas Friedman, Madeleine Albright's adviser.

We are very far, here, from the unifying discourse spouted by fashionable economists on the self-regulating market as a guarantor of peace. The American ruling class knows that economics are political, and that it is relations of power – including military power – that command the market. There will be no 'global market' without an American military empire, they say – for the above-mentioned article is but one amongst hundreds. This brutal frankness is no doubt possible over there because the media are sufficiently controlled for the government's strategic objective never to be subject to debate; freedom of expression – a freedom which often reaches the burlesque – applies only to matters involving individuals and, beyond them, to conflicts within the ruling class, rendered perfectly opaque in these conditions. There is no political force capable of combating the system and enlightening a public manipulated with such consummate ease.

More curious is the silence of the European powers and some others who, pretending not to read the press on the other side of the Atlantic (I dare not think they have no idea what it says), forbid their adversaries from hinting at the very existence of Washington's global strategy,

falling back instead on facile accusations that these opponents harbour a 'conspiratorial' view of history, or even that they are behaving like visionaries who see the shadow of the 'Great Satan' around every corner.

And yet the strategy in question is quite limp. The US is less convinced than its allies, so it would seem, of the virtues of competition and 'fair play' – virtues, incidentally, which it violates with impunity every time its interests are at stake (cf the banana wars among many other instances). Washington knows that, without its military hegemony, America cannot force the world to finance its savings deficit, which is the condition for the artificial maintenance of its economic position.

The instrument of choice in the imposition of this hegemony is therefore military, as the highest US authorities never tire of repeating. This hegemony, which in turn guarantees that of the Triad (US-Canada, Japan, western Europe) over the global system, would therefore demand that the US's allies accept to navigate in its wake. The UK, Germany and Japan have put forth no objections, not even 'cultural' ones. But the speeches European politicians feed their audiences – with respect to Europe's economic power – thereby lose any real significance. By placing itself exclusively on the terrain of mercantile disputes, with no project of its own, Europe is beaten from the start. Washington knows this well.

The weapon against the US's global strategy is a process of globalisation which must be at once multipolar, democratic (at least potentially), and negotiated. The margin of autonomy that this allows is the only means of correctly addressing fundamental social problems, which differ due to the unequal development of regions, and is by the same token the condition for democracy to take root seriously, since it gives a better chance to demilitarisation, security and peace. In contrast, American hegemony, in association with neoliberalism, has so far only produced chaos, the multiplication of conflicts and large-scale military intervention. This, after all, was only to be expected.

The principal tool in the service of Washington's chosen strategy is NATO – hence its ability to survive the collapse of the adversary that was its *raison d'être*. Today, NATO speaks in the name of the 'international community', thereby expressing its contempt for the democratic principle that governs this community through the UN. In debates conducted in the US on the global strategy we are discussing, human rights or democracy are mentioned only rarely. They are invoked, in fact, only when this is useful for the functioning of this same global strategy, which explains the blinding cynicism and systematic use of double standards in evidence. There is no question of intervening in favour of democracy in Afghanistan or in the Gulf, for example, no more than there has ever been any question of hampering Mobutu yesterday, Savimbi today, and many others tomorrow. People's rights are sacred in certain cases (Kosovo today, perhaps Tibet tomorrow), and forgotten in others (Palestine, Turkish Kurdistan, Cyprus, the Serbs of Krajina, expelled at gunpoint by the Croatian regime, etc). Even the terrible genocide in Rwanda gave rise to no serious investigation into the responsibility of diplomats who had supported the governments that were openly advocating it. Certainly, the despicable behaviour of certain regimes – like those of Saddam Hussein or Milosevic – makes the task easier by offering pretexts that are easy to exploit. But the complete silence that meets other cases deprives the discourse of democracy and people's rights of any measure of credibility. It would be impossible to do a greater disservice to the fundamental requirements of the fight for democracy and human respect, without which no progress is possible.

The avowed goal of the US's strategy is not to tolerate the existence of any powers capable of resisting Washington's orders, and therefore to seek to dismantle all those countries deemed 'too big', as well as to create the largest possible number of pawn states – easy prey for the establishment of American bases guaranteeing their 'protection'. Only one state has the right to be 'big'; the US, as its two last presidents have said explicitly. The method put into practice, however, is not limited to wielding the bludgeon and manipulating the media. It attempts to enclose people in immediate and unacceptable alternatives: bowing to oppression, disappearing, placing themselves under the US protectorate. For this to take place, it is necessary to draw a veil of silence over the policies that have created the tragedy. For example, we may cite the rapid recognition of the states of the former Yugoslavia, with no concern for preparing them

by regulating the fate of the concerned peoples in a democratic manner.

Alignment with the strategy of the US and its subaltern NATO allies has dramatic consequences. The UN is about to succumb to the fate of the league of nations. Clearly – and fortunately – American society is not that of Nazi Germany, but for the decision-makers in Washington, like those of Berlin before them, force has been established as a supreme principle,

to the complete detriment of international law, for which the dominant discourse has substituted an odd 'right of intervention', disturbingly reminiscent of the 'mission civilisatrice' of 19th century imperialism.

The struggle for democracy will remain completely ineffective if it is accompanied by submission to American hegemonism. The struggle for democracy is indissociable from the fight against Washington's hegemony.

Indonesia: A Regional Tinderbox

S P Seth

Indonesia's perilous economic situation has fuelled a social, ethnic and religious crisis. The political situation is unstable. Worried about this, the Chinese population of Indonesia and neighbouring Singapore look to Australia to defuse the crisis.

DURING his recent visit to Australia, Singapore's prime minister Goh Chok Tong was a worried man. He worried about 'volcanic' pressures within Indonesia, with prospects for still 'greater uncertainty'. According to an Australian commentator, Goh feared that Indonesia lacked the leader needed to steer the country through its greatest crisis since the mid-sixties. Worst still, it did not look likely to him that this year's Indonesian elections would deliver a strong government which could handle the tasks ahead.

The city state of Singapore, with a population of about 4 million, is Indonesia's close neighbour. The latter is giant with a population of about 200 million, and is angry with Singapore. The besieged Suharto regime had expected much more from Singapore (a prosperous neighbour) by way of economic help, when things started to go horribly wrong from late 1997. President B J Habibie, Suharto's protegee and successor, has neither forgotten nor forgiven the island state for this.

Besides, he is peeved that Indonesia gets so readily blamed for discrimination against its minority Chinese population, when Singapore's treatment of its Malay minority, in his view, is so blatantly racist. And he is dismissive of Singapore, regarding it as a little dot in a sea of green – apparently referring to its geographical location surrounded by populous Muslim neighbours in Indonesia and Malaysia. (It is worth noting that Singapore's relationship with its other close neighbour, Malaysia, has never been quite comfortable, even though at present they are having a truce of sorts. The government in Singapore is more sympathetic to prime minister Mahathir in his troubles with his former deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, under trial and in jail.)

In other words, Indonesia might be whipping up its Malay and Islamic credentials thus further adding to Singapore's insecurity. No wonder, prime minister Goh is seeking to establish even closer ties with Australia. Because, apart from Singapore, Australia is probably the only regional country which is equally, if not more, worried about developments in Indonesia. And Singapore seems to think that Canberra has some leverage in Jakarta which might help.

Certainly, Australians seem to give the impression that they are somehow shaping Indonesia's policy on East Timor, a former Portuguese colony annexed by Indonesia in the mid-seventies. It is difficult, though, to say who is leading whom. At first, Canberra hesitantly suggested a longish period of autonomy for East Timor under Jakarta's sovereignty, which might be followed by an act of self-determination, if necessary. Jakarta first balked at it, but then threatened to quit altogether if its autonomy offer was rejected. It was autonomy or independence. This scared Canberra out of its wits, fearing that Australia would be saddled with the major responsibility of peace-keeping, and rebuilding East Timor's economic and administrative infrastructure; possibly an ongoing responsibility over a fairly long period of time.

Whether or not Jakarta was bluffing, only time will tell. In the meantime, the internal debate in Australia on East Timor is tearing apart the opposition Labour Party. Gough Whitlam, a former prime minister and Labour Party icon, has come under attack from his party's spokesman on foreign affairs. He is accused of having pursued a dangerously ambiguous policy on East Timor (during 1974 and 1975) which encouraged Indonesia to annex the