

WHAT WE NEED TODAY IS SOCIAL JUSTICE

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

“Only by saying a big ‘no’ to brutal capitalism can we remedy the problems that we face today.”
Workers walk past a portrait of Karl Marx in Ernakulam, Kerala. Thulasi Kakkat

The world celebrated the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx, which was on May 5, 2018, for a year. Marx was not like other philosophers who interpreted the world in various ways; he made it a point to change it. Marx and Friedrich Engels laid the formulations for the theory and practice of scientific socialism. They applied dialectics to the study of human society and human consciousness. They strove for the liberation of humanity from all forms of discrimination and exploitation. They argued that Parliament should be used as a forum to articulate the concerns of the working people. Marxism as a science, as an ideology, and as a methodology keeps demonstrating its relevance every day.

In the present election campaign to the Lok Sabha, the Left parties have been raising several ideological and political questions in order to save the Republic of India so that it ensures a dignified life to all the people and empowers them in every respect. But it is ironical that several ideological questions are being raised over the relevance of the Left and its future in India. While admitting the widespread influence of communist ideology, some people say communism is dead and the Left as a political force is dead.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some proclaimed that there was no alternative to neoliberalism. Since then, the so-called triumphant march of neoliberal capitalism has seen many hurdles, such as the 2008 financial crisis. The worst victims of this march and its consequent crises have always been the disadvantaged sections. This shows the presence of class conflict in society. Needless to say, the vulnerabilities of the disadvantaged are a creation of capitalism itself. The French economist Thomas Piketty exposed the essence of neoliberalism, which leads to unprecedented inequalities and disparities.

Re-examining socialism

In the Indian context, liberalisation of the economy was initiated on the premise that the seemingly socialist and centrally planned economy had outlived its utility and that private ownership and market forces would efficiently replace public sector undertakings and provisions. Such an opening up of the economy was also tried in other parts of the world with only one consequence — unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and a marked shift in the actual centres of power. Crony capitalism was soon making fast inroads into the policymaking coteries of India, and this new-found confidence of the private sector bore fruits. But for whom? Definitely not for the masses, as shown in a recent study which named India as the second most unequal society in the world. According to Credit Suisse Research Institute's Global Wealth Report, 1% of the Indian population owns 51.5% of the wealth in the country, and the top 10% own about three-fourths of the wealth. On the other hand, the bottom 60%, the majority of the population, own 4.7% of the total wealth.

Public education and health are the worst hit by capitalism. Education spending by the Centre has been showing a downward trend — from 6.15% in the 2014-15 Budget to 3.71% in the 2017-18 Budget. Instead of expanding higher education horizontally (to more far-flung areas of the country) and vertically (to the disadvantaged sections of society), the Central government is allowing the Higher Education Financing Agency to allow the private sector to dominate the

education sector and make higher education a distant dream for the deprived classes. Similarly, in the health sector, the government has chosen private insurance companies and private healthcare lobbies as its partners, effectively taking away the attention from public healthcare infrastructure and its upgradation.

In a country like India, which is plagued with social problems such as widespread poverty, a deepening agricultural crisis, a very high unemployment rate, and abysmal health indicators, giving away public sector assets to private players and shifting the discourse away from realising socialism could prove fatal for a vast majority of the population.

In India, in this election season, real issues of the people are considered secondary to vague appeals of nationalism and national security. The last five years are witness to the fact that the ruling elites of India favour improvement in 'Ease of Doing Business' to improvement in the Human Development Index. India is doing badly on many parameters — nutrition, peace, human development, and press freedom — while a section of the media is celebrating improvement in the Ease of Doing Business Index. In other words, ensuring that people live a decent life is subordinate to ensuring that business becomes easier for crony capitalists.

Periyar's tryst with socialism

The ruling party's appeals to nationalism and its use of the sacrifices of the Army for votes are attempts to hide its failure in giving employment to the youth, providing remunerative prices to farmers, ensuring social justice to the marginalised sections, and creating a conducive environment for the overall development of society. The government has presided over the gradual undermining of constitutional institutions, the giving away of national assets to the private sector and the increase in violence against minorities. It brands any opposition to its policies and views as 'anti-national'. All of these, however, are symptoms of a deeper problem. One has to look beyond the cacophony of high-pitched TV debates that are centred on sensationalism. As Noam Chomsky wrote, "It is easy to be carried away by the sheer horror of what the daily press reveals and to lose sight of the fact that this is merely the brutal exterior of a deeper crime, of commitment to a social order that guarantees endless suffering and humiliation and denial of elementary human rights."

The tying of national interest to global capital has not only produced adverse and livelihood-threatening consequences for the masses of the country, it has also deprived India of the higher moral pedestal in foreign policy. Deep-rooted socialism is the only true alternative to this 'post-truth' world where rhetoric has dislodged real issues.

Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles... [where] oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight." It is the duty and the responsibility of socialism to carry on that struggle for humanity, and to bring politics back to where it belongs — to the people. Only by saying a big 'no' to brutal capitalism and by following what the Constitution envisages in its Preamble — social justice — can we remedy the problems that we face today.

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More than a 'more jobs' approach, addressing structural issues which keep women away from the workforce is a must

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