

NEW WAVE

The New Wave is a Socialist newsletter reporting on issues of the working class, revolutionary politics, and world affairs

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Voters lining up in India with voter IDs

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Foreword

We are in the midst of a period of crisis of capitalism. In such times, when revolutionary forces are still too nascent, and the powers of the status quo scramble to hold on to a failing order, the forces of reaction rise. In the decades of the 1920s, in the immediate aftermath of the first world war, and the Russian revolution, the capitalists of Germany and Italy resorted to fascism to secure their class interests. In this day, the leading capitalist powers of the world, be it in Europe, the US, or in Asia, are reigniting fascism, or throwing their weight behind the most organized forces of reaction. In India, this trend acquires it's sharpest and most distinct appearance, in the rise of the BJP and Hindutva. The BJP came to power in 2014 riding the wave of discontent against the Congress party. Several mass mobilizations in the second term of the Congress led alliance, beginning from the general strike of 2010, then the anti-corruption agitation, and the anti-rape mobilizations, as well as several key peasant and farmers protests, served to decisively bring down the Congress rule once more. No sooner than the BJP had taken power, they moved to reward the big capitalists who had backed them.

Their first target was changing the land policy, next they went after labour laws, and further privatization. The BJP made no secret of it's reactionary communal agenda of spewing hate against muslims. Mob lynchings of muslims became a regular occurrence, urban policies were designed to marginalize them as a community and push them into ghettos. In the first five years, the BJP consolidated its power and set the tone for the next five years.

The judiciary was targeted and subjugated to the BJP's political whims, institutions for managing elections such as the election commission, and investigative agencies such as the Central

Bureau of investigation and Enforcement Directorate were stripped of any independent functioning, existing practically as a political tool in the hands of the BJP. Space for dissent was curbed, with the use and abuse of draconian laws like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, many political prisoners still languish in Indian jails under this act. Today, India is on a fast track towards one party dictatorship, only the united forces of the working class and peasantry in revolutionary struggle can stop this.

The Indian bourgeoisie has ambitions of joining the leading ranks of capitalist powers, to achieve this it must exploit the resources of India, and it's peasants and workers to the hilt. The Congress party, with it's nominal commitment to welfare was unable to deliver to the capitalists their desired results. The BJP has therefore become the preferred choice of the bourgeoisie, the party that can achieve the level of exploitation that the bourgeoisie desires, and enforce it with a communal agenda to keep the workers and peasants divided.

One cannot stress enough how disastrous the rise of Hindutva reaction in India will be, where over 400 million of the world's working class resides. The impact will not be limited to India, as the BJP will allow India to be exploited to the hilt. The environmental impact, the political and social impact, will be a disaster for South Asia in the first instance and the world. Against this, the forces of revolution must organize urgently and build the revolutionary party in the working class. Revolutionary leadership is the need of the hour to prepare for a fight against the machinations of the Indian bourgeoisie and it's reactionary agenda. This is a fight that must be won!

The 2024 Indian elections: How we see it



Modi's rule increasingly resembles the Congress at the peak of it's power under Indira Gandhi

The dates for the Indian national elections have been announced. The voting for the elections would take place in seven phases beginning with the first phase on the 19th of April. The voting will end on the 6th of June with counting over by July.

The organization of the election has come under question, especially it's long duration and the spread of voting constituencies. It is no surprise that the election commission, a body that the BJP has virtually taken control of, would arrange the elections to give the maximum benefit to the ruling party.

The last two national elections have yielded an absolute majority for the BJP allowing them to steamroll the parliamentary opposition and impose laws once thought impossible to implement. Laws like the Citizenship Amendment Act, the Labour Codes, the New Criminal Codes, fundamentally change the Indian administration of labour, criminal justice and citizenship. As things stand the BJP with 290 seats can form a majority government on it's own, by comparison the entire opposition combined accounts for only 173 seats out of 543

seats. The BJP would seek to maintain this hegemony over the parliament another time in the 2024 elections, but this is a task that is easier said than done.

The victory of the BJP in 2014 was not surprising, what was surprising was the scale of the victory. It was not expected that the Congress which had ruled India for most of it's post independent history would collapse so dramatically. It was not expected that the leading Indian capitalists would so decisively turn it's back to the party that had been it's preferred choice for representation since the British age. Yet, that is where we stand today, the leading sections of the Indian capitalist class have thrown their weight behind the BJP and have held it up as the new chosen representative of Indian capitalism. The BJP has thus far proven to be up to the task, for the most part. It has established a reactionary regime which is anti-labour, anti-farmer and ruthlessly pro-capitalist. It is not above populist concessions, but manages it with a cunning to mask it's exploitation.

The 2019 election was won, despite rising discontent against the party. The initial euphoria of overthrowing the Congress party rule had long since disappeared. The BJP could no longer rely on the mass sentiment against the Congress party to keep winning. It's election winning machinery consists first and foremost, in it's enormous economic power. The BJP has succeeded in amassing an enormous financial power through a combination of large scale organization, extortion using state enforcement institutions, and securing patronage of the largest corporations of India.

To ensure it retains it's core petty bourgeois upper caste constituency, the BJP has maintained and in some ways, even enhanced their reactionary hate speech against Muslims. Divide and rule has been the order of the day. Whether it is defending upper caste interests and oppressing

Dalits more intensely, or propping up the fear of the muslim, the BJP has ensured the working class can be divided, and it's core base is satisfied in continuing to support it. In this way, the BJP satisfies the larger goals of it's mother organization the RSS and it's dream of Hindu Rashtra.

As we head towards the next election, the BJP is both powerful and vulnerable. It has been over ten years since the anti-corruption agitations in India, the rule of the Congress party is fast fading into memory, and many younger voters who have not experienced any other party but the BJP in power, would not be swayed by an anti-congress rhetoric. While the BJP retains it's hegemonic position in the parliament, it remains weaker at the state/provincial level where the opposition bourgeois parties have been able to defeat them in key elections, particularly the 2021 West Bengal elections, one of the worst state level defeats of the BJP.

How we got to this point:



Nehru giving a speech during the 1952 election campaign

Most young Indians would have the faintest memory of the era of Congress hegemony. It might be hard to imagine the party with barely over 50 seats in parliament today, once wielded the kind of dominance we see the BJP having in present day India, but it did. It will be worthwhile to understand how we got to a point here today, where a party of Hindutva trumped the party that claimed to have led India's independence.

Since India's independence till 1991 the Congress party wielded hegemony. The

hegemony acquired the most acute and dictatorial form in the emergency of 1975 which also saw the most intense challenge to it's rule till then.

The Congress party was a party of the big bourgeoisie and land owning bourgeois. These classes wielded political and economic monopoly over India through the Congress party. The period of dirigisme and state capitalism was it's heyday when the Congress dominated the parliament at the center and most states in their legislatures. That hegemony started to weaken from the crisis period of the 1960s.

By the 1970s the contradictions of the Congress system reached it's conclusion and culminated in the emergency. One can argue, that the movement against the emergency of 1975 was the birth of contemporary Indian politics. Many of the regional bourgeois parties found their strength in these mobilizations, and the RSS found new legitimacy.

For the most part, parties like the RJD, the Samajwadi Party or LJP and even the Jan Sangh were petty bourgeois formations, either left wing or right wing. After the end of the emergency, India saw the first non-Congress national government. Like most petty bourgeois efforts, it broke up to internal infighting. The coalition of disparate left and right wing formations was impossible to keep together. Meanwhile, the state of West Bengal became a bastion of oppositional politics as the CPIM won power in the 1978 elections.

In the decades that followed the Congress system became weaker, their hegemony loosened while new capitalist families rose under the shadow of the old monopolists. The 80s saw the rise of the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party and the flowering of Hindutva politics in post independent India.

The decade of the 80s saw the waning of the Soviet Union, and global reaction unleashed by Raegan and Thatcher. The revolutionary upsurge after the Second World War appeared to subside, and the material conditions that created the Congress' hegemony over Indian politics also appeared to change.

While it still maintained hegemony for most of the period of the 80s, with their share of seats peaking in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, by the end of the decade their hegemony seemed to be at an end. The Congress party lost the 1990 elections, again to a coalition of petty bourgeois parties led by Chandra Shekhar. In 1991 India's state capitalist system entered its final crisis in the balance of payments crisis of 1991, forced India to accept IMF loans and open up the economy, a task that it was already well on its way to doing. The Congress would have opened the economy at a slower pace, ensuring it could keep political hegemony, but it came as a shock.

The first half of the 90s saw a period of chaos as no Prime Minister could complete a term, caught between vulnerable coalitions and the Congress party wielding influence to manipulate whoever comes in power. The chaos ended only with the BJP victory in 1998. At last, the new emerging industrial capitalists of post independence India had their representative in power. The price to pay was sacrificing secular politics, the BJP unleashed a tide of anti-muslim communal hatred following the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992. The rise of Hindutva went hand in hand with neo-liberal economics.

The chaotic transition from state capitalist to a relatively open capitalist economy modelled on neo-liberal lines was not easy and it wasn't without political consequences. We are now at a point where the Indian capitalist class is no longer content with solely focussing on expanding in India but with aggressive ambitions of global power.

The five year term of the BJP ended in 2003, to the shock of many in the mainstream capitalist media who were celebrating the victory of a right wing bourgeois party. The Congress came in with a populist agenda and in alliance with the left front parties. In 2004 the party had secured the largest share of the national parliament in its entire history. Riding on the discontent of farmers and workers who had enough of the neo-liberal aggression of the BJP, the Congress led United Progressive Alliance came to power with

the promise of populism. What we got however, was a continuation of the neo-liberal economic policies of the BJP, but without the venom of communal hatred.



L.K Advani leading the rath yatra for Ayodhya

For a time it seemed as though Congress hegemony was well on its way to returning with both the BJP and the RSS in decline throughout India but the Congress rule gave enough fuel for them to revive. Institutionalized corruption, the increased exploitation of rural India, continuing privatization, and the creeping return of the old style of hegemonic politics the Congress was infamous for, contributed to rising discontent against it. The people were not going to be swayed by false promises of welfare while getting exploitation. The hypocritical rule of the Congress was brought down by mass mobilizations. First came the general strike of 2011, then the very next year the anti-corruption mobilization, farmers protests in Bengal, Maharashtra and Kerala, and ultimately the protests against rape in Delhi. These contributed to the rising discontent against the Congress.

With the Stalinists being completely discredited following the massacre of peasants in Nandigram and the Singur agitation against land acquisition, there was no other leftist alternative. The Communist Party led left front alliance had thrown its support behind the Congress Party and its coalition with the idea of countering the BJP. All it gained in return was the Congress Party working to bring it down in alliance with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) which currently rules the state of West Bengal. The parties have not yet recovered from the crisis it found itself in after the 2009 elections. The whole alliance holds not more than 5 seats, from a high of 54 in

2003. This is the lowest share of seats in parliament for the CPIM in its post independence history. From being the main opposition against the Congress for the first two decades, it has sunk to near irrelevance in electoral politics.

The road was open for the BJP and its mother organization to take the fullest advantage of the anti-corruption mobilization, and the protests against rising inflation. The BJP had the backing of sections of mass media, and a strong organizational backing from the RSS. Funds were never a problem, as a major oppositional bourgeois party the BJP could always rely on support from the capitalist class. From being a right wing opposition, it could be primed into becoming the new hegemonic ruling capitalist party. In 2014, the BJP with Narendra Modi at the helm, became the new ruling party of India by an absolute majority in parliament. The Congress Party, which had ruled India for most of the six decades of independent India, was reduced to a mere 44 seats in the 543 seat parliament.



Arvind Kejriwal during the anti-corruption agitation in 2012

The BJP rode the wave of discontent against the Congress, becoming the main force to channelize discontent. The collapse of the Congress was dramatic, not only did it lose the national parliament, they also lost key states that it ruled. The BJP seemed unstoppable, that was until it attempted to push through a new land acquisition law. Mass protests across the nation put an end to these schemes giving the BJP its first major defeat and setting the tone for the dynamic of politics heading into 2019.

The first five years of the BJP saw it riding the wave of discontent that gave it power. Soon enough, it became clear that the leading capitalists of India put their full backing behind the BJP. Money and media became the two biggest tools in their arsenal to influence public opinion. It took little time to corner the bourgeois opposition, whose only real claim to legitimacy came from their nominally secular politics against the rabidly communal BJP. That too was never followed consistently.

The party that had protested on the streets against rising prices now turned a blind eye as the price of essentials sky rocketed, the rupee devalued to its lowest point in decades, and the poor were faced with hunger and unemployment. The drug of religion and communal hatred was administered in ever larger doses to pacify the people. Where the Congress would have attempted to balance between class interests of workers and the bourgeoisie, the BJP remains brazenly on the side of the big bourgeois, with their populist concessions being a knee-jerk reaction to any protest or the need to win the next election.

Neither rising prices nor the debacle of the demonetization of 1000 and 500 rupee notes, could beat the BJP, which increased its seat share from 282 in 2014 to 303 in 2019. By this time however, the wave of discontent against the Congress had subsided. For many the protests against the Congress party, the anti-corruption mobilization, are all distant memories. The only clear legacy from the protests being the rise of the Aam Admi Party and its victory in Delhi and Punjab. The Aam Admi Party has become but another regional bourgeois party with that revolves around the cult of its leader Arvind Kejriwal, much like most regional bourgeois parties.

However, the people are not so easily cowed. The BJP has proven to be a harder opponent than the Congress of 2004, it is less willing to concede, and it has a far larger more stable organizational structure which can more effectively enforce the demands of the ruling class. Yet, the BJP is at its limits. It has thus far

succeeded in monopolizing political funding, it has entrenched its influence over the bureaucracy, especially the management of elections, and it has succeeded in controlling the news media and most critically the judiciary.

It has taken control of the state machinery, but it cannot control the workers and farmers of India. Soon after winning the 2019 elections, the BJP stepped up its reactionary agenda, pushing forward with the abrogation of article 370 and pushing forward with new farm laws and labour codes. These were aimed at the benefitting big agro trading corporations and agricultural corporations at the expense of middle and poor farmers. The Labour codes were designed specifically to help the cause of capitalists to curb worker's protests and make it easier to exploit. Arguably the worst measure that the BJP government took in this period, was the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Almost as soon as these laws were passed protests broke out across the country. The protests against the CAA were among the largest spontaneous protests since the anti-corruption agitations. These shook the government to its core, and prompted a large scale crackdown on activists. Dozens of political activists and youth leaders were arrested, some social activists like Father Stan Swamy were arrested as well, who worked their lives for the welfare of tribal populations in Central India. Political activists like Umar Khalid are still languishing in jail, among India's many political prisoners.



Farmer's agitation in 2020

The protests only ended in 2020 with the onset of the pandemic, it was both a blessing and a curse for the BJP. The pandemic gave them the excuse to impose harsh lockdowns which made political protests impossible. The sudden imposition of the lockdown also caused at least a 1000 fatalities as millions of migrant labourers were given no respite, suddenly found themselves jobless, and had to walk back on foot, unable to find any train or public transport to take them back. This debacle was inescapable for the Modi government. The farmer's protest which started together with a general strike by trade unions in 2020 would prove to be the biggest challenge for the Modi government.

In the aftermath of the total debacle of handling the pandemic, where officially at least half a million Indians died (unofficially perhaps as many as 3 million), proved to be the Modi's undoing.

One by one, the BJP started losing their power over key states, and only narrowly holding on to some states. Rajasthan, Punjab, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Maharashtra were lost in quick succession between 2021 and 2023. The bourgeois opposition had only to place themselves in the right place at the right time to take advantage of what seemed to be like a wave against the BJP. This hope would prove to be premature.

Expectedly, the bourgeois opposition was blind to its own shortcomings. The victory in Maharashtra which saw the Shiv Sena and the Congress align to win against the BJP was short lived. Soon the Shiv Sena split with one faction joining the BJP in a coalition while another remained with the Congress. In Chattisgarh, a state the Congress had for near a decade, complacency, and discontent from farmers eventually drove the Congress out of power. In Bihar, Nitish Kumar who had aligned with the BJP only to switch sides to the Congress and RJD once more switched, this time back to the BJP. Rajasthan, where the government routinely changes every election, saw the revolving door turn in favour of the BJP. The party had proved that as far as bourgeois elections were concerned, the party could always muscle its

way into power, either by its control over the state machinery, or simply buy out support from the ever fickle bourgeois opposition.

The forces arrayed in this election :



Various political parties and their symbols

So, as we head into the next elections, the alignment of forces become clear. On the one hand we have a hegemonic and reactionary bourgeois party in the helm, which has control over the state machinery, the news media, has an immense organization behind it and the unequivocal backing of the big bourgeoisie. The BJP uses this power in the service of the big bourgeoisie and pursues the grander objective of building a Hindu state. On the other hand we have the former hegemonic bourgeois party, which has mostly lost patronage, stands discredited for its history of corruption, but one that can still present itself as the lesser evil, by counting on the collective historical amnesia of Indians. The Congress can at best promise a return to the past, where despite the brutal exploitation of India's workers and peasants, they could at least count on not being discriminated on the grounds of religion. By contrast, the BJP would discriminate against minorities, attack them, marginalize them, and in extreme cases conduct pogroms against them.

Between these two hegemonic parties, are a plethora of smaller regional parties. The regional bourgeois parties by and large replicate the Congress system within their states or regions to one degree or another. Those petty bourgeois parties which emerged in the fight against the

emergency of 1975, against the hegemonic tendencies of the Congress Party, have now become mirror images of the very forces they fought. Dynastic politics, institutional corruption and the typical cynical disregard of the people that characterizes most bourgeois politics, all exist in these parties.

The largest and most corrupt of these is undoubtedly the TMC which appears to be the most influential of the regional parties and was itself an offshoot of the Congress Party.

While the regional parties make their electoral manoeuvres the Stalinists struggle to maintain relevance. It is perhaps the least surprising development that the CPIM has led a leftist alliance with the congress party. Once more, they repeat the very mistake that led them to their disastrous situation. Once more, they sow illusions in the masses that any real change can be achieved from the bourgeois Congress Party.

On the other side, are the farmers protesting in Delhi, the workers struggling against their exploitation at the workplace, and the youth itching for rebellion against a system that has given them neither jobs for a secure future nor a stable present.

Indian capital grows by the intensified exploitation of the countryside, this has been a fact since independence. That exploitation has increased manifold and is about to peak under the BJP. The protests of the farmers in 2020 is but the most acute expression of this crisis. The resistance against exploitation has defined the farmer's movement across the country over the decades. Meanwhile, the working class resistance assumes a new pitch as the old big Stalinist led trade unions decline and new militant unions rise in their place.

The strike actions of the Anganwadi workers are a great example of this new rising militancy, as well as showcasing the bankruptcy of the old trade unions leadership.

Over the last ten years of its existence the BJP government's greatest contribution, has been to show every Indian the limits of bourgeois democracy. It has shown that true power in a bourgeois democracy lies with those who control

capital, for they can manipulate the masses with news media, and distort any election result by deciding who gets more money. More funding translates to better organization and better reach, there is simply no equality between the largest parties and smaller parties in a bourgeois democracy. Neither is there any equality of opportunity in growth of new parties.

The best challenge to the BJP has thus far come from mass mobilizations. Be they protests, strike actions, or marches, they have had more success in pushing back against the BJP than the ramshackle and cynical opposition from the various bourgeois parties. Nevertheless, the elections are still seen by many as a means of challenging the ruling party, and it remains as a means for the masses to express their dissatisfaction, but a tool that is distorted a myriad ways by the power of news media, and BJP's overwhelming money power.

What makes this election decisive ?



RSS cadre with flags : The RSS plans to make India a Hindu Rashtra

On the face of it, this might just be another bourgeois election in India, just like the five years before it, and the five years before that. The problems of communal violence, caste violence, and neo-liberal economic politics, exist now as they have existed before under the Congress. Once more the masses are given a raw deal, having to choose between two or more corrupt and exploitative bourgeois alternatives, or a Stalinist alternative which will simply use it's mandate to support one of the two main bourgeois forces.

The differences emerge when one looks a bit deeper, and sees the insidious nature of the BJP and it's ten year misrule. The BJP itself is a bourgeois party, one that emerged by uniting the right wing faction of the Congress Party which split from the main party, and the Jana Sangh which was a party built by the Hindutva RSS. Over time, the BJP progressively pushed the bourgeois liberal faction to the margins, a process that sped up under Modi.

Today, it is the RSS that holds the most influence over the present day BJP. The influence especially shows when the BJP turns it's sights on issues at the core of the Hindutva agenda. The 'integration' of Kashmir, the creation of a National Register of Citizens, making citizenship contingent on religion through the new citizenship laws, curbing progressive political actions, higher education, and marginalizing Dalits, the BJP has shown itself to be a torch bearer of Hindutva.

The Indian capitalist class feels the need to put their weight behind the BJP at this time, to help charge it's economic growth, at the core of it is the freer exploitation of the countryside and of the working class. The BJP has showed it is more capable of doing this than the Congress, whose old tricks of pacifying the populace with welfare measures and dominating them through the state machinery, no longer worked.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the capitalist class would rather see India become a Hindu Rashtra where non-Hindu minorities and Dalits become second class citizens, than see a threat to their profits and ambitions. The fickle nature of bourgeois opposition leaders who change parties and sides at the drop of a hat, shows this even more brazenly.

Should the BJP win these elections, it is quite likely that they may be able to secure a super majority in parliament at both the lower and upper house. It has already shown what it will do with the existing majority in parliament. Two million Indians who have had their citizenship revoked in Assam remain in doldrums. Over a hundred thousand languish in detention camps.

This is a preview of what to expect should the BJP and the forces of Hindutva roll out the NRC across the nation. Following the abrogation of Article 370, Kashmir and Ladakh have had their statehood revoked and turned into union territories. The suspension of democracy there seems near permanent, and is a dire warning for states in India.

The BJP's attacks on workers and farmers are intense already, and will only increase in intensity should they win.



The agitation of the Anganwadi workers has been one of the most important developments in recent years

What must be done

The last ten years have made it abundantly clear, that bourgeois parties and bourgeois politicians will betray the masses. The capitalist class of India is perfectly at ease with India becoming a Hindu state. Any commitment to secularism was purely superficial, and opportunistic. The façade is broken now.

Despite all the about turns, switches, and betrayals, the Stalinist CPIM led left front have given their support to the so-called I.N.D.I.A alliance led by the Congress Party. The mainstream parliamentary Stalinists have clearly learned nothing from the failure of the last time they aligned with the Congress and the disastrous situation it led to. Once more, the second largest 'Communist' party in the world will use its enormous resources, vast trade union networks, and youth organizations, to lead India's workers and peasants into the arms of the bourgeois Congress.

We stand opposed to this politics! The Congress had six decades worth of an electoral mandate to fight and destroy Hindutva reaction and build a secular society. Far from doing any of that, it supported reactionary parties for its own ends. The Shiv Sena was a creation of the Congress party, and they presided over the worst communal riots in Bombay's history. The Sikh reactionary movement for Khalistan was the result of Congress' policy of supporting reaction to fight a rising Communist movement. Today, these people have put on the mask of secular populists to fool everyone into thinking, that should they get another 5 years that might put an end Hindutva.

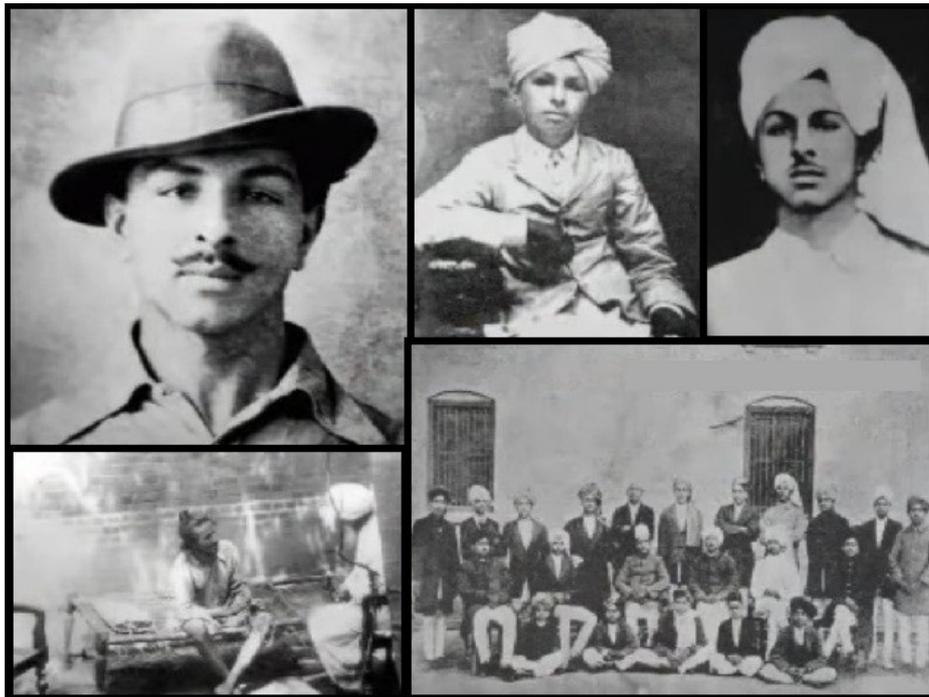
Returning to supposedly better days before the BJP means little for the masses of workers and peasants in India for whom little if anything has changed for the better.

In the least, we must promise a better world than the one we live in currently. For a party that calls itself Communist, at least this much should be expected. Instead, we get a regurgitation of old rotten Stalinist politics of popular fronts with some imagined progressive bourgeois.

The surrender of the largest leftist party to bourgeois forces is indeed a debacle for the working class of India, for it leaves virtually no viable political alternative in the sphere of electoral politics. The challenge against the BJP must be fought out in the streets, factories, and fields. Here, lay the real challenge to the BJP, as shown so clearly by the farmer's protests.

However, the mass actions are not united nor do they have a single political leadership. Consequently, their agendas are limited to their immediate issues. This is not to say, the people are not politically conscious. The fact that the farmer's protests have started anew now when the elections are around the corner shows they have an innate sense of strategy and political understanding.

To unite and channelize this energy, requires a revolutionary party armed with a programme of socialist revolution, and transitional demands. To build this must be our ultimate goal.



BHAGAT SINGH : An Enduring symbol of resistance

On the 13th December 2023, a group of young men and women plotted to bomb the parliament with smoke bombs. This group of young radicals mimicked the methods of a revolutionary from 94 years ago, one who remains a symbol of resistance and rebellion in India to this day.

The actions of the youth who attacked the parliament that day emulated those of Bhagat Singh, and just like him the group performed this action to protest the ruling class and its politics. Bhagat Singh used it to protest the passage of two repressive bills brought before the imperial legislature, while Manoranjan D and Sagar Sharma, the two leaders of this group, used the bomb attack to protest the failure of the parliament to take up issues facing the country, that of inequality, unemployment, and the violence in Manipur.

Both attacks used non-lethal weapons to ensure minimal to no damage to the people in the parliament. The objective was not to kill but to make a political statement. Bhagat Singh courted arrest together with his comrade Bhatukeshwar Dutt, just as the smoke bomb attack plotters did

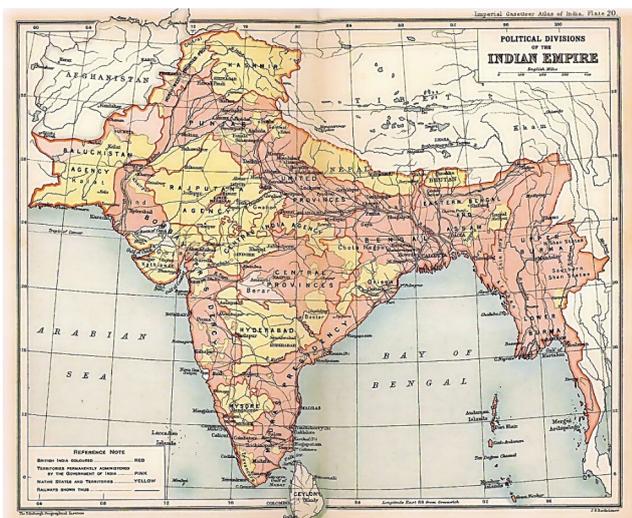
more recently. With Bhagat Singh under arrest, he could use the court proceedings as propaganda against the British Raj. On this count, the smoke bomb attackers have been considerably less successful.

The similarities only grow more distant as one looked into the two actions more closely. The smoke bomb attackers have since been arrested under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and remain under arrest today. Unlike Bhagat Singh, their actions have not led to a wider uprising, there are no great mobilizations to free them. The investigations conducted on them have failed to find any link between the group and any organization or political party. They discussed and coordinated through online groups and chat groups.

There was no specific agenda, nor any political objectives behind their action, beyond the vague goals of challenging the parliament which had grown more and more distant from the people. Nevertheless, their bravery must be acknowledged, their actions cannot be denied or ignored. It is a testament to the enduring legacy

of the revolutionary Bhagat Singh. The bomb attack is equally a testament to how far the capitalists have succeeded in distorting the image of Bhagat Singh, from a Socialist revolutionary, to an aggressive nationalist. At the time when the police arrested the bomb plotters, they sounded nationalist slogans, 'bharat mata ki jai' is today perfectly at home with the right wing BJP.

Bhagat Singh's world:



The British Raj in 1930 . Britain controlled a quarter of the world's territory at this time

Bhagat Singh was a product of the material conditions of his time. To understand him, we must understand the context in which he lived.

After the first war of independence in 1857 British rule in the Indian sub-continent changed. The old company based colonialism was done away with in favour of an imperial bureaucracy that ruled India directly from London. India was primed for a new sort of exploitation as world capitalism entered the era of imperialism.

The British Raj saw the rapid expansion of railways, industrial capital, and the deeper penetration of British finance adding to the vice like grip over India. Added to this was finance capital from the USA and the growth of an indigenous Indian capitalist class tied to British finance capital.

India was dragged into the first world war and became a key supplier of manpower and resources for the British war effort. Indian jute, and Indian soldiers helped the entente win the first world war and carried the British Empire into the post war world. While Indian soldiers fought and died in the trenches of Europe, the jungles of Africa and the deserts of Mesopotamia, India's people suffered through ten million deaths during the influenza outbreak of 1918. The 'Spanish flu' as it was known claimed up to a hundred million world wide, the largest death toll in China and India.

The British handling of the influenza pandemic in India included harsh quarantine measures and mistreatment, coupled with negligence or outright racist exclusion. The huge death toll was very much the result of British administration, and this only contributed to radicalizing the populace against British rule.

For many Indians who did participate in the war, it was expected there would be a quid pro quo from the British, that they would take steps towards granting Indian independence or at least some form of autonomy in recognition of the sacrifice of tens of thousands of Indians for an imperialist war. Instead, for many returning Indians, especially in the province of Punjab, they returned to the iron fisted rule of governor O'Dwyer.

Oppressive acts to curb protests in Punjab, called the Rowlatt Act. The growing nationalist upsurge that had gripped the nation came at a time when the world saw the first successful socialist revolution in Russia. The Indian Communist Party was founded in Tashkent when Bhagat Singh was only 13 years old.

The growth of the left wing Ghadar party, which had influence in Punjab, contributed to radicalizing young Bhagat Singh. The two most decisive events that helped radicalize him, was the non-cooperation movement, the first large scale mass mobilization against British rule since the rebellion of 1857 and it's abrupt disruption by Gandhi and the Congress party following the

massacre of policemen at Chauri Chaura village. From this, the Hindustan Republican Association split, along with other radical outfits that challenged the Congress Party.

Bhagat Singh would join them and become it's most famous revolutionary.

The HSRA :



Ashfaqullah Khan (L) Ram Prasad Bismil (C) and ChandraShekhar Azad (R) leaders of the HSRA

While Bhagat Singh is remembered, the organization he led and fought for has been forgotten for the most part. The Hindustan Republican Army became the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association in 1928.

The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association started it's life as the Hindustan Republican Army, in the model of the Irish Republican Army which had recently won independence for Ireland. The armed struggle presented a contrast to the 'peaceful' mobilizations started by Gandhi.

The organization founded by Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Sachindra Nath Bakshi, Sachindranath Sanyal and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee in 1922 by splitting the youth group of the Congress party in the light of the abrupt suspension of the Non-Cooperation movement.

Bhagat Singh joined the organization in the late 1920s radicalized by the political developments which had taken place over the decade. By the time he had joined the HSRA, he was already

influenced by socialist ideas. No longer was radical republicanism of the old HRA enough, the organization was turned to a militant socialist revolutionary organization. In September of 1928 Bhagat Singh led the union of numerous socialist organizations across Bengal, Punjab and Bihar at Delhi. From this meeting emerged the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association as we know it.

The organization was committed to a socialist revolution in India. The organization rightly identified the oppression of India with the capitalist system and it's manifestation in the last stage, that of imperialism. The independence of India could not be won without also struggling against the capitalist system. It was the workers and peasants of a united India who would have to lead the revolutionary struggle against British Imperialism.

The HSRA stood in defiance of the Congress and the leadership of Gandhi, against his criticism of violence Bhagwati Charan Vohra of the HSRA wrote the Philosophy of the bomb.

To those attempting to paint Bhagat Singh in saffron colours, whether casting him as a pure nationalist or a Sikh hero, would do well to know of his part in building the HSRA into a Socialist revolutionary organization. In it's manifesto, the HSRA clearly aimed at the capitalist system and attempted to rouse the masses in struggle against British Imperialism, as an anti-capitalist struggle. To quote from the HSRA manifesto :

Indian is writhing under the yoke of imperialism. Her teeming millions are today a helpless prey to poverty and ignorance. Foreign domination and economic exploitation have unmanned the vast majority of the people who constitute the workers and peasants of India. The position of the Indian proletariat is, today, extremely critical. It has a double danger to face. It has to bear to onslaught of foreign capital on the one hand. The latter is showing a progressive tendency to joint forces with the former. The leaning of certain politicians in favour of dominion status shows clearly which way the wind blows. Indian

capital is preparing to betray the masses into the hands of foreign capitalism and receive as a price of this betrayal, a little share in the government of the country. The hope of the proletariat is, therefore, now centred on socialism which alone can lead to the establishment of complete independence and the removal of all social distinction and privileges.

Bhagat Singh's ideas :



Bhagat Singh bombing the Central Assembly hall, as depicted in the movie Shaheed (1965)

That Bhagat Singh was a Communist, could not be clearer if one reads his writings. The two of his most famous articles hold some of his endearing ideas. Bhagat Singh's fame began from the bold bomb attack on the Central Assembly Hall in Delhi, what is less known is what was written in the leaflets he threw on the floor of the assembly.

The text of the leaflet was a clear in its condemnation of the repressive bills being discussed before the assembly : *“Without repeating the humiliating history of the past ten years of the working of the reforms (Montague-Chelmsford Reforms) and without mentioning the insults hurled at the Indian nation through this House-the so-called Indian Parliament-we want to point out that, while the people expecting some more crumbs of reforms from the Simon Commission, and are ever quarrelling over the distribution of the expected bones, the Government is thrusting upon us new repressive measures like the Public Safety and the Trade Disputes Bill, while reserving the Press Sedition*

Bill for the next session. The indiscriminate arrests of labour leaders working in the open field clearly indicate whither the wind blows.”

The public safety and trades disputes bills were aimed at curbing the rising militancy of Indian workers, whose ranks grew with the wave of industrial development following the First World War. The growth of left wing and radical trade unions among the workers gave cause for alarm to the British Raj.

The attack on the assembly was not merely an act of directionless rebellion, nor a mere nationalist spectacle, it was a carefully planned political action with the aim of protesting the passage of repressive bills which aimed at curbing protests and enforcing imperial rule.

During his time in prison Bhagat Singh wrote many articles and kept track of world events through access to newspapers. One of his key writings was ‘To Young Political Workers of India’ where Bhagat Singh analysed the political developments of his time and the leadership of Gandhi and the Congress with remarkable foresight. The warning to the youth not to fall into the traps of bourgeois demagogues still rings true today. At the same time Bhagat Singh showed remarkable clarity.

No one reading this writing can doubt where Bhagat Singh's leanings lay. To quote from the article :

I said that, because in my opinion, this time the real revolutionary forces have not been invited into the arena. This is a struggle dependent upon the middle class shopkeepers and a few capitalists. Both these, and particularly the latter, can never dare to risk its property or possessions in any struggle. The real revolutionary armies are in the villages and in factories, the peasantry and the labourers. But our bourgeois leaders do not and cannot dare to tackle them. The sleeping lion once awakened from its slum-

ber shall become irresistible even after the achievement of what our leaders aim at. After his first experience with the Ahmedabad labourers in 1920 Mahatma Gandhi declared: "We must not tamper with the labourers. It is dangerous to make political use of the factory proletariat" (The Times, May 1921). Since then, they never dared to approach them. There remains the peasantry. The Bardoli resolution of 1922 clearly denies the horror the leaders felt when they saw the gigantic peasant class rising to shake off not only the domination of an alien nation but also the yoke of the landlords."

Bhagat Singh's fight did not end at removing the British from India but in removing the capitalist system from India as well. Today, that is the fight we are faced with in India and all of South Asia.

Bhagat Singh and the Communist Party :



Stalin with Churchill at Yalta. Stalin led the Communist international to form popular fronts with 'progressive' bourgeois nationalists, leading to liquidation and weakening of the movement

Much is usually made of Bhagat Singh not joining the Communist Party of India, and typically brought up by centrists and right wingers to counter leftists holding Bhagat Singh as a socialist icon. The manipulation of Bhagat

Singh's image by the bourgeois press is deliberate, to dilute his Socialist past. The truth of why he never joined the Communist Party is never explored. Like much of Bhagat Singh's life and works, memory of his actions are deliberately made hazy.

The truth is, there is no contradiction between the reality of Bhagat Singh as a communist and Bhagat Singh's decision not to join the Communist Party. Shortly after the formation of the party, the comintern and the soviet union would find itself in one of the worst periods of the communist movement. The degeneration of the first worker's state was brought about by the immense weight of imperialist reaction and isolation. The result, was the birth and growth of what we would identify later as Stalinism.

The bureaucratization of the party following the end of the Russian civil war, affected the nascent Indian Communist Party as well. The party was loosely organized in it's early period, and had to deal with the harsh British Indian police. All this at a time, when the comintern directed a policy of aligning with the progressive national bourgeoisie.

The theory of stagism was taken to it's logical conclusion in China, where the Chinese Communist Party was directed to align with the bourgeois Kuomintang. The result was the Shanghai massacre. In the aftermath of this disaster the international entered the third period politics where united fronts of any kind with bourgeois parties was shelved in favour of sectarianism. This was the period when Bhagat Singh was building the HSRA by uniting with other socialist organizations.

The Communist Party had by this time build the Kirti Kisan party or the Workers and Peasants party, which worked within the Congress Party. The party which had at best a fuzzy commitment to socialism was aborted by the third period. Thus, at a time when Bhagat Singh was building the foundations of a revolutionary party in India, the Communist Party of India under the counter revolutionary leadership of Stalin and the troika, went from one confused failure to the next.

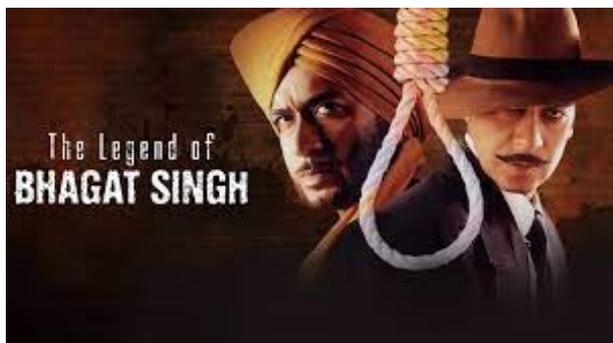
The party in its early phase gave no option to Bhagat Singh who had abandoned the Congress Party and repeatedly called out the leadership of Gandhi. The party in its second phase offered no prospect once it turned to sectarianism.

Rather than deny Bhagat Singh his socialist credentials, his distance from the Communist Party only proved him as a principled revolutionary.

Bhagat Singh today :

Bhagat Singh's image has been diluted and manipulated and presented to us in a manner that he himself might find unrecognizable. Mass media and the bourgeois press, with no small help from the Communist Party and the mainstream bourgeois parties, have converted a revolutionary communist who was a committed atheist, into a hazy nationalist hero whose main contribution begins and ends at the bombing of the Central Assembly Hall in Delhi.

The purpose behind his actions, the ideas behind them, his writings, and his political work, have been largely brushed under the carpet.



The Legend of Bhagat Singh was a successful hindi movie about Bhagat Singh, where he was shown chiefly as a nationalist

The Communist Party which could never win over Bhagat Singh in his lifetime, have tried to appropriate him as one of their own. The Congress Party which Bhagat Singh had condemned and distanced himself from, attempt to dilute his image and place him in a common pantheon of loosely defined 'freedom fighters',

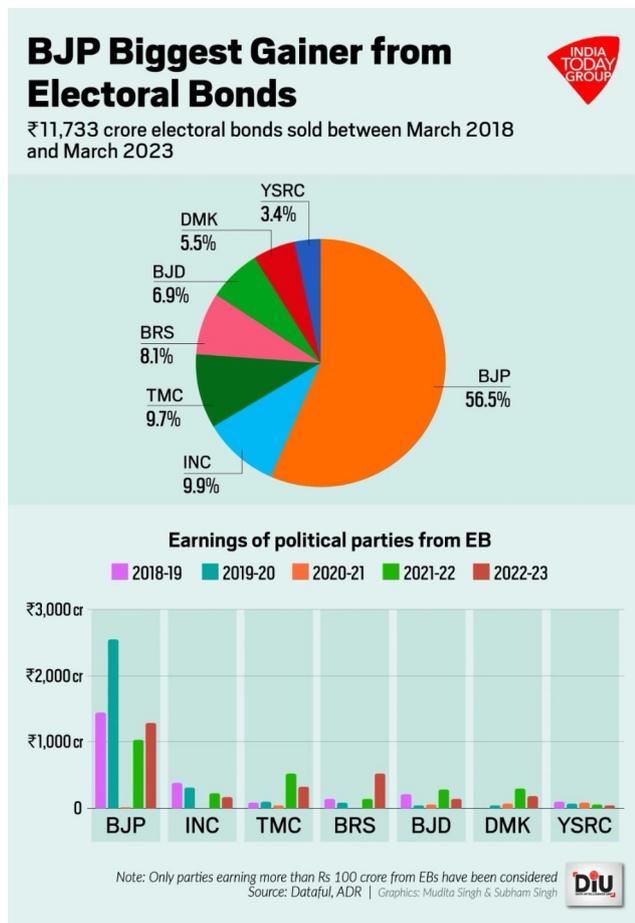
standing side by side with the likes of reactionary Savarkar. The BJP since their inception have tried hard, and are still trying to appropriate Bhagat Singh into their own pantheon as a 'violent radical'.

All three efforts reek of dishonesty and opportunism. Had Bhagat Singh been alive today, it is more than likely he would have been labelled a terrorist and put under arrest, under draconian laws which might remind him of the public safety act and the British Raj. India today has dozens of political prisoners who continue to languish behind bars. At such a time, the government of India's homage to Bhagat Singh cannot be more brazenly hypocritical.

This brings us back to the smoke bomb attack on the parliament in December last year. It would seem as though, in the nearly eight decades of independence the Indian Republic has done everything to make Bhagat Singh's warning come true. He had written in 1931 in his letter to Young political workers: *"But if you say that you will approach the peasants and labourers to enlist their active support, let me tell you that they are not going to be fooled by any sentimental talk. They ask you quite candidly: what are they going to gain by your revolution for which you demand their sacrifices, what difference does it make to them whether Lord Reading is the head of the Indian government or Sir Purshotamdas Thakordas? What difference for a peasant if Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru replaces Lord Irwin! It is useless to appeal to his national sentiment. You can't "use" him for your purpose; you shall have to mean seriously and to make him understand that the revolution is going to be his and for his good. The revolution of the proletariat and for the proletariat."*

Today's India is the government that Bhagat Singh warned us about, the only difference is, that instead of Sir Purshotamdas Thakordas, it is the government of Adani, Ambani and Tata that manifests in Narendra Modi that oppresses the Indian masses. To fight against this, it is not just the bomb that we must learn from, but his ideas and history of organization and agitation as well.

ELECTORAL BONDS : LEGALIZED CORRUPTION



Electoral bonds graph reveals BJP got most of the funding

Following an order from the Supreme Court, the State Bank of India, our largest public sector bank, was forced to release data of electoral bonds redeemed by political parties. A total of Rs 16,492 crores (approximately \$2 billion) were redeemed in phases between the 1st March 2018 and 11th January 2024. Half of this massive amount was redeemed by one party, the BJP.

The electoral bonds scheme was first announced in 2018 and implemented shortly before the 2019 elections. It was another means by the BJP to amass political funding, in what has practically amounted to the legalization of corruption. The list of donors has been revealing, with most of these donations linked with companies that have been the subject of

investigation by the Enforcement Directorate for tax irregularities. What comes to light is a massive extortion scheme by the BJP to garner political funding. At the heart of this, is one of India’s most important banks.

The electoral bonds scheme:

The scheme was first floated in 2017 by the then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. The rationale of the scheme was to streamline, and make vague political contributions more clear. What it achieved was the opposite, in fact it became a tool for the ruling party to amass more funding than any of it’s rivals.

The electoral bond was a type of promissory note which can be bought by any Indian citizen or any Indian organization. The bonds can be procured only by cheque or digital payments, these payments are anonymous and bears neither the anonymity of the donor nor the political party to which it is issued. These bonds can only be issued to parties which have secured at least 1% of the vote in the preceding national elections.

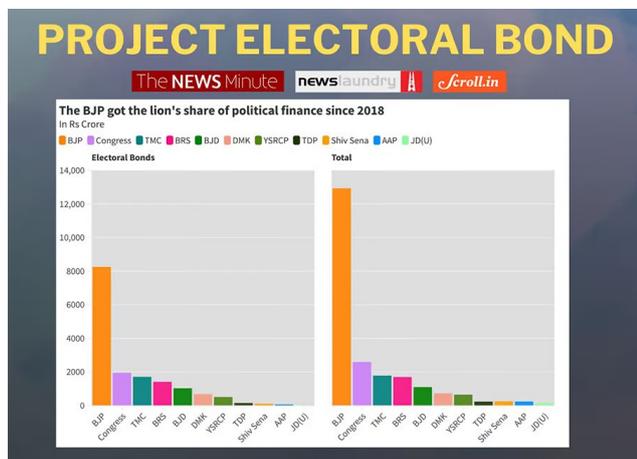
From the very beginning the scheme was controversial. The law was brought in force under the Finance Bill of 2018 presented to the parliament as a money bill. This ensured it would not be debated in the upper house of the Rajya Sabha. The BJP was able to use it’s majority in parliament to push through the law right before the 2019 elections, the results were visible in the elections when the party was able to use it’s considerable financial resources to secure another resounding victory.

The scheme was eventually challenged by the Communist Party before the Supreme Court on the grounds of legality. On the 15th of February, the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bonds as unconstitutional and compelled the State Bank of India, the largest issuer of the electoral bonds, to release data of donors. The

list was handed over to the Election Commission of India (ECI) which has now uploaded the data on the list. Even this list is incomplete and does not account for about Rs 4000 crores (about half a billion dollars) worth of funding.

The beneficiaries of the scheme :

The revelations from the State Bank of India shed light on the long suspected nexus between the government and corporations. While the electoral bonds weren't the only source or even the largest source of political funding for parties, it has been one of the key sources of funding, and a tool for the BJP to monopolize political funding.



A study by newslaundry has revealed the BJP dominates all forms of political funding

The largest recipient of the electoral bonds by far have been the BJP, which received up to 58% of electoral bonds amounting 6566 crore rupees (a little less than a billion dollars). The next highest recipient of bonds was the second largest party, the Congress party, with merely 1,123 crore rupees, just about one sixth of the total of the BJP's bond issue, and less than 10% of the total. Tailing in third place is the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) which is the ruling party of West Bengal, at 1092 crore rupees, almost as much as the Congress Party.

The largest of the donors was a company owned by India's infamous 'lottery king' based in Tamil Nadu, Santiago Martin. A billionaire who built

his fortune by becoming the largest distributor of lottery tickets in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu. At one point his company was selling 12 million tickets a day in 2001. He had been arrested previously in land grabbing cases, and the company Fortune Gaming, had been accused in cases of lottery fraud.

A shady businessman, who built his business empire by gambling on people's lives, now secures his profits by investing in political corruption seems to be the most fitting for a scheme as shady as the electoral bonds. While he is the largest donor, his case is not unique. A closer look revealed that most donors to electoral bonds are companies with dubious financial situations, or suspicious origins, or were the targets of investigation by the Enforcement Directorate or the Central Bureau of Investigation.

The revealed data showed that many loss making companies donated huge sums to electoral bonds scheme. Newly established companies, likely shell companies, at mere months old have contributed massively. Forty three of these new companies bought electoral bonds worth Rs 384 crores. Some of these companies bought millions worth of electoral bonds a mere year or two of their formation. The list also revealed companies which received government contracts in return for purchasing electoral bonds.

The most worrying pattern was seen in companies which bought electoral bonds shortly after being investigated by central government agencies. Electoral bonds worth Rs 335 crores were bought by such companies, following which cases were often withdrawn.

The monopolization of political funding :

The electoral bonds is but one part of a larger lobbying system in India. Till the Supreme Court order, this stood as a system of legalized corruption, the logical conclusion of India's institutionalized corruption, where the parties subverted any pretense of independence of the state from that of the party and the capitalist class.

Institutionalized corruption was a consequence of conceding political supremacy to the Congress party after Indian independence. As the Congress system fell apart in the 90s, the BJP emerged as the next preferred choice of the Indian capitalist class. Today, the BJP is the first preferred choice of India's capitalists, a fact that becomes strikingly clear from the pattern of political funding.

While the electoral bonds are one part of political funding, they are but a small part of the larger political financing.

A study by a group of independent journalists and media outlets, not linked to the mainstream news media or big houses, have conducted a study into political financing. The results show that of all known political financing, the BJP secured the lion's share of up to 60% of political financing, totaling to about 13000 crore rupees, just short of \$2 billion.

The distant second and third in that list are the two other main bourgeois parties the Congress, and the TMC. The Congress which was once the political hegemon in India now accounts for less than one eighth of the total of the BJP's financing. Nevertheless, it is not a small sum, and among oppositional parties, it has received the largest contribution by far.

The picture that emerges from this, is that the BJP has effectively monopolized political funding in India, a trend that has grown especially since 2018, with the advent of the electoral bonds scheme. It is a common practice of the ruling party to give out concessions in return of 'gifts' to its kitty. The BJP has been

able to take over state institutions flawlessly, and wield them to its whims.

Today, the state and party are increasingly becoming one.

The politics of funding :

The trend reveals that the BJP is clearly the preferred choice of the Indian capitalist class, however the Indian bourgeoisie does not wish for a repeat of the Congress system to return in a new package. The oppositional bourgeois parties have been kept alive with a steady funding, even if it pales in comparison to the ruling party's.

The Congress and the regional bourgeois parties, especially that of the TMC in West Bengal, and regional parties of Southern India like the BRS and DMK, have gotten enormous sums in political contribution. The system of lobbying and patronage continues, making mockery of any pretense of democracy under capitalism.

The corruption of the BJP is clear, but neither can the bourgeois opposition claim their hands are clean, simply by pointing to a smaller share of the loot. Given the total imbalance of financial resources in favour of the BJP, it is quite probable that the next national elections will be another stunning defeat for the Congress led opposition. However, should the Congress manage to carve out a victory, it is quite clear that they, much like the BJP, will ultimately turn to serve their paymasters.

At the end of this circus, it is the working class, youth and peasants of India who will be sacrificed at the alter of capitalist profits.

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