

Fascistic Politics in India and the Left

By [Raju Das](#)

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India is experiencing something like a national emergency. This is in the form of persistent, nation-wide attacks on the basic democratic rights of ordinary citizens, by hyper-nationalist and communal forces which are supporting, and which are supported by, [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP). They are especially targeting religious minorities, secularists, Leftists, as well as [dalits](#).

No political project hangs in the air. It must be rooted in material conditions and class relations. Indeed, fundamental to the worldview of the forces playing the politics of religion, is the idolization of *free-market economics*, and of *authoritarian politics* supported by a *mass movement*. Authoritarian politics is necessary to implement free-market economics in the interest of property-owning classes. This is especially so in an unequal, poverty-stricken, relatively backward society like India where millions of people are not only suffering but are also fighting against their conditions, and who therefore have to be suppressed/managed through authoritarian means, if the businesses have to be kept happy.

The ideology and practices of free-market economics and authoritarian politics are dressed up by Right-wing demagogic political leaders, as development (*vikas*) and as good governance, respectively, and sold to voters in the election market. 'Development' and 'Governance' are also used, along with hyper-nationalism based in the idea of the supremacy of Hindu religion over other religions, to help produce a mass movement. So, free-market economic ideas/policies, rabid religious nationalist ideology rousing a mass movement, and authoritarian intolerance toward dissent: all these come together and support each other. One term to describe it all is: growing fascistic tendency.

Safron Crush

In India, to win support for their cause, the fascistic forces have been making good use of electoral methods to mobilize the masses. The saffron party (BJP) is now in power in as many as 13 States on its own and another 9 States with an alliance partner, out of 29 States. It is now the dominant party of the ruling class, including financial capital, and it supports, and is supported by, imperialist capital and its states.

The increasing political significance of the fascistic movement under BJP's political leadership is indicated by the fact that when for the first time in Indian electoral history, there was a direct electoral face-off between the Left and the BJP in March 2018, BJP won. Even though the Left garnered 45% of the votes (down from 48.11% in 2013), the BJP, with its alliance partner won the majority of seats with a vote-share of 50.5%. BJP did so by using money and muscle power, by swallowing up Congress politicians, and by selling the dream

of what it calls 'development'. Shortly after the declaration of the [Tripura election results](#), violent attacks on the communist movement in Tripura by the fascistic movement began. In fact, soon after the results were declared, two statues of **Vladimir Lenin** were taken down by the saffron mob.¹



All these and similar actions demonstrate the Right-wing's deep disrespect for democratic values. The dominance of Right-wing forces represents a most extreme form of the latent tendency toward an attack on democracy, the tendency that exists in capitalist societies when there is massive inequality and where the most basic needs of the masses remain unmet. For the BJP and indeed for the Sangh Parivar under [RSS](#)'s mentorship, one of the main means of acquiring political power is violence against religious minorities, against communists, and against all those who defend democracy and secularism. The question is: what is to be done now?

The remainder of this essay is divided into five sections. The next section deals with the fascistic tendencies as they are manifested in India. The following section talks about Marxist theory of Left politics, and the actually-existing Left politics in India, in terms of its relative strength and weakness, in relation to the fascistic threat. It is followed by a section addressing the question of what is to be done to undermine the fascistic threat? It proposes that Left forces must independently mobilize their basic classes against the fascistic brigade in the extra-electoral sphere, but in the electoral arena, in some cases, they may have to enter into some understanding with bourgeois forces in order to maximize the unity against the BJP. A further section discusses what I call Lenin's theory of political compromise. Finally, the essay concludes by considering the proposal for the fight against fascistic tendencies outlined in light of Lenin's theory.

Congress and BJP as two faces of Indian Bourgeois politics, with a difference

Coming out of the anti-colonial movement which it led, Congress has been the traditional party of the post-colonial bourgeoisie, but since the 1990s at least, its influence has been in decline.² It has failed to significantly raise people's living standards and to ensure that benefits of capitalist economic growth, to which its neoliberal policies contributed, are

distributed in a fair way. BJP has now displaced Congress as the dominant party of the capitalist class, a process that has happened over time. How different and similar are these two political arms of the ruling class?

While Congress plays the religion card ('soft hindutva') to win elections and while it has failed to protect the rights of minorities (note that the 1992 mosque demolition happened under a Congress government at the Center), it will generally not go against the principle of secularism *to the extent that* the BJP does. Its politics is not dominantly based on the politics of sectarian hatred. The politics of hatred is the trademark of BJP.

As far as economic policies, the policies concerning capitalist development, are concerned, there is very little difference between BJP and Congress. Both are enthusiastic supporters of bourgeois class relations, and both support neoliberal forms of capitalism. And capitalists would like to use these parties as their political arms. If anything, BJP is 'the Right-wing of Congress'. In part *because* BJP as a capitalist party has to pursue capitalist development like Congress does, it makes use of politics of religious identity and hyper-nationalism to distinguish itself from Congress in order to sell itself in the voter market as a different and unique commodity.

BJP stands for, and is a part of, a *fascistic movement with Indian characteristics*. BJP is the vanguard of militant political Hinduism. It is the political front of the fascistic movement that is recruiting its cadres from middle class and un- and semi-employed people, by making use of the discourse of the Hindu religion and the Hindutva-based notion of the nation. As a vanguard, it makes use of a variety of resources: the babas (spiritual masters) selling/offering tips, based in religious texts, for mental and spiritual peace; the so-called intellectuals with dubious academic credentials who have suddenly come out of nowhere; RSS cadres who know well how to make *ad hominem* and physical attacks on those who challenge them.³

There are also a few party spokes-persons who regularly show up on TV channels and who seem to know everything about everything and who forcefully champion the views of the Right-wing forces. Then there are fascistic vigilante groups, which force conformity on people to fascistic practices and ideas. BJP uses all these resources to change people's way of thinking/practice from one that is based on reason and empirical-historical evidence and that is critical of economic and political power relations, to a way of thinking/practice that does not care (much) about reason or argument and that seeks to assert, at all cost, the supremacy of Hinduism.

That is not all. The fascistic forces are also blatantly pro-business (and pro-market). In India's contemporary conservative climate, that has been in the making since the late 1980s, what is good for the business class is seen as being good for the nation, where the nation is seen, ultimately, as the territory of the majority-religion (Hinduism). If one says anything against the business class or against the pro-business policies of the government, or against the majority religion, one is considered anti-national. The ideology of the homogenous nation is used to support pro-business policies.

When the Right-wing government gives away to big private business-owners, nation's land, or state-owned companies that have been built on the contributions of the people of the nation, or when it gives away money from nationalized banks to rich investors who do not return it, and who indeed flee the country, and to whom the government does nothing, or when the government prostrates before American imperialist military strategy making

Indian soil available for refuelling U.S. war planes, all this is not anti-national for the Right-wing because all this is done to serve the interests of the nation as *the Right-wing sees it*. In concrete terms, the notion of the nation deployed by fascistic people, the storm troopers of the capitalists, means this: 'for your nation, do not ask for higher wages or better working conditions, and give your hand and land for industrialization'.

That BJP is already seen as a political party like any other is indicative of the weakness of Left-democratic culture and the power of communal-political thinking. The corporate-controlled media acting as the propaganda channel of the ruling class has also helped to popularize the saffron agenda. The fact that leaders and spokespersons of BJP and RSS and other elements of the Sangh Parivar in general, have gained a place on TV and academic discussions demonstrates how normalized the fascistic tendencies have been – especially, in the minds of urban middle class people and other strata. Indeed, it is conveniently forgotten now by many that RSS, which is BJP's spiritual guru and whose foot-army garners votes for BJP, much like the colonialists following the Christian missionaries, has been banned several times in India.

BJP fights elections on the basis of the on-the-ground-work done by the Sangh Parivar 'missionaries'. Such groundwork includes brutal attacks on communists and on secularists and democrats, as well as charity work (think about RSS-funded network of schools in rural areas, that takes advantage of complete collapse of state-funded education), ideological brain-washing, and false promises creating illusion about its pro-people character. BJP takes advantage of people's need for religious consciousness in a society where there is massive suffering caused by class relations which BJP itself is an enthusiastic Right-wing supporter of. BJP takes advantage, as well, of people's economic insecurity which is alleviated by a sense of agency and empowerment when what one does and think has some palpable effect: killing fellow-citizens, destroying a monument, etc.

Prior to major elections, BJP typically resorts to sectarian violence and communal polarization as it is doing in Bihar, Rajasthan, etc. The aim is to cultivate its Hindu vote bank and garner Hindu votes. And when the BJP comes to power, the Sangh Parivar gets support to expand its tentacles inside the state, including educational and coercive institutions. When in power, it also pursues communal politics to satisfy the divisive cultural-political agenda of RSS, and to divert attention from its own failure to improve people's conditions, a failure that is a given because of its utterly pro-business character.

Underlying all these factors behind BJP's popularity is the fact that sections of the ruling class itself (the bourgeois and big-landlords), have shifted their loyalty to the BJP from Congress, even if not always willingly. If the ruling class can benefit from BJP's authoritarianism that helps it implement neoliberal-capitalist policies, why not support it?⁴ The business class is very happy with the BJP, even if its saffron-fascistic hands are colored red by the murders of minorities, democrats, secularists and communists.

BJP is the political head of an ideologically driven mass movement that is rooted in small-scale producers and un- and under employed people, a movement that attacks democratic and social rights of workers and peasants. It is a movement by common people against common people. The rise of BJP is a part of world-wide Rightwing political trend moving on a fascistic path (Anievas, et al, 2014; Panitch and Albo, 2016).

BJP is a communal and authoritarian force, and represents an attack on democracy and secularism as well as on the living conditions of people and on nation's sovereignty. True to

its Right-wing bourgeois nature, it pursues neoliberal policies to create opportunities for national and imperialist capital. It subordinates India to U.S. or any other form of imperialism, in spite of its demagogic, hypocritical discourse about nationalism. Its notion of nationalism is more a religion-driven mental state rather than a material reality, which can be mobilized against imperialism. Of all bourgeois political movements/ tendencies/parties, the saffron movement, with the BJP at its political core and as its political vanguard, is the most dangerous threat to the communist Left, given that their ideologies are diametrically opposite. It is a threat to everyone who is committed to the culture of decency in public discourse, to democracy, secularism and rational dissent. In so far as BJP is all this, it must be the target of an all-out fight, a fight on economic, political and ideological fronts.

What is the Left to do to fight fascistic tendencies?

The *main* method of the fight against communal-fascistic politics must be class-based. Such a class politics requires a much stronger Left than exists now, and that presupposes principled Left unity. Such unity must produce a gradually expanding united front of Left forces as representatives of workers and semi-proletarians, the forces which exist separately and strike together, and which deploy the full spectrum of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary methods, with the primacy given to the latter. The Left must mobilize workers and small-scale producers affiliated to it and must attract workers and small-scale producers who may not be and who may be with non-communist secular parties, to fight fascistic forces in every possible way, and wherever these forces operate, including on the street. What should be targeted are not only the political and cultural views of these forces (their attack on democratic rights and secularism, their hyper-nationalism, etc.) but also their pro-business economic and pro-imperialist, policies.

The electoral sphere is indeed one of the spheres in which class struggle happens. With respect to the fight against fascistic tendencies, a *small* aspect of the fight of the Left – and indeed fight for economic concessions and fight for socialism – must be the fight in the electoral sphere. The word ‘small’ is used to refer to the fact that the Left’s electoral activity must be subordinated to its overall political-ideological struggle, and to its extra-electoral struggle. The struggle within the electoral sphere, which is important given that liberal democracy is a shell of Indian capitalism, has many dimensions. Winning a few seats in the parliaments/assemblies, etc. gives the Left a chance to make its voice of reason heard.

An important part of the protracted process of class struggle is an attempt to stop a fascistic party from coming to power and from making use of state’s resources to attack social and democratic rights of ordinary people and to destroy – or at least severely weaken – the communist movement. Between various forms of bourgeois government, some forms are more conducive to class-mobilizational work by the Left than other forms, so the Left cannot be neutral to which forms of bourgeois government exist, just as it cannot be neutral toward whether capitalism is peasant capitalism or landlord capitalism. A government that is run by fascistic, communal and hyper-nationalistic elements, a government that attacks democratic rights *as well as* living standards of people, is the least conducive to class-based movements. One can see this when communists are hurt, statues of communist icons are demolished, communist offices are ransacked, and so on.

The process of fighting for a new society must include the fight for the very conditions for that fight. The Left must fight for these conditions. It must make sure that the Right-wing government – a major source of, and a major expression of, the power of the fascistic movement – must go, and that a secular government is in place, which has a reasonable

amount of respect for democratic rights of people.

The Left must mobilize its basic classes (workers and small-scale producers) in extra-electoral activities, to fight for democratic rights and secularism and to fight for economic concessions, as a part of, and as steps toward, the fight for socialism; and electoral activities must be seen as *only a small part* of the Left's political work, a prime aim of which must be the development of democratic-secular consciousness, and of trade union consciousness, and then the transformation of these forms of consciousness into communist consciousness or class consciousness proper.

It is this Marxist/socialist perspective that must shape Left's approach to the electoral fight against fascism. In fact, the arrival of fascistic tendency as a part of, and as a response to, capitalist crisis and reaction, is a great opportunity for the Left to say this to people (at least, to relatively politically advanced workers and peasants, in the first instance): the ruling class and its political parties are failing not only to meet economic needs but also they are failing to support basic democratic values, and therefore must be overthrown. The aim of communist parties is to launch class struggle, which is the struggle that is shaped by the consciousness that interests of capitalists (capitalists and landowners) cannot be fundamentally reconciled with the interests of workers and small-scale producers.

As mentioned earlier: unity of Left forces is fundamental to the task of fighting the fascistic forces. Then, in as many constituencies as possible, secular-minded parties/movements/individuals must be united against BJP and its allies, before, during, and after the elections, and inside the parliaments/assemblies and outside. There should be as wide a secular front against communalism as possible, a front that is at the same time, to the left of BJP (and Congress-as-it-exists-now) in terms of economic policies. How this can be done is a different matter.

What is to be done to undermine the fascistic threat?

One way to think about this is as follows. There are at least a dozen regional parties in India that are 'secular' (or relatively secular) in that they do not employ the communal card as consistently and as forcefully as the way BJP does and they are not fascistic as BJP and the saffron family: BJD, RJD, BSP, SP, JMM, DMK, AAP, TMC, People's Justice Centre, etc. Regional parties are basically parties that represent interests of large land-owners, regional petty-bourgeoisie, including better-paid sections of the salaried stratum or the 'professional class' living/working in a province; and, importantly, the regional bourgeoisie – the fraction of the bourgeoisie whose scale of operation is more or less sub-national/regional and which faces competition from big bourgeoisie.⁵ In many ways, the secular regional parties are regional counter-parts of Congress. Some of them are actually regional offshoots of Congress.

The Left is the most principled fighter against the curtailment of democratic rights and against the attack on secularism. In that capacity, and in so far as it is the greatest reservoir of democratic-secular consciousness, the Left must help establish a national-level coordination committee for the fight against communalism and fascistic tendencies. A part of this process, from an electoral angle, should be an attempt to establish a federation of regional parties, to which the Left should provide any theoretical and other forms of help as required. The unity among regional parties must be based on at least three commitments.

One is the commitment to secular politics: they must be opposed to conducting politics in the name of religion, and they must be opposed to discrimination against any group based

on religion, whether it is majority or minority religion.⁶ Where these parties (e.g. BJP, BJD, BSP, TMC) were in an alliance with BJP in the past and have opposed BJP since, they must critically review their past practice, draw the lessons, and publicly reforge their commitment to secularism. Secondly, given that millions of people are attracted to the right-wing BJP because of the failure of economic policies of Congress, the regional parties, if they wish to be not eaten up by BJP (and BJP does, and can, eat into regional parties' support base), must be committed to people's welfare and some restriction on the power of capitalists and landowners to amass limitless wealth.

Sustainable opposition to secularism cannot be possible unless it is based on the opposition to Right-wing economic policies hurting the masses, i.e. unless such opposition is based on progressive economic policies: once again, free-market economics and authoritarian communalism rooted in a mass movement, are two sides of the same coin, whether or not some free marketers oppose communalism and whether not some communalists support some amount of state control and state support for the poor.

Thirdly, regional parties cannot operate at the centre (federal level) *merely* as a motley of regional parties: the collectivity of regional parties must have a national-scale vision of how to make sure that: a) India remains a secular-democratic nation with a reasonably independent foreign policy and a policy of good relations with neighbours, and b) it remains a country where federalism – equitable, democratic, relations between the Center and the States – matters. If voted to power, they must act as *if* they are parts of a national party – i.e. as a *federation* of regional parties, which, collectively, will seek to improve conditions of people of India as a whole (its workers and peasants, and various oppressed groups such as tribal communities, women, dalits, religious minorities, etc.) and not just in their particular States where these parties rule or have an influence, although they will maintain their own regional identities.

In fact, such a *regio-national* approach of regional parties is increasingly necessary given that development of one State is linked to, and dependent on, development in another State, because of the inter-State flow of people, capital, water, polluted air, etc. Once again, the national federation of *regional* parties must be based on their *common* commitments to the people of India, the commitments which have only *regional* manifestations. The three commitments of regional parties that are just mentioned overlap with Left's values: secularism; pro-poor policies, and a multi-scalar approach, which includes going beyond the narrow confines of a region.

In those States where a major regional party is not contending for power, and where the Left is also weak, Congress will be the main anti-BJP force and which must receive support from all secular forces, both from the Left and outside. For this to happen, for Congress to avoid competition from non-BJP parties, it must change its hyper-neoliberal approach to development (which it shares with BJP more or less) to one that gives much more emphasis to the bottom 70% of the population than it normally has, especially to address the agrarian crisis, ensure employment security and a decent standard of living in cities and villages and promote ecological sustainability.

This means that if Congress wishes not to be eaten up and/or dominated by the Right-wing BJP, it must be less subservient the business class (and just to crony-capitalists) and must give up its obsession with trickle-down economics, the idea that when the business class increases its income, when the national growth rises, poverty will be eliminated. To get

support from other parties, including Left parties, Congress cannot do the following: share with BJP its Right-wing economic policy, and fight against BJP on the ground that BJP is communalist. To adequately fight the BJP, Congress cannot be merely a secular BJP.

Whether it is Congress or the federation of regional parties, all parties must be willing to have a vision of development that counters BJP's 'Modani', or Gujarat, model of free-market-based development. This is true even these parties will not go beyond a limit in pursuing a non-neoliberal, pro-people developmental path. It is not enough for people to be protected against attacks on their political freedom, including religious freedom. They need to experience freedom from hunger, from debt, from job-insecurity, etc. The tiny and super-affluent business class must be politically forced by all secular forces to grant some economic concessions to the majority.

The Left must not be a part of a governmental front, which is inevitably a *bourgeois*-democratic front, no matter how secular it may become. It must be outside of the front and support it in its fight for secularism. The Left must demand pro-poor policies from the secular-democratic front. And it must carry on its class-based anti-capitalist mobilization, and that means that beyond a point, the secular bourgeois parties are not the friends of the Left. They are only temporary allies.

India is a large and geographically diverse country, where social and political conditions vary enormously. The fight, within the electoral sphere, against fascistic forces will have to be somewhat different in different States. What was said above can be summarized in the form of five scenarios (it is needless to say that this is provisional, given the complexity of the situation).

1. BJP — Regional 'secular' party₁ — Regional 'secular' party₂ — weak Congress — weak Left (e.g. Uttar Pradesh)

(All non-BJP parties, including Left, against BJP, on the basis of tactical seat sharing - or tactical electoral unity — among secular parties.)

2. BJP — Regional 'secular' party₁ — weak Congress — weak Left (e.g. Odisha)

(All non-BJP parties, including Left, against BJP, on the basis of tactical support for the Regional party from all secular parties.)

3. BJP — 'strong' Congress base — Regional 'secular' party₁ — Regional 'secular' party₂ — weak Left (e.g. Gujarat, Rajasthan)

(All non-BJP parties against BJP; non-BJP secular parties, including Left, to give tactical support to Congress.)

4. BJP — Strong Left base — Regional 'secular' party₁ (e.g. West Bengal)

(Publicly acknowledging its past mistakes, Left to vigorously campaign against neoliberalism and communalism, against all contending parties, on the basis of its mass and class movements.)

5. BJP — Strong Left base — Congress (e.g. Kerala)

(Maximum unity against BJP to be sought among Left and democratic forces; Left to campaign against neoliberalism and communalism on the basis of its mass and class movements; Congress should consider tactically supporting Left.)

The political strength of the Left varies not only across States but also across regions/constituencies inside a State. While the above 'model' is pitched at the level of States, Left should stand its candidates where its class and mass organizations are strong and where it has a chance of winning a seat, partly on the basis of its negotiation for tactical support from non-BJP secular parties. Where it has very limited chance of winning a seat, it must provide tactical support to secular parties in return for these parties reducing their pro-business character.

Such a big compromise?: Return to Vladimir Lenin

The idea that the Left should help establish an economically progressive front of secular bourgeois parties to fight fascistic tendencies, and that this might require Left's tactical electoral understanding with bourgeois parties, is potentially a very problematic idea. First, this idea is not in line with the principle that the Left should mobilize its own forces, independent of bourgeois forces. Besides, various regional parties have been with BJP from time to time and have not been consistently secular; non-BJP, non-Left, regional parties have had no problem accepting into their arms, the leaders from the BJP camp. The regional parties are also *bourgeois* parties.

So, to have some relation with these regional parties would be a compromise not only on Left's secularism but also on the principle of class politics. In fact, regional-bourgeois parties have converging interests with national and global bourgeoisie (which opens regional branches, to which regionally-based small-scale capitalists are linked through the supply chain) and with therefore with BJP; after all, the regional bourgeoisie wishes to benefit from neoliberalization that BJP promotes, including by directly entering into deals with national and global capital. Also how can the Left have any relation with Congress, which is such a neoliberal-capitalist party?⁷

If the Left is in an electoral understanding with bourgeois parties, whether these are national or regional parties, to fight communalism, and when these parties pursue policies that attack people's living standards, how and to what extent can the Left counter these policies/parties? In the name of protecting secularism, if the Left fails to defend economic rights of the masses, what would be left of the Left? There is indeed a real danger that workers and peasants affiliated to the Left parties will be politically subordinated to the bourgeois parties who will hold power and with whom the Left will be cooperating.

These and similar questions have great merits. But here the argument is that on a long journey toward socialism and in actual practice, in the short and medium term, and keeping in view the current political conjuncture, one *has to make* temporary compromises and engage in temporary retreats. But what does compromise really mean? We need to read about it from someone who is, arguably, the Marxist theoretician and Marxist politician *par excellence* of the 20th century. This is Vladimir Lenin whose statues were recently brought down by thoroughly anti-democratic people with an extremely low level of political consciousness. Let's briefly consider what I will call Lenin's theory of temporary compromise, which is present mainly in two of his texts.

“The term compromise in politics implies the surrender of certain demands, the renunciation of part of one’s demands, by agreement with another party” (Lenin, 1917). It is important to bear in mind that: “The task of a truly revolutionary party is not to declare that it is impossible to renounce all compromises.” As Engels said against the Blanquist communards, it is mistaken to believe that “we want to attain our goal without stopping at intermediate stations, without any compromises, which only postpone the day of victory and prolong the period of slavery” (quoted in Lenin, 1920).

Lenin was scathing in his criticisms of those German communists who thought that “All compromise with other parties . . . any policy of manoeuvring and compromise must be emphatically rejected.” In launching class struggle, “to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one’s enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies) – is that not ridiculous in the extreme?”

One might then ask: why is compromise necessary and possible? Let us consider the matter of temporary compromise from the vantage point of: nature of the class enemy and nature of the working class. Let’s begin with the class enemy of the working class. It is, like any class, both unitary and fragmented. The fact that the ruling class fractions have different interests and therefore there will be different kinds of bourgeois parties to represent the different ruling class interests explains why Left’s compromise is possible:

“The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, careful, attentive, skilful and obligatory use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies..., any conflict of interests among ... the various groups or types of bourgeoisie ..., and also by taking advantage of any, even the smallest, opportunity of winning a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional” (ibid.; italics added).

Lenin (1920) adds: “Those who do not understand this reveal a failure to understand even the smallest grain of Marxism, of modern scientific socialism *in general*” (italics added).⁸

Let’s turn to the nature of the working class in relation to the need for compromise, in Lenin’s theory. The working class is potentially the most revolutionary agent. No anti-capitalist revolution is possible without this class, apart from this class, over the head of this class or with a substitute for this class and its organization. Yet, the working class, although it is an objective reality, falls short, ideologically and politically. It is deeply divided. It is shaped by ideas and interests of non-proletarian classes. Its level of class consciousness and political preparedness is relatively low to fight for deep democratic transformation and to conduct a socialist struggle. And these facts together constitute an objective reason why Left’s temporary compromise is *necessary*. Here is Lenin:

“Capitalism would not be capitalism if the proletariat pur sang were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types... [of non-proletarian people, including small masters]. ... if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on” (Lenin, 1920).

Lenin continues:

“From all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, its class-conscious section, to resort to changes of tack, to conciliation and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters” (ibid.; italics added).

So, temporary compromises in the electoral sphere are objectively *necessary* when/where the working masses are divided and not class conscious (enough) and thus, concomitantly, the Left is weak, at this juncture. Compromises are *possible* because there are conflicts of interests among the economic and political elite (i.e. various parties).

In line with Lenin’s theory, it is possible to argue that temporary compromises in the electoral sphere, which can pose ideological and political risks (of subordinating workers and peasants to bourgeois forces), are justified only when the following criteria are met. First, compromises are unavoidable – they are forced by conditions (e.g. Left is weak relative to, say, fascistic forces). Second: compromises, ultimately, contribute to the political project of raising the level of consciousness of the masses and advancing the goal of the communist struggle against a) capitalism’s adverse consequences for the masses, and against b) capitalism as such.

As Lenin says, tactics of compromises are applied only “to *raise* – not lower – the *general* level of proletarian class-consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win” (Lenin, 1920). Third, Left forces maintain their organizational and ideological independence vs non-left parties and movements. Fourth, the Left will always have the right to criticize, and to politically go against (mobilize its classes against) its temporary allies when their policies attack living conditions of ordinary people. Fifth, Left’s *dominant* focus is on extra-parliamentary mobilization, including for economic struggle, of workers and peasants, and not electoral battles which involve tactical understanding with non-Left forces.

Once again, “The task of a truly revolutionary party is not to declare that it is impossible to renounce all compromises, but to be able, *through all compromises*, when they are unavoidable, to remain true to its principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the mass of the people for victory in the revolution” (Lenin, 1917).⁹ The point of political compromise is not to merely arrive at a capitalist society that is slightly tolerable and that just needs to be managed by Left forces for ever.

The compromise in question here is revolutionary compromise (like Luxemburg’s ‘revolutionary reforms’), the compromise that is *temporarily* necessitated by the force of *circumstances* relative to the strength of the Left forces, in order to advance the long-term *revolutionary* goal, the goal of transcending capitalism and not to help sustain capitalism *sans* fascistic tendencies. Therefore: “Naïve and quite inexperienced people imagine that the permissibility of compromise *in general* is sufficient to obliterate any distinction between opportunism...and revolutionary Marxism, or communism.” In fact, “the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is *full* of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!” (Lenin, 1920).

Conclusion

By way of concluding, I will consider what relevance might Lenin's theory have for the conjuncture in India (and indeed similar other countries)? It is that: that certain bourgeois (regional) parties are less consistently secular than Left parties and that they are vacillating, is no ground for non-compromise if a temporary compromise can remove the currently existing important obstacle to the communist movement and advance the objective of class struggle in the medium and long-term.

As mentioned, every class, and the class enemy of the working class, are both unitary and fragmented. In so far as all bourgeois parties support capitalists and landlords, they are the same, unitary, class enemy: Congress and BJP constitute a unitary enemy. But these parties support the ruling classes in *different* ways. Some parties – like some sections of ruling class – may be more secular-minded than others. Some may be *slightly* more pro-poor or pro-worker, pro-peasant, than others. In terms of the political representation of ruling class interests, there are two facts. Firstly, different interests of the ruling class (with its different fractions) are represented by different parties.

Secondly, these parties, to remain in electoral competition, if not for any other basic principle, will represent the given interests of the ruling class differently, and in ways that are conflictual within limits (a non-BJP party has to be different from BJP to be in electoral competition and will therefore serve the ruling class in different ways than the BJP does).¹⁰ These two facts concerning the political representation of the ruling class constitute an objective reason why temporary compromise by Left is possible.



Accredited social health activists (ASHAs) striking for their rights.

In fact, small-scale parties (regional parties) which are parties of 'small masters' (small-scale capitalists), potential electoral allies of Left parties are : "vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional," especially, when it comes to the fight for secularism (and indeed, for progressive economic policies). Yet conflicts between them and bigger (e.g. pan-Indian) parties can produce a possibility for what Lenin calls "*conciliation and compromises ... with the various parties of the workers and small masters.*" Similarly, when Congress as a pan-

Indian bourgeois party is in danger of being eaten up by BJP which is another pan-Indian bourgeois party, it may need Left's support for its own existence, producing a possibility for compromise, enabling the Left to fight fascistic forces with support from Congress.

If the Left was strong, it could mobilize its classes independently of bourgeois forces, both outside and inside the electoral field of struggle, and especially including the BJP, a party which is not a communal party that happens to support the business class but a bourgeois party that makes use of communal hatred to attain political influence. But if the Left is relatively weak as it is at this conjuncture, then it needs to temporarily compromise, within limits, on the principle of independent electoral politics (i.e. it may have to enter into some – tactical – electoral understanding with bourgeois forces).

There are at least elements here: a) the temporary compromise in the electoral arena with vacillating secular bourgeois parties that may be objectively necessary, and b) the project of advancing class struggle. These two elements constitute a dialectical whole, within which the first element must be subordinated to the second. This means that the communist parties cannot just show their face to the masses during elections, and then disappear for 5 years.

This also means that while organizing the masses for concessions from the system, they must be as un-compromising as the subjective and the objective situations allow, and that they must educate the masses about the fact that their fundamental class interests are not compatible with those of the bourgeoisie and large landowners, which is why the question of not only democracy (whatever it is called by various electoral and non-electoral Left parties), but also of socialism must gradually come to the front. Otherwise, the temporary compromise becomes permanent, and the project of advancing class struggle gets transformed into a means of reproducing a more tolerable capitalism for an indefinite future.

If Lenin is right that “the greatest efforts are necessary for a proper assessment of the actual character of this or that ‘compromise’” (Lenin, 1917), this means that what needs to be questioned is not the idea of a temporary compromise itself but its goal. What is problematic is not compromise but ‘compromise-ism’: seeking a compromise to permanently reproduce a bourgeois order in slightly democratic and egalitarian forms, without any vision and action aimed at the long-term transformation of society.

And such a vision – i.e. goal of fighting for socialism – must be taken out of communist party documents and be given a material expression. It must be actually talked about in the everyday life of the masses and of communist leaders, i.e. in their daily struggles, at the picket lines, during protests against militarism and against cuts in funding for welfare, in party meetings, on the street, in the eating places, in the corridors of university departments where communists work, in theatres, in the editorial board meetings of Marxist online and offline journals, and indeed every place, big and small. Any temporary compromise on the socialist principle is not worth it if it is not seen as ultimately advancing the communist cause.

It should be stressed that the aim of secular-democratic bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces, partly because of the danger that fascistic tendencies pose to them, may just want to confine their political work to the creation of a polity that weakens such tendencies. And that political aim overlaps with the socialists' aim to undermine – to revolt against – fascistic tendencies, and such a revolt has to be also a revolt against fascists' pro-business policies and attack on workers and small-scale producers living standards. But that revolt is limited,

because as socialists:

“it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far – not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world – that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers. Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one” (Marx and Engels, 1850).

*

Raju J Das teaches radical political economy, international development, state-society relations, and social struggles at York University, Toronto. Das is on the editorial board of [Science & Society](#) and the editorial advisory board of *Dialectical Anthropology*. His most recent book, published in 2017, is [Marxist Class Theory for a skeptical world](#) (Brill, Leiden).

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Notes

1. Interestingly, one of the most prominent statues of Lenin in India, at Esplanade in the center of Kolkata, remains in place even though the Left is no longer in power.

2. This is the case even if in February 2018, it won by-elections in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

3. A student activist from JNU said to me: “RSS people will give us blankets in the night and beat us up

in the day,” meaning they can be very nice but when you argue with them, they will beat you up. A major human rights activist and former professor in a major Central University said this to me: “RSS people when they join a public debate always make personal attacks on people who challenge them, because that is their overall strategy but in private they might apologize.”

4. In 2009, Anil Ambani said: “Narendrabhai has done good for Gujarat ...A person like him should be the next leader of the country” (quoted in Karat, 2014: 7).

5. Note that the distinction between the two is not necessarily clear-cut, as regionally operating firms are connected to nationally-operating larger firms, as suppliers and in other ways.

6. As UP’s by-election results show, when reasonably secular-minded regional parties are united against communal forces, they can electorally beat the BJP.

7. One can also rightly complain that the Left itself has acted like neoliberal Congress in the provinces where it has been in power. Luckily, the Left is rethinking its own land acquisition policy. Geographical scale cannot be an excuse for inconsistency: one cannot advocate for more progressive policies at national scale and less progressive policies at the provincial scale.

8. Lenin (1920) notes: “Those who have not proved *in practice*, over a fairly considerable period of time and in fairly varied political situations, their ability to apply this truth in practice have not yet learned to help the revolutionary class in its struggle to emancipate all toiling humanity from the exploiters. And this applies equally to the period *before* and *after* the proletariat has won political power.”

9. “To agree, for instance, to participate in the Third and Fourth Dumas was a compromise, a temporary renunciation of revolutionary demands. But this was a compromise absolutely forced upon us, for the balance of forces made it impossible for us for the time being to conduct a mass revolutionary struggle, and in order to prepare this struggle over a long period we *had* to be able to work even from *inside* such a ‘pigsty’.” (Lenin, 1917).

10. These limits refer to the fact that all parties must fundamentally support capitalism and private property, and within these limits, specific political parties can pursue their interests that may be relatively autonomous of ruling class interests, and sometimes may even deviate from ruling class interests (in profit-making, etc.).

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