

- ▲ Democracy for Social Transformation
- ▲ Agroecology Works!
- ▲ The Tide Is Turning
- ▲ Water Grab
- ▲ Depoliticisation
- ▲ Do Globalise



development digest

02

Contents

✓ 1. Democracy for Social Transformation Beyond Democracy by <i>Rajni Kothari</i> . Exploring Democracy by <i>Ashutosh Kumar</i> – a review of Democracy in India edited by <i>Niraja Gopal Jayal</i>	STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION	1
2. Agroecology Works! Towards an Agroecological Alternative for the Peasantry by <i>Peter Rosset</i> .	BIO-REGIONALISM	13
4. The Tide Is Turning Promise of the Chavez Offensive by <i>C. P. Chandrasekhar</i> .	SOCIAL-POLITICAL MOBILISATION	21
5. Water Grab Water Woes by <i>Sarosh Bana</i> . A Bid ...for Water by <i>Darryl D'monte</i> . The Last Common Property : A Historical Reminder by <i>Richard Mahapatra</i> . Water Crisis by <i>Anil Lal</i>	COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES	25
6. Depoliticisation A Text Without A Context by <i>Neera Chandhoke</i>	DEPOLITICISATION	37
7. Do Globalise <i>Pratap Pandey</i> reviews Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate by <i>Naomi Klein</i> ; Ed. <i>Debra Ann Levy</i>	GLOBALISATION	41

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This digest features important articles on development and social transformation in order to reach those working in the field and not having knowledge of these documents. It is aimed at promoting further reading of the originals, and generating public debate and action on public issues. The articles are compiled and edited for easy reading and comprehension of the concepts, and not so much to reproduce the academic accuracy of the original texts.

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Democracy for Social Transformation

Democracy is under scrutiny.

There is growing disillusionment with prevailing models of democracy, in particular, representative democracy. The tendency towards autocracy and fascism is not just seen in national institutions. The practice of democracy and the representative character of its processes bring dilemmas of effectiveness and sustainability especially for grassroots level institutions.

The practice of participation on the other hand brings its own set of problems that need to be dealt with. It is fine at the grassroots level, and very effective for constant face-to-face transactions, even though this also has its problems. But when we scale up, we have a problem with participative processes at regional and national levels.

Along with it, there are the slowly emerging aspirations for what Rajni Kothari calls "genuine democracy", as an instrument of transformative politics.

Rajni Kothari pleads for the re-conception of democracy, not as a prescription and 'road-map', but as a concerted search for meaningful practice at all levels of society. In fact, he talks of democracy as an emancipatory ethic of the whole of society, as refashioning the whole of human enterprise.

In a new book, Democracy in India, Niraja Gopal Jayal presents several essays on development and democracy which are integral to the project of modernising the Indian State. Civil Society should bridge the gap between formal structures of governance and necessary conditions for the realisation of "substantive" democracy. The most important challenge is the project of Hindutva, which is seeking to redefine democracy in majoritarian terms, exposing the tenuous character of Indian Pluralism.

Beyond Democracy by Rajni Kothari. Asian Exchange, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2001/Vol.18 No.1, 2002, pp 13. [ELDOC6006732]

Exploring Democracy by Ashutosh Kumar. Economic & Political Weekly, Vol 38, No 11, March 15-21, 2003.
<http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles.5610> [C.ELDOC6006803]

Beyond Democracy

by Rajni Kothari



Democracy by itself does not promote either equality or justice, only logical axioms like *equality before law*. In practice, it is found to live side by side with high levels of inequality, poverty in the midst of opulence and ill-treatment of a wide variety of *minorities* for whom there is little by way of *compensatory justice*.

This has proved especially pertinent under corporate capitalism of the late 20th century. The high degrees of inequalities will exist in reality as long as the democratic state is structurally operating in the framework of capitalism, which it is in spite of democracy's ideological intent to contain the capitalist thrust.

... democracy can survive only by striking roots in a direct form. It is secured not by great leaders but by competent, responsible citizens. *Effective dictatorships require great leaders. Effective democracies need great citizens.*

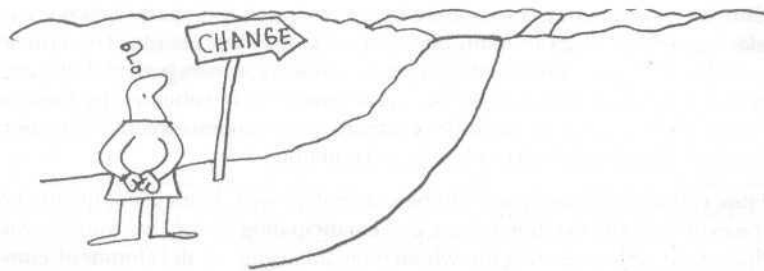
Movement for creating emancipatory democracy

There is emerging a newly inspired appeal for transformative politics of which democracy could well become a legitimate instrument.

In the face of a growing disillusionment with prevailing models of democracy, in particular representative democracy, aspirations are slowly emerging for what could be called *genuine* democracy (which in the present context becomes *direct democracy* based on various degrees of self-rule, self-governance and self-determination). Yet genuine democracy is still in the realm of aspirations and expectations; much of what is desired has not yet been realised, not at any rate in full measure.

This conception of democracy which is based on an ethical imperative towards world transformation, calls for a new breed of intellectuals and activists to begin with. It arises from the core of an idealistic middle class (one hopes that such a core still exists) and moves towards larger and ever-enlarging struggles of the mass of the people in country after country, and ultimately engulfs the world as a whole. Just the opposite of the neo-liberal model of globalisation, it produces instead an authentic *global* upsurge of 'peoples, communities, and ecologies'. Moving beyond the so-called *new social movements* of environment, women, tribals, *backwards* and through them all castes and classes, it is a movement that is deeply rooted in the whole of civil society.

The status quo is still very much intact. The cracks that are emerging in it are still of a transitional type. They are yet to indicate a clear direction with a lasting imprint. All the same, the *transitions* have begun to make themselves felt. There can be no denying that something 'new' seems to be in the offing. It is uncertain, and cannot be brushed aside as mere dreams and utopias. We are at least at the crossroads even if the path which we are likely to traverse is as yet uncertain.



In these transitions, the *uncertainty* is so full of not just ambivalence and ambiguities but pitfalls, dilemmas and growing contradictions that we seem to be unsure of facing up to it and dealing with it.

It is not just the era (or age) of uncertainty but the *aura* of uncertainty (which threatens to become even a cult of uncertainty) that we need to get into and unravel. It is precisely the unraveling of this new *aura* that will help us come to grips with the most challenging of all intellectual issues in the modern era.

Era of uncertainty

This state of uncertainty does not necessarily amount to a state of despair, an end to all hope and the acceptance of a pessimistic future. The uncertainty only pronounces a lack of clear affirmation of hope and a positive view of emerging prospects for humanity and its future. I would in fact go further. This state of uncertainty could be taken up as a challenge to once again turn things around and regain a feeling of hope, of recreating it, of reaffirming an optimistic state of affairs.

Uncertainty only indicates an absence of certitude. It does not betray an entirely negative outlook. It could well be seen as a challenge to both imagination and praxis. Indeed it is a challenge to conceive a better prospect for both humanity and the planet as a whole than was the case before things began to become uncertain or ambivalent.

In fact, an era of uncertainty ought not to be taken as one of despair and disappointment. It could well indicate a kind of *crossroads* from where new beginnings could be initiated.

Emancipation and democracy

Currently, democracy seems to be better equipped to impart legitimacy to elected regimes than to fulfill basic aspirations of the people. The crucial question that has been emerging over the last several years both globally and within individual nation-states is: What prospects/ possibilities are there of democracy leading to people's emancipation/ empowerment/ liberation from the shackles of both modernity and tradition?

How is human emancipation to be conceptualised? As focusing mainly on the exploited and excluded strata, and **emancipating** them? This would mean that one is only repeating the whole mental baggage of **development-cum-democracy**. In my view emancipation needs to be conceived in comprehensive and holistic terms, reaching out from each individual (including individuals in the established social strata) to wider and wider *cycles* of classes and communities. Emancipation is a deeper, and deeply rooted process of change, mobilisation and transformation.

The whole of society has to be emancipated and that emancipation is basically a *state of being* which applies to all. I should like to add here that it is of particular relevance for the middle class, at one time considered the torch-bearers of *Swaraj*, along various dimensions - not just political - and entails egalitarian restructuring of civil society, and thereby a comprehensive model of equity, justice and emancipation.

On the road to development, on the one side we have the dominant model of economic development and its trickle down perspective vis-a-vis the poorer countries and the mass of the people generally. On the other, there is the trickle up model of catching up with the richer and more affluent countries. These trickles converge to a *catching up* syndrome of development - both for the poorer social strata and for the poorer nations and states. For these classes and systems to resume the idea of emancipation will call for a major ideological remodelling towards transformative politics, economics, environment and culture.

Emancipation will involve taking into its purview the whole series of problem encounters facing humankind in its present condition, dealing as adequately as possible with poverty, inequity, injustice, erosion of basic resources (both natural and human) and the ethnic, ecological and civilisational dimensions of that condition. *It is a concern about nothing short of refashioning the whole of the human enterprise* (and through its reach and spread, diverse other species and life-engaging terrains of livelihood); **in short, restructuring of life on this planet.**

Ideological restructuring

Seen from a variety of thresholds, the ethics of emancipation necessarily calls for a major shift in ideas, institution-building and political engagement. The three of them together provide a powerful normative thrust, almost a kind of catharsis that ranges from individual selves to community structures to national and international alignments of both mutative and paradigmatic kinds.

In reaction, we are producing a model of secular fundamentalism of the 'modernist' type (to be distinguished from the fundamentalism of the communal, religious and so-called *casteist* varieties). I am not inclined to be overtaken by the myth of moving (switching) from an undefined and undifferentiated modernity to some sweeping idea of an equally undefined and undifferentiated tradition.

I see the **emergence of an ideology of collective resurgence**, drawing all the time on the micro and intermediate thresholds of which one notices several thousand at work; and taking off from there towards a *macro* systemic change; taking us beyond both *development* and *democracy*, into a whole new era of liberation, both in the socio-political arena as well as in the psycho-cultural and civilisational contours, which must ultimately be the antennas of emancipation.

The ideological challenge is probably the most pervasive and multidimensional of all. We happen to be facing a major intellectual - and hence ideological - vacuum. Neither the Liberal nor the Marxist nor in many ways even the Gandhian or the still deeper spiritual ideological conceptions provides us with a workable model of fundamental change. For change to be truly far-reaching and fundamental one needs to delve deep into the psychic, cultural and existential arenas of human striving.

Such a comprehensive interface of issues and problem encounters is not limited to the issue of poverty. This becomes evident even in dealing with poverty - for one is up against almost the full canvas of human concerns. The emergence of an iniquitous and unjust, an increasingly polarised, social order is in fact what one is up against.

Implications for 'emancipation and democracy'

The challenge is to keep alive the flame of hope and resurgence and to continue to offer ideological streams to the stirring and struggling segments of the masses of the public. The latter - the dalits, the tribals, the women, the aspiring youth - are no doubt to be the principal authors of the slowly emerging *movement* for democracy. They would also be the ones to ground it within the still larger movement for Emancipation. Yet there will still be need for democratic and human rights *movements* consisting of activists, intellectuals and a whole array of individuals and communities that are beginning to experience a new upsurge of catharsis, producing in the process a variety of changes that will lead in course of time both to a *crisis of change* and a *challenge of change*. ▶



Exploring Democracy

by Ashutosh Kumar



Democracy in India edited by Niraja Gopal Jayal; Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001; pp 571, Rs 750. [CED Ref: B.Q11.J.1]

It is now 2500 years since the advent of democracy in the Greek city states. At the same time we are witnessing the arrival of the *third wave of democracy* in the aftermath of the collapse of communism in Europe. With the processes of globalisation and localisation overwhelming *the global village*, democracy as a form of *good governance* is increasingly being viewed as procedurally the best way of arriving at decisions that not only take everyone's interest into account but are equally binding on all of them. As a result it is the democratic part of liberal democracy, ie, a set of procedures and the representative institutions, that is being more emphasised than its liberal component which is equality, freedom, tolerance and accountability. This is the basic contention of the editor of the book under review who in her brilliant introduction **privileges the substantive form of democracy over its procedural [or formal] form.**

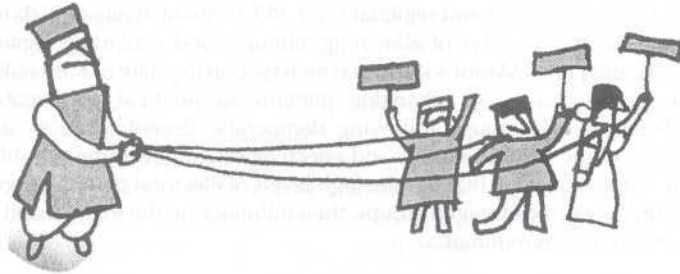
Making an attempt to *prefigure* post-colonial democracy, *the papers in the first part of the book argue that the representative institutions of India today have their origins in the form of colonial legacy.* James Chiriyankandath refers to the Government of India Acts to show how they gradually increased the democratic representation of the Indians (based on limited voting rights) in colonial governance. ... On the flip side he traces the prevalence of electoral mobilisation on the basis of caste, religion and region especially in post-Bluestar, Mandal and Mandir India to the colonial "legacy of separate representation and the recognition, by the state, of social groups on the basis of caste and religion".

The separate electoral representation, argues David Washbrook, also laid the foundation of the Nehruvian idea that "the members of civil society could only represent sectional interests, and the state alone could represent the whole of society". He also traces the origin of the idea that the "real function of representation is advisory, while the task of policy formulation is best left to

the bureaucracy and the judiciary" in the late colonial rhetoric of democracy and development.

The second part of the book has papers exploring the relationship between democracy and the state. The common argument has been that for the success of democracy an effective state is required "to underwrite democratic arrangements" as well as a strong civil society that could save the citizens from the "potential tyrannies of the state". Rajni Kothari in his article, for example, argues that the greatest significance of Indian democracy has been the fact that it has survived and endured despite lacking the essential pre-requisites of a democracy, ie, literacy, industrialisation, and lack of democratic history at the time of decolonisation. The emergence of a populist and personalised polity, according to Atul Kohli, has been among the recent occurrences leading to what he famously calls the *crisis of governability*. This weakening of state institutions in the face of the process of the deepening of democracy also constitutes the theme of the paper by Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph. While taking up pressure groups as the unit of their analysis they analyse the nature of Indian political economy primarily in terms of a conflict between, and the alternating dominance of, a *demand polity* in which the citizens' demands expressed as electoral pressure dominate over the state, and a *command polity* where the state's hegemony prevails over the citizenry. Jayal's paper is concerned with the study of what she calls the *foundational* principles of Indian democracy, namely, development, welfare and secularism. She argues on the basis of her concrete studies that there has been an incongruity between the procedural and substantive aspects of Indian democracy.

The third part of the book has papers arguing in favour of a strong civil society in order to bridge the gap between the formal and substantive aspects of Indian democracy by broadening and deepening it. It is in this context that the new social movements have come under larger theoretical inquiry. Pramod Parajuli notes in his paper how the feminist, ecological, and indigenous peoples' movements have taken up the rights of women, dalits, tribals and minorities besides promoting a sustainable pattern of development. In the process an alternative model of governance based on *consultative and participatory* social relations and indigenous knowledge is receiving the attention of the people. The agenda of *bringing the people back in* also figures in the writings of Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen who demonstrate the significance of public action, both collaborative and adversarial, in preventing famine. Sudipta Kaviraj in his paper argues that democracy is central to an understanding of the popular culture grounded in



the principle of equality and disowning of the inherited hierarchies. The popular culture of democracy also comes across in the accounts of elections by Walter Hauser and Wendy Singer. As for the diversity of popular cultures in Indian civil society Arend Lijphart insists in his paper that India is "an impressive confirming case" for consociational theory as it fulfils all the four conditions, ie, government by grand coalition in which all the ethnic groups are represented; cultural autonomy for such groups; proportional representation in politics and the civil service, and minority vetoes on issues concerning minority rights and autonomy.

The fourth part of the volume consists of papers focusing on the nature of the political economy of development in India. Deepak Nayyar's paper brings out the inherent tension between the market economy [that tends to exclude the masses] being introduced in India and the ever-widening base of its democracy. It thus further erodes the capacity of the state to mediate the increasing conflict between the market and democracy. The paper by Pranab Bardhan focuses on the political sociology and economy of the liberalisation policies. He refers to the two parallel trends in Indian politics showing an increasing shift of political power from the centre to the states as well as from the upper castes to the backward and lower castes. These developments have brought the 'turmoil from below' accentuating the conflicts within the 'dominant coalition' consisting of the industrial capitalist class, the rich farmers, and the professionals in the public sector. Moreover, they have also resulted in the erosion of earlier practices by which decision-making on economic management and public administration was institutionally insulated from the imperatives of day to day politics.

The fifth part of the book consists of two papers dealing with the dynamics of Indian democracy at the grassroots level. Subrata Mitra in his paper takes a case study of the assembly elections in a village of north India to show that

elections at the local and regional level add a “qualitatively new dimension to the traditional ways of allocating authority and according legitimacy”. Crook and James Manor’s study of panchayats in the state of Karnataka takes up related issues, ie, changing patterns of political participation by individuals and groups following democratic decentralisation; and the impact of the responsiveness and effectiveness of government institutions. The authors observe that despite high levels of electoral participation by the historically disadvantaged groups, their influence on the mandal and district council remains minimal.

Part six of the book deals with the future of Indian democracy. The emergence of the dalits and Hindutva as major political phenomena can be considered a departure from the historical past of hierarchical but pluralist India. Gail Omvedt in her overview of dalit politics, from Phule through Ambedkar to now BSP, draws attention to the complete neglect of gender as well as environmental and alternative development issues. Finally the paper by Christopher Jafferlot takes a look at the Hindu nationalist conception of democracy.

A reading of these essays makes one realise that the idea of democracy has become embedded in the Indian political imagination notwithstanding the still deeply hierarchical, agrarian, feudal, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of Indian society. Most third world democracies, on the other hand, have had a chequered career compared to their Indian counterpart in terms of political participation and contestation.

The reading, however, as the editor admits herself, also raises many questions concerning Indian democracy, leaving some of them unanswered. Why is the said deepening of democracy not being reflected in public policies? Why has the democratic base of Indian democratic leadership increased only in sociological and not in economic terms? Has there really been an anti-market streak in Indian political culture with the prevalence of Gandhian values and emphasis on group equity and rights? Are democracy and development compatible? Can democracy and the market coexist without an effective state?

Well, the questions are unending. One can read and reread these scholarly articles, among the most significant ones written over the last decade by leading social scientists, for possible answers. ▶

While Indian democracy today is, in institutional terms, fairly well secured, it remains embattled by forces both external and internal. Internally, the most important challenge is the project of Hindutva, seeking to redefine democracy in emphatically majoritarian terms, exposing the tenuous character of Indian pluralism. Internally it also continues to be faced by the enduring challenge of creating a more equal society, and reducing the vast economic disparities that are being accentuated by the process of globalisation. That process of course represents the major external challenge, seeking to legislate global regimes in such matters as trade, environmental regulation, and intellectual property. Accompanying these are the attempts to lay down global standards for 'good governance', and to forge networks between non-governmental organisations for the creation of a 'transnational' civil society.

Extract from Introduction: Situating Indian Democracy. Pg 44 of Democracy in India

There are many who have been looking for sources of substantive democracy within tradition. JP spoke of the self-governing village community, Gandhiji of networks of village republics governed by Panchayats, Vinoba Bhave of Lokniti as opposed to Rajniti. The RSS while speaking of Ram Rajya, and decentralised janpadas, uses its "dharmasatta" (religious authority) to mold the Hindu majority into one vote bank making it unbeatable – a kind of a majoritarian hegemony.

In a true democracy, one accepts a majority decision when it is a result of different elements coming together on that decision, not when it is a continuously organised stream of assertion of one group, which is riding roughshod over other minority groups. The same is the case in decisions relating to globalisation, where the centralised capitalist economy which includes today's media, has decided that economic globalisation is the prescription for development.

Given this situation, what does working for substantive democracy involve?



Agroecology Works !

Mere change of the holders of power does not in itself usher in an egalitarian, humanized, dignified society. The new power holders become another oppressive elite, because the institutions and processes, and the technologies and systems have not undergone radical restructuring.

This is an essential lesson in Structural Transformation!

Is such transformation possible?

Peter Rosset tells us it has been done, and done on a large scale. If we have not been told about it, it is because the dominant media cannot recognize it, and those who do, cannot allow it to come to light. Because Cuba has done it.

What is possible , and actually happening, is not a mere going back to the past. The author suggests that some forgotten discarded elements like land reforms and redistribution are amalgamated with newer insights and practices relating to ecological issues, and need to be based on traditional contexts such as local production.

Toward an Agroecological Alternative for the Peasantry

by Peter M. Rosset

Sustainable Agriculture: an Adequate Response to the Crisis?

The crisis of agriculture has both ecological and socioeconomic dimensions, which are interrelated and derive from the historic conditions of U.S. agriculture and the penetration of capital, serving both to deepen the crisis and inhibit fundamental change. Any alternative paradigm that is to offer any hope of pulling agriculture out of crisis must address ecological, social and economic forces. To focus exclusively on ameliorating environmental impacts, for example, without addressing either the grim social reality that farmers face or the economic forces that perpetuate the crisis, is doomed to fail. This is precisely the concern that I raise with regard to sustainable agriculture. [Certainly an exclusive focus of the socioeconomic dimension is little better, as with, for example, the expropriation of plantations by socialist governments, without changing the technological basis of production, has inevitably led to crises almost identical to those of capitalist agriculture.]

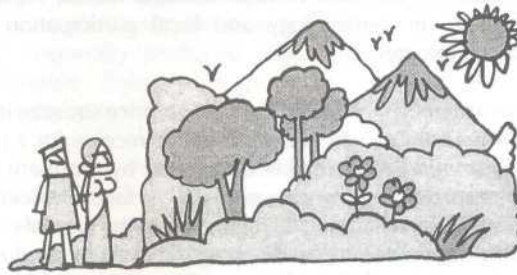
Current Practice is Alarming

In this context, I find the prevalence of input substitution in alternative or 'sustainable' agriculture to be alarming. Essentially, the capital-intensive, monoculture-based system of conventional agriculture is left intact. All changes are relatively minor. A toxic pesticide is removed and a biological product is substituted. Instead of, or in addition to urea, manure or expensive commercial compost is trucked in. While these changes may suggest a more environmentally benign direction, they leave in place the key forces that are driving the agricultural crisis: extensive monoculture, excessive use of machinery, input control by agribusiness dependence on fossil fuels, and very high capital requirements. This approach neither addresses the debt trap that farmers are caught in because of high costs of machinery and inputs, nor the ecological basis of declining yields - the reduction of functional biodiversity of agroecosystems.

Clearly the agrichemical industry knows which way the wind is blowing. Though actual figures are a closely guarded trade secret, it is widely believed that more than half of all research and development spending in the pesticide industry now goes toward biologicals.

Towards An Agroecological Approach

Agroecology has emerged as the discipline that provides the basic ecological principles for how to study, design and manage alternative agroecosystems that address not just environmental/ecological aspects of the crisis of modern agriculture, but the economic, social, and cultural ones as well (Altieri, 1995). Agroecology goes beyond a one-dimensional view of agroecosystems - their genetics, agronomy, edaphology, etc. - to embrace an understanding of ecological and social levels of co-evolution, structure and function. Instead of focusing on one particular component of the agroecosystem, agroecology emphasizes the interrelatedness of all agroecosystem components and the complex dynamics of ecological processes. Current tendencies in agroecology encourage us to tap into the knowledge and skills of farmers, and identify the potential for assembling biodiversity to create beneficial synergisms that provide the ability to remain at or return to a relatively stable state.



A closer look at ethnoscience (the knowledge system of an ethnic group that has originated locally and naturally) has revealed that local people's knowledge about the environment, vegetation, animals, and soils can be very detailed (Altieri, 1995). Peasant knowledge about ecosystems usually results in multidimensional, productive land-use strategies, which generate, within certain ecological and technical limits, the food self-sufficiency of communities in particular regions. By understanding ecological features of traditional agriculture - such as the ability to bear risk, production efficiencies of symbiotic crop mixtures, recycling of materials, reliance on local resources and germplasm, exploitation of the full range of micro-environments, etc.- it is possible to obtain important information that may be used for developing appropriate agricultural strategies tailored to the needs, preferences and resource base of specific farmer groups and regional agroecosystems.

An Alternative Paradigm

Any alternative paradigm will be doomed to failure if it addresses only one dimension of the crisis of modern agriculture - as in the cases of input substitution in big farm agriculture in the West, or large state farms in socialist countries. In that context I feel that the following are the absolutely essential pillars upon which to construct a paradigm that truly offers a way out of the crisis:

Agroecological technology: As I have argued in this essay, only a truly agroecological approach offers the possibility of reversing the pervasive decline of the ability of soils and agroecosystems to support future production, while reducing the vulnerability of farming to pest, climatic and price shocks, and cutting the all-important costs of production by substituting ecosystem functions for external inputs (Altieri, 1995; Pretty, 1995). This means eliminating hidden biases and subsidies for external-input technology from the entire apparatus of education, research, extension, credit and communications media, replacing it with an emphasis on agroecology and local participation in the generation of technologies.

Fair Prices for Farmers: The other half of the cost/price squeeze in which the world's farmers are caught is the price they receive for what they produce. With a world food market dominated by Northern trading cartels and transnational corporations, farmers face artificially low prices and consumers pay artificially high ones. In the case of countries in the South this translates into the dumping of Northern surpluses into local economies at prices below the cost of production, driving local farmers out of business and into the cities, even as local food processing and distribution facilities are concentrated in ever fewer hands and city dwellers pay more for their food. To break the cycle of destruction of rural economies by a global food system out of control, we must begin by insulating farmers from the monster. That means a retreat from extreme trade liberalization, with a step toward [at least] selective protection for [at least] domestic food production in each country as a matter of national security (Rosset, 1997; Rosset et al., 1994)

Redistribution of Land: In order to break the cycle of growing inequity and poverty as a product of growing land concentration, and to provide the conditions for the fruitful employment of agroecological technology, we must place land reform squarely back onto the agenda from which it was displaced during the late 1980s and early 90s. As the example of

Kerala state in India demonstrates, land reform can provide the basis for equitable development (Franke and Chasin, 1994), and as the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Chiapas are showing us, land reform is possible in the nineties, even if it must be directed 'from below' (Langevin, forthcoming; Rosset, 1994). Sobhan has made a lucidly argued case for a renewed emphasis on agrarian reform as the basis for social transformation. One might also add that the evidence shows the enormous potential for productivity increases to be gained as a result of reducing average farm size. When technocrats argue for enormous investments in bioengineered crop varieties, to take an example, they speak of hoped-for yield increases of the order of 10%, 15%, or in the most extreme cases 100% (Tribe, 1994). Yet we can respond by pointing to the often 500% or even 900% greater total productivity per unit area of small farms compared to large farms!

Greater Emphasis on Local Production: People should not have to depend on the vagaries of prices in the world economy, long distance transportation and super-power 'goodwill' for their next meal. Locally and regionally produced food offers greater security, as well as synergistic linkages to promote local economic development. Furthermore such production is more ecologically sound, as the energy spent on international transport is wasteful and environmentally unsustainable. Policies should be redirected to favor local production, including in urban areas. By promoting urban farming, cities and their surrounding areas can be made virtually self-sufficient in perishable foods, be beautified and have greater employment opportunities. Despite negative government policies in most countries, cities already produce nearly one seventh of the world's food (UNDP, 1996). Only Cuba gives a hint of what the figure might be if government policies were to actually favor urban farmers.

Cuba: Evidence that the Alternative Paradigm Can Work

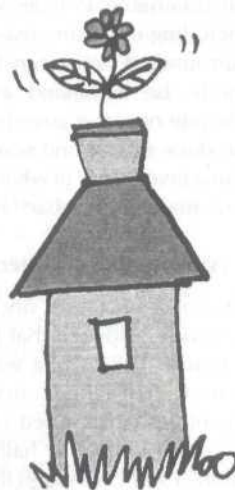
Recent changes in Cuba, since the collapse of trade with the former socialist bloc, provide evidence that the alternative approach proposed herein can work. Before 1989 Cuba was a model of a conventional industrial farm economy. Cuban agriculture was based on enormous production units, using vast quantities of imported chemicals and machinery to basically produce export crops, while over half of the island's food was imported (Rosset and Benjamin, 1994). Although the government's commitment to equity, as well as favorable terms of trade offered by Eastern Europe, meant that Cubans ate

well, the underlying vulnerability of this style of farming was exposed when the collapse of the socialist bloc was added to the already existing and soon to be tightened U.S. trade embargo. Cuba was plunged into the worst food crisis in its history, with consumption of calories and protein dropping by perhaps as much as 30%. Nevertheless today, in 1997, Cubans are eating almost as well as they did before 1989, yet comparatively little food and agrochemicals are being imported (Rosset, 1997). What happened?

Faced with the impossibility of importing either food or agrochemical inputs, Cuba turned inward to create a more self-reliant agriculture based on higher prices for farmers, locally produced, environmentally friendly inputs, smaller production units, and urban agriculture.

The combination of a trade embargo, food shortages and a change in government policy to open farmers' markets, meant that farmers began to receive much better prices for their products. Given this incentive to produce, they did so, even in the absence of Green Revolution-style inputs. They were given a huge boost by the re-orientation of government education, research and extension toward alternative methods, as well as the re-discovery of traditional farming techniques. As small farms responded by increasing production, while the large-scale state farms stagnated and faced plunging yields, the government initiated the newest phase of revolutionary land reform, parceling out the state farms to their former employees as smaller scale production units (Rosset, 1997). Finally the government mobilized support for a growing urban agriculture movement which has transformed Cuba cities and urban diets in just 2-3 years.

The Cuban experience tells us that we can feed a nation's population with a small farm model based on alternative technology, and in so doing we can become more self-reliant in food production. Farmers must receive higher prices, and when they do, they will produce, with or without Green



Contd... 20 →

From Industrial Dependence to Self-reliance

The compulsions of globalism are presented as irreversible. Nothing makes the apostles of an industrialism without end more angry than respect for the past: even the suggestion that it has anything to teach us is castigated as nostalgia, impossible, backward-looking, a romantic hankering after a vanished and mythic world. Anyone who speaks of salvaging even a portion of the wisdom of the past is accused of being a "Luddite", an impediment to progress.

Cuba strips bare the whole paradigm of development into which the vast majority of the world has now been compelled. Only when the earth has been stripped of much of its wealth, the forests, earth, soil and water used up, polluted or poisoned, does it become clear that money cannot restore the spoiled biosphere, and that wealth has a deeper meaning than mere currency.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Cuba was denied the access to pesticides, fertiliser and tractor fuel on which it had depended. This, together with the continuing trade embargo by the USA, ought to have ensured the collapse of the regime. That it didn't is a tribute to the ingenuity and creativity of people who have lived for almost half a century in a state of siege. In place of industrialised agriculture, Cuba has developed a low-input sustainable system.

Cuba shows that human resourcefulness is one of the earth's great treasures; when these are allied to a sustainable agriculture, the wounds to the planet may, perhaps, yet be healed. Sixty per cent of the vegetables consumed in Cuba today are organically grown in city gardens. In the countryside organic sugar, coffee and orange farms have been established; but the real triumph has been Cuba's ability to mobilise popular support for turning unused city land into small vegetable plots. There are now more than 60,000 huertos, or gardens, growing food in Havana alone. People have drawn on their memories of childhood in the countryside to revive old skills and enthusiasms, and the people of Cuba, despite their poverty, now enjoy one of the healthiest diets in the world.

This is why the survival of Cuba is an important lesson to the world. The transition to self-reliance has been peaceable, without fanfare. It has taken place despite the silence of the media, and the switching off of the engines of global publicity. But there it is. It has happened.

Cuba, supple and ingenious, tells another story; and shows that loss of industrial dependency doesn't have to mean chaos and ruin. Cuba, not for the first time, and certainly despite many past mistakes and blemishes, is good news. ▶

Jeremy Seabrook, A Short History Of The Future, New Vistas, The Statesman, April 20, 2003 [C.ELDOC1071160]

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Revolution inputs. If these expensive and noxious inputs are unnecessary, then we can dispense with them. The policy lessons from Cuba that we can apply elsewhere, even under dramatically different systems and circumstances, are exactly those outlined above in the section on an alternative paradigm: agroecology, fair prices, land reform, and local production including urban agriculture. Thus, I firmly believe, Cuba is a lighthouse that illuminates the path out of crisis.

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The Tide is Turning

Just as the neo-liberal juggernaut sweeps through the world arrogant and seemingly triumphant, its momentum is suddenly waning.

While dissent is dispersed and fragmented, and 'alternatives' seem to be far removed from displacing the mainstream, the solidarity and coalescence of protest seems to be gaining ground.

In quite a few places faith is being put in the hands of the 'left'. Latin America has chosen its own path to travel. And though the reaction is fast and furious, the 'left' is able to stand its own ground. Hugo Chavez is holding his ground in Venezuela.

Maybe the tide is already turning!



Promise of the Chavez offensive

by C. P. Chandrasekhar

If Venezuela President Hugo Chavez builds on his recent victory against a covert coalition's attempt to unseat him and moves ahead with his egalitarian development programme, the global war against the neo-liberal offensive would witness an advance.

On February 2, the two-month-old, private sector-led strike in Venezuela was lifted. That general strike had come as the culmination of 18 months of unrest, in which a mainly capitalist opposition attempted to dislodge President Hugo Chavez. Clearly, Chavez has won a major victory, despite the fact that the domestic industrial sector, international capital, the governments of developed countries and the mainstream international media had all joined the covert coalition to displace him from power.

But long used to dominating the system with autocratic rulers, Latin America's elites have not been known to adjust to the needs of democracy or accept the popular verdict when it moves to the Left. Among the many moves they adopt, one which has gained currency since the time of Allende, is a strike by the owners of capital against a government biased in favour of the workers and the poor. This is precisely what has been attempted in Venezuela where besides a failed coup aimed at displacing him, Chavez has faced four major strike actions on the part of capital. The most recent, which began on December 2, has, however, pushed sections of capital into bankruptcy, leading to a gradual end to the strike. That end would have come earlier, but for the strength the strike action gained because of the alliance of managers and workers in the oil industry, who in Chavez's view constitute a labour aristocracy which has joined the elites in the drive to bleed the system.

What is most noteworthy is that in the midst of all this Chavez has won out by sticking to his radical agenda, which includes land reforms, regulation of goods and capital markets and nationalisation.

What is surprising is that Venezuela's elite had bought its own propaganda, and believed that Chavez actually had the support of only a few lumpen elements. Even when this was proved wrong by the quick reversal of the April 2002 coup, which momentarily brought Pedro Carmona to power, the business-led opposition was not convinced, leading to the strife that has

followed. As has been commented by a number of political observers, including Cuban President Fidel Castro, what is surprising is the fact that, on return to power in April 2002, Chavez refrained from seeking revenge, and allowed the plotters of the coup and their supporters in the oil industry to continue with their campaign. He even joined negotiations, led by the secretary-general of the Organisation of American States, to seek a peaceful end to the stand-off between the government and the business-led opposition.

Chavez held out and having won the battle is putting in place new leaders and workers in the oil industry, and refusing to take back 5,000 sacked workers, is working to restore oil production levels that are inching towards 2 million bpd and has suspended currency trading as a first measure to stop the fall in reserves and the decline of the bolivar. But things are not going to stop there.

If Chavez does move ahead, in a context when Left-leaning regimes have come to power in a number of Latin American countries, the war against neo-liberal policies and corporate globalisation would witness an advance and the geo-politics of the region is bound to change.

Chavez and his supporters are conscious of this. Eliecer Otaiza, an adviser to the President, is reported to have declared: "The happy society we want to create is in order to change... the system of production and trade and the international political system." With the U.S. being a neighbour and dependent on the region, as Venezuela's contribution of close to 15 per cent of U.S. oil imports suggests, this shift would not go unchallenged. The battle has only just begun. ▶

Water Grab

Water has always been the cradle of what we like to think of as civilization. The history of civilization shows us very clearly that our misuse of water has always led to epochal decline.

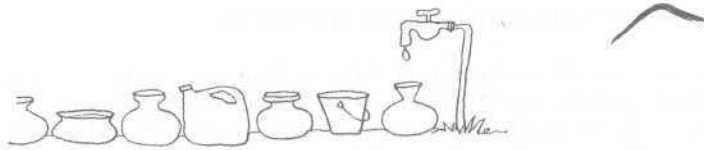
In not so ancient times, we just migrated to the next water-hole. This is just not possible today, with human beings having colonized every nook and cranny of the earth.

Nowhere is the innate destructiveness of our dominant lifestyles more apparent than in the rampant destruction of water bodies, and the attendant water-grab by the rich and the powerful.

Today, Water-Grabbing takes place on a national scale, and has reached global dimensions.

But that need not deter us. It can be fought, as is happening all across the country for rivers and oceans as well as for ponds and wells. These struggles do not make the front-page, and are kept out of sight. A singular success in communalizing water in urban Bolivia is hidden from us.

Yet these struggles have many dimensions, and simmering beneath the surface are the pulls and contradictions within the fraternity of those committed to supporting the comfortable availability of good water for every member of the community in a village or city.



Water Woes by Sarosh Bana, Business India, March 31, 2003. [C.ELDOC1070741]

A Bid... for Water by Darryl D'monte, The Hindu, Sunday, April 13, 2003
<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mag/2003/04/13/stories/2003041300140200.htm>

The Last Common Property – 'A historical reminder by Richard Mahapatra, Down to Earth, March 15, 2003 [C.ELDOC1070741]

Water Crisis by email from Anil Laul, February 2, 2003. [C.ELDOC6006561]

Water Woes

by Sarosh Bana

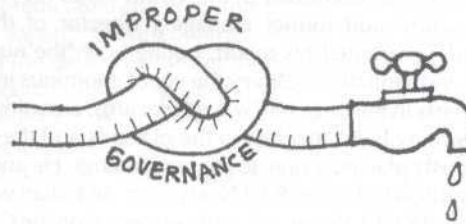
Few issues in India have roused such concern of late as that of water... or the lack of it. The failed monsoons last season brought with them the scourge of drought that wreaked havoc on the rural population. And there is already mounting scepticism about the ambitious Rs. 5,70,000 crore river-linking project that over the next 15 years seeks to establish 30 links across 37 of India's rivers to solve the regional imbalance of water, and to create navigable waterways, 30,000 MW of hydroelectric capacity and additional irrigation of 22 million hectares.

India, with its burgeoning population, polluted resources and expanding arid tracts, faces a particularly severe threat as attested by the World Water Development Report. It has ranked the country a poor 120th for its water quality in the UN's system-wide evaluation of global water resources. Only Morocco and Belgium are ranked lower.

India also ranks 133rd among 180 countries for its poor water availability of 1,880 cubic metres per person, annually. The water dilemma seems to prevail in both urban and rural India, with the former Union urban development minister Jagmohan acknowledging that as many as 20 per cent of India's urban households are denied any access to safe drinking water, there is no sanitation worth the name for 58 per cent of the urban population and toilet facilities are available to only 24 per cent of the urban population. He deems the question of solid waste disposal of still greater concern with even the most conservative estimates suggesting that 28 per cent of urban wastes are left to decompose and putrefy on roadsides and in the vicinity of houses. Quite a substantial portion of this waste flows into the drains, choking them and spawning breeding grounds for pests.

The national debate on the use of water is, however, sharply divided. Agricultural scientists say that farm water use, especially irrigation, must be increased 15 to 20 per cent in the coming 25 years to maintain food security and reduce hunger and rural poverty for a growing world population. Environmental scientists, on the other hand, say that water use will need to be reduced by at least 10 per cent to protect the rivers, lakes and wetlands on which millions of people depend for their livelihoods and to satisfy the growing demands of cities and industry. Many of these ecosystems have already been eliminated or severely damaged over the last decades.

The issue of who controls water and how they use such controls, called "governance," was a major topic of debate at the World Water Forum. Ravi Narayan of the NGO Water Aid believed that the lack of good governance was the single biggest cause for failure in providing safe water to people. "It is first essential to accept access to water as a human right and to determine the ownership of water," he said. "Water is a public good and belongs to the people that empower the government to govern it wisely." It was widely felt that the current water crisis arose from improper governance, rather than from the shortage of water. ▶



A Bid ... for WATER

by Darryl D'monte

at the Third World Water Forum (March 16 to 23, 2003),
held in Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka, Japan.



A resource that gushes profit

While Mr. Camdessus, Chairman of the World Panel on Financing Global Water Infrastructure and former managing director of the International Monetary Fund, presented his report, noting how "the numbers (of those without water and sanitation) convey the cry of enormous injustice" all over the world, activists in the huge hall waved placards, accusing him of uttering lies. There were tiny bells attached to the placards and they tinkled gently, lending a curiously placatory note to the proceedings. He and other speakers carried on regardless but when Ravi Narayanan, an Indian who is director of the London-based NGO, Water Aid, and also served on the Camdessus group was speaking, the activists clambered on to the stage and shielded the speakers from the audience by holding long banners in front of them, proclaiming: "Water for Life and not for Profit!"

What is it about the Camdessus report that raises people's hackles?

- Its first thrust is to call for a doubling of financial flows into the water sector, supposedly to meet the U.N. Millennium Development Goals of halving the numbers of those without access to water (1.2 billion) and sanitation (2.4 billion) by 2015. This is unexceptionable, since the connection between the provision of these two most basic amenities and people's well-being is well understood. According to the Camdessus report, these funds would come from "financial markets, from water authorities themselves through tariffs, from Multilateral Financial Institutions, from governments, and from public development aid, preferably in the form of grants".

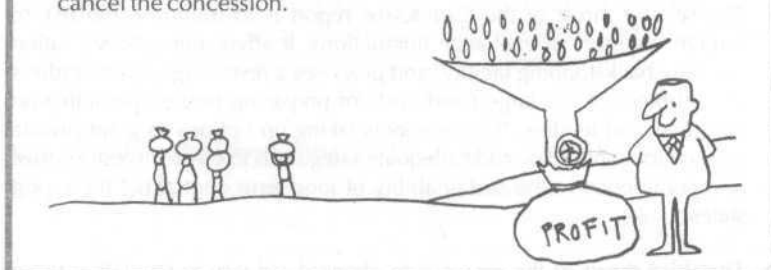
But, the timing of this appeal for greater funding for water is no accident. In many parts of the world, private water companies – the two biggest of which are Suez-Ondeo and Vivendi, both French, with RWE from

Germany, which has bought Thames Water from the U.K. – are on the retreat, facing opposition from consumers and heavy financial risks due to foreign exchange volatility. Manila and Buenos Aires are two prime examples, while Ondeo has recently pulled out after unsuccessful attempts in India. According to Olivier Hoedeman of Corporate Europe Observatory, a watchdog organisation, "After a decade of sweeping privatisation, 460 million people around the world are now supplied water by private corporations (up from just 51 million in 1990). Water industry analysts expect the privatisation trend to accelerate and predict the number to reach 1.6 billion people in 2015. "Whereas the water corporations during the 1990s primarily conquered newly privatised markets in developing countries, their focus is now increasingly shifting to the more predictable and profitable consumers in Europe, the U.S. and presumably Japan." These countries, with the exception of France, till today retain the delivery of water in the public domain, but faced with growing uncertainties in the developing world this may soon change. However, developing countries still present a huge market. Vivendi, the world's largest company, saw its Asian sales double to \$647 million last year and China and India are the biggest prizes.

- The second thrust of the Camdessus report is to minimise the risk to foreign investors of exchange fluctuations. It advocates a "devaluation liquidity backstopping facility" and proposes a revolving fund to address the problem of the large fixed costs of preparing private participation contracts and tenders. "Governments taking up options to grant private concessions should provide adequate safeguards to create investors' trust and confidence in the sustainability of long-term contracts," the report states.
- The third thrust of the report is to channel aid which has fallen to an average of \$3.1 billion annually to water and sanitation in 1999-2001 from \$3.5 billion in 1996-98, through private hands. There were objections raised by the International Rivers Network in Berkeley, California, which cited key recommendations to international financial institutions to increase guarantees and other public subsidies for private investors in water infrastructure and supply, as well as to "resume lending" for "dams and other major hydraulic works". This refers to the widespread opposition over Sardar Sarovar in this country, among others to big dams and, consequently, the reluctance of these institutions to fund such controversial projects.

At Kyoto, activists cited opposition to privatisation in the U.S. Atlanta cancelled a 20-year-old contract this January due to poor service. A concession has been thwarted, for the time being, in New Orleans. In Detroit, as Michele Tingling-Clemons from the Michigan Welfare Rights Organisation told this writer, opponents are concerned that the poor will subsidise the rich. Penny Bright voiced the same fears regarding Auckland in New Zealand and regaled delegates by demonstrating how to sabotage the metering of water.

Oscar Olivera from Cochabamba made no bones about the fact that "many of the people here are stained with the blood of our compatriots". He was referring to a consortium formed by the U.S. firm Bechtel (one of Enron's partners in Dabhol) and United Utilities of the U.K., which was awarded a contract four years ago to run the city's waterworks, without any bidding. The company announced tariff hikes of 150 per cent and threatened to cut off connections if anyone didn't pay. "They wanted to privatise the rain!" Olivera exclaimed. When protests erupted in 2000, the police and army were called in and five died in the rioting, forcing the government to cancel the concession.



'No' to water as an economic good

Maude Barlow, from The Council of Canadians, which was instrumental in bringing several activists to Kyoto, stated: "Nothing is more crucial than the privatisation of this commodity: who owns and controls it. They are treating water as an economic good, where it will be governed by market principles and put on the market to the highest bidder. Some of the top 100 corporations in the world are in water and they are protected by powerful trade agreements. It's a question, in the end, of human rights versus corporate rights."

Wars and water

Mr. Gorbachev called for "Water for Peace" and "Peace for Water".

Contrary to the popular belief that the next world war will be over water, not oil – triggered off by a remark by former World Bank Vice-President Ismail Serageldin, now in the World Water Council – conflicts over water take a long time to build up. They do not present flashpoints, although they can remain a festering sore between hostile countries.

Not many may be aware that the Indus Water Treaty, now 43 years old, sharing the tributaries between India and Pakistan, has never been abrogated even during two wars. The agreement was brokered by the World Bank and remains a model for amicable sharing of resources.

The experience with the Ganga Treaty with Bangladesh, over the Farakka barrage, has not been as harmonious, but it nevertheless addresses a long-standing dispute between the two countries.

The Mekong treaty, between Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, is yet another example where countries have chosen to cooperate on sharing resources. As Mr. Gorbachev appealed in Kyoto, **"Water must become a powerful vehicle for peace." Without powerful agreements, it has the potential of being the opposite.**

D'monte (2003)

The Last Common Property...

'A historical reminder'

by Richard Mahapatra

The soft-spoken Olivera is spokesperson for La Coordinadora, Coalition in Defence of Water and Life, the pivotal organisation in the movement. Olivera, a former shoemaker, admits that the fight against privatisation of water was "unexpected, given the political situation". Bolivia is a quasi-democracy that has suffered decades of dictatorship.

He explains, "The government privatised everything, except air and water. So when they went ahead with privatisation of water, people were losing their last common property." "Water," he says, "is a shared right, and that right is not for sale."

The World Bank (WB), it seems, does not agree. Its June 1999 country report for Bolivia prescribed privatisation of water for Cochabamba. In 1999, WB conditioned its US \$25 million loan towards water services in Cochabamba on privatisation of these services. The water supply system was sold to a subsidiary of San Francisco-based Bechtel Enterprises. Bechtel got a 40-year lease in a secretive, one-bidder deal. This is where Olivera's struggle began. He says that the investors put up less than US \$20,000 as capital for a water system that is worth millions. The new owner of Cochabamba's water supply system lost no time in raising prices. Bolivians with a minimum wage at less than US \$65 a month were presented with water bills that came to a whopping US \$20 or more.

With the Bolivian Act of 1999, water was declared a commercial commodity, and people were debarred from access to traditional sources of water. With this, even collection of water required the purchase of permits, effectively depriving the poorest citizens of all access to water. Even water from community wells was subject to access permits. Peasants and small farmers, in fact, had to buy permits even to gather rainwater on their own lands.

This was really the last straw in a country that had long resented privatisation. Before Bechtel had even finished painting its logo on all its newly-acquired water supply structures, the country saw massive protest rallies. Bolivians marched by the hundreds of thousands to Cochabamba. Mid-January 2001, a four-day general strike over water price hikes brought the city to a halt. By

early April, Bolivian president Hugo Banzer declared martial law, freezing all civil rights.

Olivera went underground, continuing to lead the movement. The Bolivian army killed one, injured hundreds and arrested several leaders.

On April 10, Banzer could hold on no longer. The government had no choice but to cancel its contract with Bechtel. But even before the contract was cancelled, Bechtel officials had fled Bolivia. They had even started the process to claim US \$12 million as exit payment. Olivera addressed a jubilant gathering at the heart of Cochabamba. "We have arrived at the moment of an important economic victory".

With this victory, Olivera had the mandate to evolve an alternate model for water management in the city. The challenge was to evolve a structure that keeps corporate houses and a corrupt government at bay. Working on a community-based city water supply system, Olivera now propagates a democratic way to exercise shared rights like water. Today, Bolivia has the only city water supply system run by democratically-elected people. Citizens elect the board of directors through secret ballot.

Olivera was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2001 for his role in the struggle. India and Bolivia are placed similarly on their water concerns. The Bolivian experience, therefore, is a lesson for India as well, he says. ▶



From: Anil Laul
Subject: water crisis
Date: Sat, 22 Feb 2003 11:27:29+0530

Water water everywhere, but not a drop to drink

Is the recent water scam for real?
For the past few days we have been deluged by screaming headlines from the dailies and the visual media that bottled water is unfit for consumption.

The Government, the Media and the NGO's have made a bugbear out of drinking bottled water, scaring people silly. This indeed is a poser: *Drink the Government supplied tap water and you end up in a hospital and perhaps die for want of reliable medical care as a consequence of having drunk the tap water. But drink the bottled water and you have a safer bet.* May not be safe all the way as per the Euro norms but then what do we have as good as the Euro norms? Transparency as in the Euro norms? Governance as in the Euro norms ? etc.

If at all the NGO concerned did discover that the level of pesticides was indeed higher than allowed by the Euro norms but was within the BIS norms, concerted efforts should have been made to suggest the corrective action required and then taken up with the BIS for enforcement. Instead the NGO went to town on this one. *Don't drink the municipal water and don't drink the bottled water.* What does the hapless consumer do when thirsty? Quite like Marie Antoinette's solution of asking people to "eat cake", instead of bread. Maybe there is good business here for Coke and Pepsi.

Not to be outdone the political heavy weights from the Civil Supplies raid several bottled water units when in fact bottled water sold by the railways is grossly unfit for consumption. The Baboo raj swings into action. No permissions without the permission of the CGWB

How about another scarier Scam? The same Government Civil Supplies Department went to the High Court with a plea that 4% MOUSE DROPPINGS AND HAIR be permitted in the wheat supply as hygienic levels below this are difficult to meet. This was front page news in a daily but was never followed up. Psst..NGO, where were you then?

Something STINKS in the State of Delhi. Ban plastics, ban building on the ridge but don't build in the basin area either and of course Lutyen's Delhi is to be conserved at all cost. Ban cutting trees even if they fall in the middle of the road and kill. Ban Ban Ban but no one throws up the solutions.

TAILPIECE

Advice to the STAKEHOLDERS (not the average citizens):NGO's -- Try not to be GONGO's (Government Owned Non Government Organisations). If indeed you must say what is wrong, then also suggest what is right.

MEDIA - Please try not to sell by blowing perceived scams out of proportion for the sake of promoting the Media as the only mandate. Quiz yourself and the repercussions of your so-called lead stories

GOVERNMENT (POLITICAL)-Try not to promote the Baboo raj. One day you will fall victims to this hell hole. Political life is not forever

GOVERNMENT (BUREAUCRACY)-Downsize yourself, for you will be the average citizen when you retire. Then and only then, will you understand our plight. But then of course you will float your own GONGO as have so many of my now retired friends.

BOTTOMLINE

Regret of another even bigger NGO. "We have had the same equipment for the past ten years and it is a pity that this NGO hit a GOLDMINE after having had the same equipment for only a year and blowing the whistle." Says all.

Depoliticisation

Have non-party political, non-government development institutions been emasculated?

Or are they emasculating the revolutionary political groupings of the masses?

The West has openly engaged in wars, military and economic, in favour of manifest self-aggrandisement and wilful exploitation and oppression.

What is it that defangs the widespread latent anger, the simmering dissent against what is patently unjust and oppressive?

What is it that sustains this depoliticisation?

What insulates the politicians and the bureaucrats from the obvious courses of action in matters of fairplay and ethical choices?

We bemoan the criminalisation and venality of our domestic political class. Is the West any better with Bush and Blair or Chirac and Putin? Is the West any better with its high levels of literacy and rarefied technological developments?

There is a strand of thinking that suggests that the 'good' and the 'able' have abdicated responsibility in politics, that the non-party processes and the non-government institutions have emasculated popular aspirations.

Or is politicisation a romantic revolutionary fantasy?

Neera Chandoke makes a clarion call for regaining revolutionary imagination.

A Text without a CONTEXT

by Neera Chandhoke

Political commentators compare incensed demonstrations in cities across the world with the anti-War protests in the late 1960s against American intervention in Vietnam. Yet, we find a major difference between the two protests. *The anti-Vietnam movement had some kind of impact upon the American Government ...* Most of the progressive legislation in American politics can in fact be traced to the social upheavals of the late 1960s.

This year, the American and the English people have, along with people in other parts of the world, launched a virtual tirade against the war in Iraq. But this has had little impact on the determination of George Bush and Tony Blair to make the world safe for their own projects. Why is this so? **Why have the current demonstrations failed to talk back to the making of history in an imperialist mode?**

The difference perhaps does not lie in the text; it lies in the context. Recollect for instance that **protests against American involvement in Vietnam** took place in an era of virulent anti-imperialism, **in an era of politicisation**. Further, **allied as it was to other protest movements** – the civil liberties movement of the Afro-Americans, the women's movement, the sexual liberation movement, the anti-nuclear movement, and the labour movement – the anti-Vietnam movement marked a turning point in American politics.

In the first three-quarters of the twentieth century ordinary people across the world had been politicised through processes of sustained mass struggle. People became aware of what it was that they were fighting for; they became conscious of what is possible and probable; what is politically desirable, and what is not, what has to be fought against, and what has to be fought for. In short, ordinary people became supremely conscious of both the constraints as well as opportunities of history, or indeed that ordinary people have the capacity to talk back to histories of oppression.

But history can be made only if people have both the vocabulary and the vision of an alternative world to struggle for. This vision was given by the

vocabularies of the twentieth century – imperialism, anti-colonialism, oppression, power, struggle, emancipation, and 'swaraj'.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, however, **a gigantic process was set in motion, a process of taming unruly and recalcitrant civil societies; a process of de-politicisation of people who had once been made aware of the possibilities of history.**

Witness the political languages that have erupted recently on to the political scene: globalisation instead of imperialism, governance instead of politics, social capital and trust instead of struggle, community instead of class, civil society instead of the revolutionary imagination, and NGOs instead of popular mobilisation. These vocabularies are so trite that they seem banal; our political visions are so ordinary that they seem commonplace.

semantic engineering

<i>globalisation</i>	(instead of imperialism),
<i>governance</i>	(instead of politics),
<i>social capital and trust</i>	(instead of struggle),
<i>community</i>	(instead of class),
<i>civil society</i>	(instead of the revolutionary imagination),
and <i>NGOs</i>	(instead of popular mobilization).

These vocabularies are so trite and our political visions are so ordinary.

No longer do we find any idea of struggle and emancipation in these political vocabularies, only ideas of resignation. In the middle of these political languages that call for social capital and for building networks of trust – vocabularies that conjure away the fact of political, social, and economic oppression through semantic engineering – *anti-war protests and also the anti-globalisation protests stand alone.* And we all know what happens to political struggles when they stand alone and bereft of support from attendant ideas of solidarity against anti-imperialism – they become isolated.

If global civil society is to make any headway in bringing states driven by imperatives of power back to civility, its members will have to regain the revolutionary imagination. ▶

Do Globalise



Review of : **Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate** by Naomi Klein Editor: Debra Ann Levy Leftword Books October 2002 [CED Ref. B.U00f.K60]

About a decade ago this intellectual dude called Francis Fukuyama argued that history, as humans had conceived of and tried to live it (a process that had an in-built redemptive goal or outcome), had come to an end. The Berlin Wall had fallen; the erstwhile USSR's emission levels had nose-dived; 'time' was nothing but a series of moments in an endless present. In such a situation one could only lead a McLife, forever. Not any longer, reveals journalist Naomi Klein in her latest book.

McLife is McStrife, it is now clear to many. When thousands gather to protest a McMeeting (a WTO or G-8 'summit'), they are living proof that the end-of-history idea itself has come to an end. They protest because they want to live by their own rules; make their histories in their own little ways.

The book isn't actually a book, as *No Logo* (her prize-winning analysis of the emergence of anti-corporate activism the world over) was. By her own admission, *No Logo* was a "thesis-driven project". *Fences and Windows* is more like a patchwork quilt, a collection of newspaper articles, essays and speeches she wrote and delivered between 1999 and 2001. It travels over similar ground, but in a completely different manner. Klein isn't arguing here; she merely puts together pithy pieces of writing and invites the reader to take short strolls through 3 years of global summits/protests. The two are inseparable, although in deadly opposition.

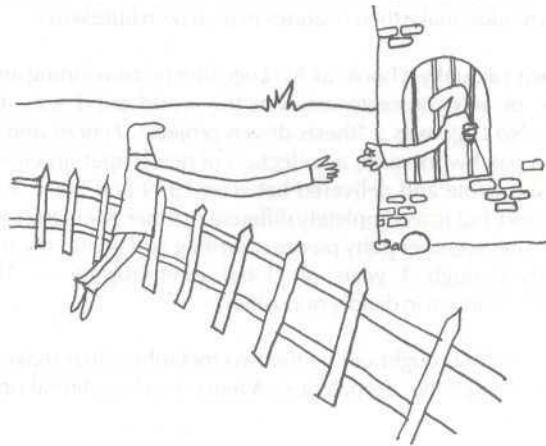
This fact is neatly brought out by the two metaphors that make up the title, and thread through the 'despatches'. A fence can be a literal obstacle, as in

the chain-link one throws around conference venues to keep people out. It is also virtual: a tariff or tax, or rule or clause inserted in a treaty, which affects people and natural resource-use globally, often turning lives and ecologies upside down. A window is what you open to either reveal the reality of the way the world is being governed, or to catch glimpses of the ways to reclaim an eroding earth.

Klein's articles are passionately informative. The world today is not a global village "intent on lowering walls and corridors, as we were promised, but a network of fortresses connected by highly militarized trade corridors." Power has moved out of local through national levels to be centralised in faceless global governing institutions; this makes it more difficult for people to respond to its effects:

"Sure, capitalism thrives in representative democracies that embrace pro-market policies such as privatisation and deregulation. But what about when citizens make democratic choices that aren't so popular with foreign investors? What happens when they decide to nationalise the phone company, for instance, or to exert greater control over their oil and mineral wealth? The bodies tell the story."

Enter, at this point, a man or woman – laid-off worker, homeless person, landless peasant, local resident, university student – with swimming goggles and wet cloth (to ward off tear gas and pepper spray), hell-bent on getting to



the bottom of the story. Is s/he an 'anti-globalisation protester'? No, says Klein. "At issue is not the merits of internationalism. All the activists I know are fierce internationalists. Rather, we are challenging the internationalization of a single economic model: neo-liberalism." These people ask: "exactly what is globalisation, and who gets to define it? "What we are calling 'globalization' must be recast not just as an inevitable stage in human evolution but as a profoundly political process: a set of debatable, deliberate and reversible choices about how to globalize."

Seattle was the "coming-out party" for those who define globalisation as a movement towards "deep, responsive democracy." Klein records with curiosity their tactics: they are fighting a "war of the fleas"; they are like "spiders." They are de-centralised and stand for power dispersal. Their political practice is of the "hub and spokes" variety: no one grand ideology, but links between ideas. They march, but also hold concerts and parties full of satire and poetry. Not only do they tote laptops to create and share Web-archives of every conference or the all-night "strategy party" they attend, they are as concretely elusive as the Net itself. This is why, Klein tells us, they are a subversive force to be reckoned with.

Fences and Windows is about the many little ways in which globalisation has entered the lives of many ordinary humans. Not only as a monopolistic uprooting force, but also as a spur to inter-connect and build new forms of co-existence. This quilt of a book does not keep out the cold, but it will make you warm. ▶

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