India: A discussion on "What does Modi's victory mean?"

*By **Roger Silverman**, June 2014*
(Cde. Silverman is one of the founders of Workers International Network. The original article, which was specially commissioned for Workers International Journal, has also been posted on https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/socialistdiscussion. WIN also has a Facebook Group: https:// www.facebook.com/ WorkersIntlNetwork)

The article I wrote recently on the Indian election results initiated a correspondence with the son of a British friend who is currently working in Banglaore, India. He has illusions in Modi, and we have had a fairly spirited exchange of ideas. I have copied here my latest reply to him…

Thanks for your reply. For me, too, it is stimulating to have my ideas challenged (even when they are right!). I haven't got time for a thorough reply now, but here are a few interim points to keep the discussion going:

You keep quoting the wishes of the USA (in this case, once again in relation to their collusion with India in unilaterally violating the nuclear non-proliferation pact), as if that were a decisive factor in determining the future course of world history. If anything, this policy had far more to do with US determination to tie the hands of Pakistan, with its ambivalent attitude to Islamic fundamentalism, than with India's rivalry with China; it is after all towards Pakistan that the Indian H-bombs are facing.

But even leaving that issue aside, your faith in the power of the USA to shape the world according to its own interests is hopelessly anachronistic and touchingly naïve in the current

epoch, and is belied in front of our very eyes, day after day, from Ukraine to Afghanistan to Iraq to Latin America. The USA may well want to find some means of curbing China's growth, but for all the reasons I've already mentioned, any hope of promoting India to the extent that it threatens to eclipse China is doomed.

(Incidentally, you also disregard the evolution of the Chinese economy. Increasingly, China's economy is shifting its former dependence on the export of cheap goods to the growth of a potentially enormous internal domestic market.)

Independent India was born amid a bloodbath of communal genocide. It was plagued from the beginning with caste atrocities and domination over the sub-continent's patchwork of national minority cultures and languages. There is simply no basis for your assumption that the medieval barbarities of India's caste heritage are now coming to an end. The very survival of a bigoted communal rabble like the BJP — let alone its current ascendancy — gives the lie to that illusion. The BJP is the shamelessly blatant political voice of Hindu communal supremacy over the Muslim and other minority religions; of perpetuation of an upper-caste apartheid system of "untouchability"; and of brutal imposition of the dominant minority Hindi language over the regional cultures.

Narendra Modi personally is the man who, as chief minister of Gujarat, presided over the communal slaughter of thousands of Muslim men, women and children, and who this very day is ramming the Hindi language down the throats of the vast non-Hindi speaking majority. I'm afraid the myth that he represents some kind of modernising technocratic enlightenment is, frankly, laughable.

In a society where every day women are raped, hanged from trees and burned alive over dowry disputes, what do you make of the recent public pronouncements by BJP ministers that rape is "sometimes right, sometimes wrong" and that "these incidents happen accidentally"? Is this evidence that "India is evolving"?

Under Modi, the last vestigial traces of the old policies of

the Nehru dynasty are being stamped out. Modi is the face of reaction in India today — the traditional ideology of India's brutal ruling class and castes, now openly feeding the voracious appetites of the global corporations, and triumphally stamping out the last vestiges of the long-discarded policies of the Nehru dynasty, which had made at least token concessions to planning, protection and secularism — albeit hypocritically and corruptly administered.

You advocate an "effectively regulated" market economy; but who is to administer regulation over the tiny handful of rampantly predatory multinational corporations, incomparably richer and more powerful than any state, that exploit the world's resources and populations?

You defend the provision of health care, food subsidies and education for their potential role in improving productivity, but haven't you noticed that welfare measures of any kind — health care, subsidies, housing, education, unemployment and disability benefits — are being destroyed worldwide? And don't you feel uneasy at finding yourself actually advocating the wholesale demolition of workers' rights to even minimal employment security in a country where hundreds of millions of people are already unemployed or chronically underemployed? And even defending it, on the very dubious grounds that it will allegedly help provide employment? Even if this turns out to be marginally correct, any jobs that it does create will be at starvation rates of pay and under daily threat of instant termination.

I hope that you will use your stay in India, as I did for many years, to talk to people at all levels, stay with workers' families, sleep on floors and roofs, shower with buckets of cold water, contend with rats and mosquitos, languish under power cuts, witness first-hand the hardships and struggles of ordinary people, and look at life from their standpoint too, as well as those of well-fed business economists.

And do travel outside India's "Silicon Valley" to get a more rounded picture of the real Indian society; although even Bangalore suffers from more fundamental problems than mere

"conservatism in women's dress codes".

I am reading Luce's book (Edward Luce: In Spite of the Gods: The Rise of Modern India), and will give you a fair and balanced appraisal of it once I have finished it. But I have to warn you that so far my impressions are not favourable.

Roger Silverman, June 2014