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Indian Communist: 'Modi represents the Indian brand of fascism'

Saturday 24 June 2023, by [ANDREWARTHA Jacob](#), [D'ROZARIO Clifton](#) (Date first published: 15 June 2023).

Clifton D' Rozario, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, talks to Jacob Andrewartha ahead of his participation in the [Ecosocialism 2023 conference](#) on July 1-2, about the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and how the left is fighting back against his fascist regime.

It is common to hear Modi described as a reformer who enjoys great popularity within India. But it was not that long ago that he was referred to as a tyrant overseeing the weakening of democratic institutions. Can you give us a bit of background to Modi's rise to power and what might explain this change in tune regarding his rule?

There is no consistency in how the international community looks at Modi. If you go back 20 years, he was *persona non grata*. Today, Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese refers to Modi as "The Boss". But there is a political and economic rationale to this shift.

While the rise of fascism in India has been propelled primarily by India's own internal developments, the current international climate favours it. Globally, we are seeing a rightward political shift occurring. Global capitalism finds itself in a deep crisis and yet, at the same time, is on the offensive. That is why the kind of fascism that we see in India is mirrored by similar rightward shifts in other countries. Capitalism in crisis is germane ground for these kinds of regimes to arise and prop each other up.

As to Modi's rise to power, it is essential to understand the Hindu supremacist organisation, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or National Volunteer Organisation). Formed in 1925, this organisation — which drew inspiration from Italian fascism and Nazism — has been mobilising in various ways since then to try and establish a primarily Hindu majoritarian state.

As a young boy, Modi joined his local RSS branch and attended its indoctrination camps. From there, he became an RSS full timer in the late '60s, and later went on to consolidate his rule within the RSS.

In 2001, he took the leap from the RSS to the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the RSS' political front, when the RSS decided to parachute Modi into Gujarat as chief minister to replace the ailing Keshubhai Patel.

Less than a year later, in February 2002, we had the horrific Godhra train burning in Gujarat, an absolutely horrific train disaster in which 59 Hindus died. What followed in Gujarat was absolute mayhem: officially, the government says 1169 people died as a result of the subsequent anti-Muslim riots, but unofficial estimates put the figure at more than 2000.

Modi came under a bit of flack internationally for the role he played as chief minister. But the

corporate elites came to his aid. Later that year, elections took place in Gujarat that saw Modi and the BJP returned to power with a thumping majority.

As chief minister, Modi's reign was marked by pro-corporate policies, weakened labour protections, decreased social expenditure, and an increase in caste-related atrocities and communal polarisation. Modi's charge onto the national political stage was premised on this foundation laid in Gujarat, which he flaunted as the Gujarat model of development.

During that time, Modi also slowly transformed himself into the main BJP leader at the national level. Within the BJP, he created a situation that made it inevitable that he would become the prime ministerial candidate by sidelining any other potential rival.

But there were also objective factors that explain why Modi became prime minister. By 2014, India had lived through ten years of a Congress Party-led coalition government that was confronting an economic downturn. It was also a regime marred by corruption, leading to massive anti-corruption rallies around the country. Amid all this, the middle classes were clamouring for a very strong leader.

As a result, the Congress lost its position as the natural party of the ruling classes. Seeking an alternative, the ruling classes found what they were looking for in Modi.

What can you tell us about the Modi government's more recent track record on human rights and democracy?

Since coming to power, the BJP has made a mockery of the constitution. What we are seeing is that basic constitutional values, whether they be secularism, federalism, etc, every single one of them is under attack.

At the same time, any kind of dissent — especially ideological dissent — is completely clampdown upon. Furthermore, you have so-called public institutions and agencies, such as the police and the tax authorities, being deployed against political opponents.

You also have unprecedented communal polarisation and the privatisation of violence. As I mentioned, the RSS has several front organisations; some of them are ultra-violent organisations that have taken the law into their own hands, carrying out lynchings of Muslims.

In sum, you have the collapse of how one would understand a functioning democracy. In its place you have populism, nationalism, authoritarianism and majoritarianism. All this is a matter of concern and paints a very bleak picture.

In light of all this, the CPI(ML) Liberation has labelled the Modi-BJP government as fascist. Why is the case?

Whether we call Modi fascist or not, no one disputes that this regime rules by attacking society, attacking the constitution, attacking the secular fabric of society, attacking all the institutions of accountability and democracy.

Some organisations are reluctant to say this amounts to fascism. I imagine this is because if you look at fascism in the historical, traditional sense, you could say what we have in India looks different to what the Nazis or Mussolini looked like.

But we cannot sit back and wait for that exact same scenario to replay itself today. Obviously, fascism has different features in different governments; in different countries it will have its own

local particularities. What we are saying is that, if you put together all these elements of Modi's rule, then what you have is Indian fascism.

Having said that, I think it is OK to call it whatever you want — the point is to understand the scale of the challenge we face. We have to accept that this is not business as usual: the BJP is not just another party of the ruling class. This is a party based on the ideology of the RSS and backed by private militia groups who will not think twice before taking the law into their own hands and killing people.

In our view, there are several aspects of this regime that separate it out from other ruling class regimes: the unabashed crony capitalism, the subservience to imperialism, the aggressive majoritarianism, the dismantling of the constitution, the relentless attacks on dissent and on minorities and the working class — all of this together represents the Indian brand of fascism.

Our party has identified the Modi regime as a fascist regime and called for all-out resistance to this growing fascist offensive. We have emphasised the need to step up opposition through determined mass struggles and exploring possibilities of broad-based electoral alliances among opposition parties.

What can you tell us about the resistance to Modi, in particular the recent protests by female wrestlers?

Prior to Modi coming to power, there was a kind of paralysis in terms of protest. The situation is all different now. Whether it is students protesting over various issues, including the new education policy, or landless labourers protesting, or the Adivasi, the original inhabitants, protesting various projects, we are seeing rising resistance across the country.

One of the most remarkable fightbacks was the one by farmers [in 2020-21]. For a year, farmers from all over the country set up tents outside Delhi, basically occupying every corner and encircling Delhi, to demand the government withdraw three anti-farmer laws. More than 800 farmers died in that protest. In the end, the Modi government had to withdraw the laws.

Now we have the struggle of the wrestlers, some of them Olympic medal winners who have brought sporting glory to the country. These protests arose after complaints were filed against Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh alleging he had sexually harassed seven women wrestlers, including a minor, over the past 10 years.

When the government refused to act on this, the wrestlers took their protest to the Supreme Court and succeeded in officially having two reports filed against this man. Despite this, he has still not been arrested.

This is not the first time that we have seen the BJP protecting one of their own — we have seen the BJP protect people accused of terror acts, such as Pragya Singh Thakur, who today sits in parliament.

But these wrestlers have stuck to their guns and a remarkable mobilisation is taking place around their struggle: student organisations, women's organisations, trade unions, farmer organisations and various political parties have all come out and expressed their solidarity.

We are seeing a mass surge of protest against the inaction — or more accurately the protection of this man — by the Modi government.

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