

Draft

Manifesto of the New Socialist Initiative/
Inqilabi Socialist Front

A WORLD FOR THE WORKERS!

A FUTURE FOR THE WORLD!!

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India

Preface

You are invited to read, examine, evaluate and comment on the Draft Manifesto of the New Socialist Initiative – an ideological-political platform in the making. Another proposed name for this upcoming platform is Inqilabi Socialist Front.

The Draft Manifesto is an outcome of the intense process that has been underway for the last several years among a group of Marxist activists and intellectuals active in and engaged with the revolutionary left movement in India. It has been prepared as a first step towards the launching of a platform that will articulate, confront and address the enormous challenges presented by the rapidly changing times. The politics of opposing capitalism have to be reworked and strategies for replacing it with socialism are to be redesigned. Socialism, furthermore, is to be freshly envisioned with the aim of taking the society and the humanity to higher levels of creativity, productivity, equality, democracy, prosperity, sustainability and freedom.

The world is a very different place than it was a century ago or even half a century ago. Revolutionary left became a global force in the last century under the conditions of imperialist colonialism and indigenous feudalisms. But these are no longer the mainstream conditions of the world today. Colonialism has been forced out of the stage of history and feudalisms, wherever they exist, have been relegated to the margins of political and economic systems. Imperialism has fashioned a new modus operandi that better serves its interests in the postcolonial conditions. Capitalism reigns supreme and has, for the first time, succeeded in penetrating and taking under its fold every country and every society on the planet. For the first time in history revolutions directly confronting capitalist systems and bourgeois democracies are on the agenda. Revolutionary left has to prepare for this altogether new condition and forge a suitable strategy and a new language. Lessons and strategies of the previous century, important as they are, will no longer suffice.

Dogma invariably feeds on populism. Both sidestep the truth and both work against the real interests of the people. Together they conspire to prevent large parts of the left movement from coming to grips with the changing times. A revolutionary movement must proceed from actually existing conditions of the present and it must proceed towards building a future that resonates with the claims and the desires of the working people. Such a future can only be a freshly envisioned socialist future.

The Draft Manifesto is an attempt to address this issue and confront this challenge. We appeal to you to consider it, criticize it, and improve it. We appeal to you to become a part of the process that has shaped this manifesto and that aims to create this new platform - one that will speak on behalf of the revolutionary left in a new voice and with a fresh promise.

National Convening Committee
New Socialist Initiative/Inqilabi Socialist Front

Draft
Manifesto of the New Socialist Initiative¹

A WORLD FOR THE WORKERS —A FUTURE FOR THE WORLD!

History is always full of surprises. Rare, however, are the periods when its long course prepares to take a big turn. Such turns are dreaded by some and awaited by many. Those who dread them would like to imagine history as having arrived at an endless plateau where a big change in its course is no longer possible. There are no other roads to be taken. Those who have waited for the big change, on the other hand, have so passionately desired it and fought so hard to turn every twist into a big turn that, exhausted by the struggles and preoccupied with the strategies of yesterday, they often fail to recognize today's tasks and tomorrow's potentials. It is invariably under such conditions that future is freshly envisioned, strategies are redesigned and new forces appear to help history take the next big turn.

Humanity stands at the threshold of such a period. The long course of capitalism has lasted for half a millennium. For more than two centuries it has been the dominant system on the planet. And yet, it is only now that capitalist relations have been able to penetrate every nook and corner of the world. It is only now that the entire globe has been turned into an unhindered playground of capital. Capitalism for the first time stands face to face with itself. No longer can it arrogate to itself the mission of modernizing the natives and civilizing the barbarians. The natives have sprung their own capitalists and have already become participants in the capitalist world order. Barbarians of today are mostly the capitalist rulers themselves who brook no resistance to their designs of creating a new imperial order and spare no ruthlessness in making capitalism entrenched everywhere. No longer can capitalism blame other systems for the miseries, exploitations, oppressions and unfreedoms under which much of humanity continues to suffer.

Empires never look back at the ruins left in the wake of their victories, nor do they weigh how much of a burden they have themselves become for their subjects and for history. Capitalism sounds triumphant today. It does not judge itself by what it has done and what it is doing to humanity. It does not judge itself by the great contradiction that resides at the very root of its being, nor by the endemic turbulence and the recurrent crises that arise there from. It judges itself by how it has fared against other systems and what it has done to other systems. Not only has it prevailed over the older systems under which it was born—invariably by destroying them but also by co-opting and incorporating many of their elements and structures—it has also withstood the challenge of a variety of socialist systems that arose during the twentieth century. It would like to present this as the moment of its final victory. It would like to raise the slogan—There Is No Alternative!

The question, however, is not how capitalism judges itself. The real question is: how is humanity going to judge capitalism. The victory of capitalism over other systems that have existed so far is no longer the issue. The real issue is: can it do anything about the

¹ Another suggestion for name: *Inqilabi Socialist Front*

fundamental contradiction at the root of its own being; can it face the new system that will arise from that very contradiction—a system that will arise from its own belly! Empires successful against external threats have often crumbled under their own weight. Systems successful against other systems are never successful against themselves. They are never able to prevent themselves from creating their own gravediggers.

Revolutionary leaders of the working class realized all this long ago. There is nothing new in such arguments and assertions. What is new is the situation itself—a situation in which deeds and consequences of capitalism are everywhere on display. Everywhere capital harnesses productive powers and creative potentials of the working people to create immense wealth but keeps a large majority of them under conditions of oppressive poverty and perpetual insecurity. Those who find work must work hard for a pittance because there are many who haven't found work and are ready to work for even less. Working class is pitted against itself. Even the few, who do specialized and higher jobs, draw large salaries and do not look upon themselves as workers, are faced with the same ruthless logic of capital. They must work longer and harder than ever to keep themselves in their positions. As incomes go up, the quality of life goes down. Human potential remains unrealized. Large part of it is excluded from the productive and creative processes, and the part that is deployed is fed into the profit maximizing machinery. Capital's thirst for profits and hence for all kinds of resources is insatiable. Not only does it play havoc with the human potential, it is playing havoc with the planet itself. On top of it all, many of the old forms of inequalities, exclusions and oppressions continue. They have been articulated into the capitalist relations. Capitalism is their new protector, the new provider of conditions for their reproduction. Who else, then, is to blame? Capitalism must come face to face with the consequences of its own existence. It must account for the crimes against humanity that flow out of its own logic.

The toilers and the oppressed all over the world have fought long and hard against capitalism. They have scored many victories and have suffered many defeats. All this has happened under very complex conditions. Often the battle lines were not clearly drawn. Or, multiply drawn battle lines intersected each other. The fight against capital was already on agenda a century ago, but a large part of humanity had still to fight against feudal systems, against monarchs and tyrants, against colonial masters. Many had to fight to bring capitalism to their lands and to remove barriers to capitalist development—barriers erected by capitalism itself as imperialist countries had colonized much of the non-western world. Even the proletarian revolutions of the previous century took place in countries where capitalism was not yet the reigning system. These revolutions did inflict decisive defeats on imperialism. They inaugurated the heroic task of building socialism in societies that had not yet gone through capitalist development. They became sources of inspiration for the toilers and the oppressed all over the world. But they faced great—ultimately insurmountable—difficulties in building socialism. They rescued those societies from the deep crises they were in, but could not put them securely on the high road to socialism. Reality lagged behind the plans and the dreams of the working class.

Now, for the first time in history, battle lines are clearly drawn between labour and capital. Revolutions of tomorrow will be the first revolutions directly against capital

inside capitalist countries. Socialism of tomorrow will arise, for the first time, from conditions where pressure builds up within the capitalist system—when the capitalist integument of productive forces is burst asunder.

Complexities, for sure, would not go away and new ones are bound to appear. Battle lines may be clearly drawn between labour and capital but enormous complexities reside on both the sides of the line. Labour is fragmented both by the capitalist division of labour and by the age-old divisions of race, caste, gender, ethnicities, nationalities and histories. The spread of capital, on the other hand, is highly uneven across the globe despite the recent spurt in globalization. Imperialism has changed its modus operandi to suite the changed conditions of the postcolonial world. Emergent capital from the newly independent countries is getting fused with the advanced capital of imperialism and the bourgeoisie from the so-called third world are enthusiastically joining the world capitalist system, formally as equal members but actually as junior partners. And yet, despite globalization, nation-state remains the most important and the most strategic element in the new political structure of the world. It remains the most effective instrument for exercising bourgeois rule and protecting its legitimacy. Boundaries of the nation-states are increasingly non-existent for capital as it criss-crosses them at will. In contrast, labour remains sequestered behind many walls, tied up in many chains. Capitalists of the world, despite their fierce competition with each other, seem to have united; workers of the world are segregated, fragmented and disunited.

Revolutions change the big picture by resolving the central contradictions of an era. But they can do so only by gathering forces that can sweep across manifold boundaries and divides. Every revolution must have simplicity in its grand strategy, but it must be able to find its way through the immense complexities on ground. This remains the great challenge of today. Furthermore, revolutions never repeat themselves; they can never be copied or imitated. Strategies of past revolutions can never be redeployed as such in future revolutions. Those who claim to lead the working class must rise to the occasion. They must reformulate programmes and redesign strategies that can inspire the oppressed and the exploited and harness their courage and wisdom for the coming revolutions. They must re-envision socialism—a socialism that would not only bring liberation to the ‘wretched of the earth’ but it would also unleash the creative powers of the ‘workers of the world’.

Future is never a destiny. It has to be built on the platform provided by history and it has to be redeemed by those whose labour and whose sacrifices have gone into building this platform. This task has come, fully and finally, on the shoulders of the working class. Workers must claim the world because only they can build a real future for the world.

A World of the Workers

But where are the workers? Don't we all live in a world of bankers, executives, entertainers and tycoons fused with and surrounded by the ever growing ‘middle classes’? If this postmodern capitalist paradise is in turn surrounded by the sprawling slum-proletariat, that does not take away the novelty and the centrality of the paradise.

And if, on the global scale, the metropolises of the empire of capital are still surrounded by the sprawling third world, if the metropolitan citizenry is still outnumbered by vast populations of peasants and forest-dwellers, artisans and coolies, that does not take away the novelty and the centrality of the new world order. Everywhere the center is expanding and the peripheries are in a flux. They are being reshaped in the image of the center. They are growing their own centers and demarcating their own peripheries. First world is being presented as *the* future for the third world. In any case, since when did the peasants and the forest-dwellers, artisans and the coolies, the slum-proletariat and the servants in the household, become models of a working class? Have they not always been the ‘wretched of the earth’? They had their chances in the previous century when they made their revolutions and tried their versions of socialism. Now their future lies with the new empire of capital. This empire will open the gates of its center selectively for their future generations and co-opt them as the new ‘middle classes’. Such is the shape of things under the new dispensation of capitalism—capitalists and the ‘middle classes’ living in the center and the ‘wretched of the earth’ waiting at the gates for entry passes. End of history has arrived. The working class has disappeared!

These may be the claims of the ideologues and scribes labouring in the service of capital. But that is not all. Similar views afflict even those who have fought for worker’s interests, dreamed about a socialist future and endeavored to make this future a reality, but whose faith in such a future seems to have lapsed with the demise of the 20th century socialism. Those who were only too sure of the imminent demise of capitalism have suddenly become completely unsure of themselves.

Just as the capitalist class is a product of capitalism, the working class too is a product of capitalism. The overall division of labour imposed on the society by capitalism is primarily responsible for the internal structure of the working class. If capitalism undergoes internal restructuring, as it has especially during the latter half of the 20th century, then the overall division of labour too is bound to change. The working class may then look very different from what it did in the 19th century Europe. The 21st century working class cannot be anticipated in the image of the 19th century industrial proletariat who had nothing to lose but its chains and who had a world to win.

The social division of labour imposed by capitalism has always been complex and many-layered, but it has never been as complex and as many-layered as it is today. In spite of the turbulent history and the recurrent crises and in spite of the formidable challenges presented by workers’ movements and socialism during the 20th century, capital’s insatiable drive to accumulate and expand has continued unabated. In fact, in the course of overcoming these crises and challenges, it has found new ways, established new structures and adopted new practices, as it has moved on to capture the globe and take all aspect of human life under its fold. This has added to its complexity and dynamism. More than ever before capitalism is a global system with a global division of labour, and more than ever before it has taken under its fold all aspects of human life instituting a complex division of labour even at the local levels.

It is not surprising, then, that the industrial proletariat as it emerged in the 19th century Europe has failed to become the majority even in the metropolitan centers of global capitalism. It would be naïve to expect that, despite the tremendous increase in productivity and accumulation as witnessed in the 20th century, capital would confine itself to the traditional sectors of industrial production and drown itself in the overproduction of material goods. Enhanced productivity, as well as the global system of accumulation with profits and super-profits flowing in from the far corners of the world, has enabled it to deploy a large portion of the productive powers of labour into new sectors that provide an enormous range of services. Advent of the so-called welfare state in the advanced capitalist countries has been an integral part of this process and, in turn, has greatly contributed to this internal restructuring of capitalism. Typically, in a mature capitalist economy in today's world, the so-called service sector contributes two-thirds of the GDP and an equal proportion of the labour force finds employment in this sector. Not only has such a sectoral restructuring of capital helped it soften its structural limits that would have otherwise devastated it completely, it has also changed the appearance and the configuration of the working class. There exist manifold divisions within the working class, segmenting and fragmenting it according to occupation, income, status, skill, education, and varied conceptions of self-worth and of solidarity with others. A large part of the working class in modern capitalist societies does not even consider itself to be a part of the working class. All those who sell their labour power and depend primarily on their wages and salaries, whether for bare survival or for a comfortable standard of life, form a vast majority of the entire population in all such societies. And yet it appears as though the working class is disappearing.

If the actual course of capitalism has belied many of the classical expectations in the case of the metropolitan centers, things have not been fundamentally different in the peripheries of the global capital. Here too history has deviated in many ways from the classically expected trajectories. At first there were expectations that capitalism would lead to a rapid industrialization of the agrarian societies. A large portion of the peasantry would be displaced from agriculture and turned into industrial proletariat. Those who would remain in agriculture would be polarized into capitalist farmers and agrarian wage labourers. If there was a barrier obstructing such a course of history, it was imperialism itself—the highest stage of capitalism that operated largely through the international system of colonialism. As imperialism itself was obstructing capitalist development in the colonized world, the indigenous bourgeoisie of such societies were willing to participate, often in the lead role, in the anti-colonial national liberation struggles.

Colonialism has departed from the stage of history and there has been a rapid, although highly uneven, development of capitalism in the postcolonial third world. Imperialism has changed its modus operandi. It has now entered into partnership with the third world bourgeoisie, bringing in capital and adopting primarily economic means and mechanisms for sharing in the profits and the accumulation generated in these economies. But, despite all this, even the most rapidly industrializing societies of the third world have not measured up to the expectations of a massive class polarization and the emergence of a large industrial proletariat. Agriculture still contributes a fairly large, although diminishing, share in the GDP. More importantly, a much larger portion of the labour

force remains engaged with agriculture. There is migration of labour out of the agrarian sector, but it isn't rapid enough for bringing about a speedy class polarization within the agricultural sector. In most cases, the agrarian sector in the third world remains, by and large, dominated by small peasant economies.

This phenomenon is linked with the global division of labour imposed by today's imperialism. While, in most cases, there is little doubt about capitalist development within the agrarian sectors of the third world economies, peasantry is not going to disappear any time soon from these societies. The kind of industrialization that would have brought about such a change is not possible in a third world that remains integrated into the present global division of labour. The degree and the nature of possible industrialization are severely constrained by the global nature of capitalism and by the attendant division of labour.

So, the peasantry stays, but it does so in a radically different class position and assumes a fundamentally different character. Agriculture is fully integrated into the capitalist mode of production and its products assume the character of commodities just like any of the industrial products. Wage labour makes its appearance on a large scale, but even if this were not the case, the capitalist nature of this sector would still be unmistakable. Peasants depending on family labour are nevertheless integrated into the capitalist mode. By and large, they have been turned into petty commodity producers.

Capitalism has never been able to do without petty commodity producers. They have survived, even if in small numbers, in the most developed economies. The difference here is that a large chunk of the labour force in the third world would remain confined, at least in the foreseeable future, to this category. This is how the local division of labour gets determined, at least in part, by the global division of labour. Apart from the peasantry, this category is further embellished by the large number of artisans, petty shopkeepers and so on, so characteristic of the third world societies. Petty commodity producers in a capitalist economy stand in the objective class position of the working class. They are exploited by the entire system and the surplus they generate is taken away from them through an intricate network of markets and exchanges.

While the countryside of the third world looks markedly different from the countryside of the first world, the newly emergent urban centers of the third world have already begun to resemble the metropolitan centers of the first world. Proportionately speaking, the share of agriculture, or more generally of the so-called primary sector, is ten times more in the third world production than the corresponding share in the first world. But this has not prevented the service sector from becoming the largest sector in most of the larger third world economies. Capitalist development in today's third world does not depend as much on the classical forms of industrialization as it did in the 19th century Europe. Instead it is following the road taken by the contemporary examples of advanced capitalism. This has obvious impact on the social division of labour emerging within the third world. Peasants and other petty commodity producers still form the single largest component of the working force, but the number of workers finding employment in the informal sectors is growing at a fast pace. Peasants and artisans are more likely to give way to these informal

sector workers than to the industrial proletariat. Overall, a relatively smaller number of workers will be engaged in production of material goods. Many more will be engaged in selling those goods, and an even larger number will be deployed in providing various kinds of services. It would not be very wise to wait for the industrial proletariat to become a large majority of the working people. Such a time may never arrive.

Capitalism, thus, has survived by restructuring itself and by changing its modus operandi. It imposes a complex division of labour on the world it rules and on the social life it colonizes. This division of labour segments and fragments the working class and changes its appearance. Capitalism succeeds by creating and intensifying manifold contradictions among the people. Workers do all the work of the world, but they do not all work and live in similar conditions. Not all even appear as workers. The variegated conditions of material life influence differently the structure of consciousness of the different sections. Workers work and live as workers, but not all consider themselves to be workers. Overall, the basis for the workers of the world to unite recedes from the surface and goes deeper into the subterranean levels of social reality.

Surface phenomena often arise out of the deeper layers of reality. They are part of the reality but rarely do they determine the fundamental nature of reality. Today's world is a capitalist world. Necessarily, therefore, it remains a world of the working class. This class does not appear in the image of the 19th century industrial proletariat, but objectively it occupies the same class position. Different sections of workers are located differently in the complex and elaborate division of labour, but they are all located similarly in relation to the capitalist class. The material conditions of their life may be widely different, but they all produce surplus for the owners and controllers of capital. Some of them may share in the surplus appropriated from workers at the lower ladders in the division of labour, but much more surplus created by their own labour is taken away from them.

Proletarian revolutions of the last century happened in societies where life conditions of the oppressed and the exploited were uniformly unbearable. Simple slogans, such as "Bread and Peace" or "Land to the Tiller", were enough to bring about a revolutionary unity among the people. Such uniformity of life conditions does not exist under contemporary capitalism. Unity of all the exploited and the oppressed is no longer possible simply on the basis of the conditions of life and work. One will have to go to the deeper layers of the capitalist system to find the basis for revolutionary unity. Under today's capitalism such a unity can be established only on the basis of the fact that all sections of the working class, with all the differences in their work, skill, income, identity and culture, produce surplus that is taken away from them by the owners of capital.

The surface phenomena arising out of capitalism may foretell the complexity of the coming revolutions and the challenges confronting them, but the fundamental nature of capitalism has not changed. Workers produce the world, but the world does not belong to them. Dependent on wages and salaries for their survival, they continue as "wage slaves" of capital. They create all the wealth but it flows to those who are entitled by the rules of

capital to appropriate it. Despite all changes in their life conditions, the workers of the world even today have nothing to lose. They still have a world to win.

Many Dimensions of the Social Reality

Being a worker is not a full account of the person who is a worker. Just as being a capitalist is not a full account of the person who is a capitalist. All societies in history so far have been class societies, but there has never been a society that existed linearly along the class axis alone. As a social being every person stands at the intersection of multiple axes that are needed to map social reality in all its dimensions. As a social being every person carries multiple identities.

What appear as social identities are produced and reproduced by definite social relations. Social identities invariably have material foundations. Even in the instances where they appear to arise largely in the social and cultural imaginations, or present themselves merely as superstructural features, they grow their roots in the material social reality. Arising nebulously from solid foundations they also participate in constituting those solid foundations. Not only do they form bases for a whole range of inequalities, oppressions, discriminations and exclusions—in themselves a large part of the material social reality—they also become articulated into the mode of production and offer added strength to the system of exploitation.

At the same time, social relations and the identities constituted by them are historical entities. Even the ones that seem to persist through epochs and millennia and across many modes of production are far from being eternal and unchanging. Embroiled as they are in the entire social dynamics it can hardly be otherwise. Their meanings and roles necessarily change in the course of history. Many among the old ones go out of existence; many fresh ones arise and become a part of the social reality.

Social identities that arise from corresponding categories of social relations are forms of existence and operations of those social relations. Identities are determined not only by how the bearers of those identities perceive themselves. They are also determined by how others perceive and recognize them. Identity and recognition are fundamentally intertwined, and misrecognition, in this context, is often at the root of many of the deeply entrenched social injustices and oppressions.

Gender, caste, race, ethnicity, nationality and religious identity are among the major examples of social relations that intersect variously with the axis of class relations and, along with it, constitute the social reality. These relations form bases for inequalities, oppressions, exploitations, discriminations and exclusions. Equality, justice, and freedom from oppressions and exploitations, are basic needs and intensely desired goals of all those who suffer on account of their social identities. They have been burning issues in all phases and eras of history, and they will continue to be so as long as these undesirable phenomena continue to afflict the human civilization.

Identity-based inequalities, oppressions and exploitations were, and still are, an integral part of the social order in the pre-modern societies. They enjoyed social sanction and, invariably, they were divinely ordained. Modern societies brought the question of human equality explicitly on the social agenda. The social as well as the divine sanctions perpetuating inequalities were challenged and ideologically defeated. However, modern societies have, by and large and in most cases, failed to turn formal equality into substantive equality. Inequalities based on gender, caste, race, religion, and so on not only continue in most societies, they have gained, in many instances, fresh vitality and new reinforcements.

The reasons behind this failure are many. Firstly, it shows that the phenomena of identity-based social inequalities are deeply entrenched as well as surprisingly dynamic. Not only do they continue to draw nourishments from old roots, they also strike new roots in the changed conditions. Secondly, modernity has existed and evolved under the aegis of capitalism. Capitalism, on the other hand, loses no opportunity of incorporating into its own social structure those parts of the pre-modern social relations that can serve its interests. The times when it raised revolutionary slogans such as “liberty, equality, fraternity” are long past. After defeating the old order capitalism sits cosily with the remnants of the old order. Thirdly, numerous axes of social relations criss-cross each other. In each case a given axis may identify oppressors and exploiters standing across the line from the oppressed and the exploited, but overall there does not exist a single great divide that puts all the oppressed and the exploited on one side in solidarity with each other and there is no single identity that can be assigned to all the oppressors and exploiters. All put together, this makes the struggle against totality of all forms of oppressions and exploitations that much more complex.

All social relations, and the social identities arising there from, may not necessarily be reduced to economic, political or class roots. One cannot expect, therefore, that a resolution of the class contradictions will automatically, or eventually, lead to a resolution of all other social contradictions. Issues of other social contradictions must be taken up in their own right. A historically progressive resolution of class contradictions may facilitate an emancipatory resolution of other social contradictions, but it cannot by itself ensure such a resolution. Indeed a historically progressive resolution of class contradictions would necessarily require class solidarity among those who are the exploited class but are divided among multiple social identities. Such solidarity can be expected only if sustained progress is made towards emancipatory resolutions of identity-based social contradictions.

At the same time, any movement for an emancipatory resolution of such a social contradiction cannot keep itself aloof from the class question. If being a worker is not a full account of the person who is a worker, nor is being a woman a full account of the person who is a woman. So is the case with a Dalit or with any member of any group or community that is socially oppressed. No one can escape the consequences of living in a class society. No one can abdicate the responsibility of envisioning and building a future free from class exploitation. No one, therefore, can ignore the task of fighting for a historically progressive resolution of class contradictions.

Multiple identities are an integral part of social life. But inequalities, injustices, oppressions and exploitations based on identities do not have to be a part of social life. All these must be eliminated, even if not all identities can be eliminated. There are identities whose *raison d'être* is perpetuation of some form of identity-based inequality and injustice. Such identities may be undesirable in themselves and they need to be dissolved altogether. But a society so homogeneous and uniform that it is devoid of all social identities cannot be imagined. Social and cultural diversity will remain an integral part of human civilization even after societies become free from exploitation and oppression. Indeed more so. In such societies fresh identities may arise more spontaneously to add further richness to healthy diversity. Equality of those who are culturally and socially different is a precondition for further flowering of cultural richness and diversity. In a social sense and in the social domain, different must be equals. The quest for social equality is a historical necessity not only because we are all humans, it is also because we are all different.

Nature for Profit and Accumulation

Humanity is a part of Nature but it is crucially different from all the other parts. It is the only part that can consciously and deliberately intervene in Nature. Such interventions have been, from times immemorial, the primal basis for emergence and growth of human civilization. Human interventions in Nature are necessarily mediated through the social modes of production and reproduction. In producing the conditions of their life humans also 'produce' Nature. A part of the whole assumes agency for reconstituting the whole, at least on the planetary scale.

Capitalism has taken this process to unprecedented and extreme heights. Immense development of productive forces, in the form of science and technology as well as in the form of colossal and enormously complex means, mechanisms and structures for organizing human activities, has given it extraordinary, almost magical, powers of command and control over Nature. It can harness natural forces, appropriate natural resources, alter natural processes and reclaim functions and territories from Nature in ways and on scales never before witnessed in human history. More importantly, and dangerously, with all these powers at its command it has harnessed Nature in its relentless pursuit of profits and accumulation. The system that has such powers of control over Nature and over humanity has no control over its own compulsive logic of maximizing profits at any cost. The tamer of all forces cannot tame its own rapacity. The controller of all humans cannot control its own drives. It is this irony that resides at the root of the emerging threat to the planet. It is this tragedy that imperils the sustainability of human life on this planet.

A key ideological move necessary for making the capitalist pattern of production and consumption entrenched in the world is to externalize and objectify Nature. It is taken as something external to humanity—something that humans can blithely feast on. No one, then, has to count the environmental cost of the capitalist pattern of production and consumption. Capital earns enormous profits through this pattern while it does not have

to pay for the environmental cost. But if it is challenged on this count, it finds escape routes ushering into equally lucrative territories. It makes money while it destroys the environment, but it also makes money when it tries to mend it. When movements arise and policies are formulated that force it to reckon environmental costs, it finds ways to transfer these costs to the people and rakes in further profits in the process. Capitalists make money when environmental considerations drive commodity prices to higher levels; when new technologies and processes are to be fabricated and new production methods instituted for controlling environmental damage; when governments and public institutions outsource the work of cleaning up the environmental mess to the same system of private firms and markets that created the mess in the first place.

Today's capitalism has gone even further. There are ecological commodities and related financial instruments on the market. Global corporations and rich nations can buy 'carbon credits' and continue to dump carbon into the atmosphere. Poor nations and communities can preserve their own forests and wildlife and plant trees for the rich of the world. They can earn 'carbon credits' and make some money if they refrain from adding carbon to the atmosphere themselves and toil to absorb some of the carbon spewed up by the rich. They can earn 'wetland credits' and make some money if they can preserve their own wetlands, so that the planet can have sufficient acreage of it as required by sustainability conditions, even as the developmental projects for the rich continue to swallow large chunks of it. Such examples are beginning to proliferate. Even a new kind of 'futures market' has emerged where financial instruments based on anticipated future prices of ecological commodities get traded. The poor are being paid to remain poor so that the rich can continue with their opulent ways of life. And, in the process, capital is creating new markets and finding new avenues of making further profits.

Even that is not all. Today's capitalism does not stop at appropriating and despoiling Nature and burdening the poor with the task of redemption. It has proceeded to harness and alter natural processes and, more importantly, claim monopoly over the rights to do so. It commands science and technology to create genetically modified foods, design wonder drugs, fabricate self-reproducing molecules for industrial as well as therapeutic purposes and harvest organs with the help of cloning. An increasingly strict and rapidly escalating regime of Intellectual Property Rights ensures that capitalist corporations possess a secure monopoly over these technologies and over the markets that emerge there from. Private ownership is the most sacrosanct principle of capitalism and capital is not content with owning natural objects and resources. It must own the natural laws and the natural processes themselves. The wonder molecules cannot move out of the proprietors' laboratories and start getting fabricated in someone else's lab or start curing diseases on a mass level. The GM seeds cannot spill and start reproducing into the fields whose owners have not purchased the rights to sow them. The risks involved in the new technologies are to be borne by the entire society, but the gains must be the exclusive monopoly of those who own them.

There is no doubt about the fact that the threat of an all-out ecological disaster looms large over the planet. In the long-term, the fate of humanity hangs in the balance. In the short term, it is already paying a heavy price. There should also be no doubt about the

fact that capitalism has become the principal reason behind this threat. Its mode of running the affairs of the world is at the root of this impending catastrophe.

Those who think that ecological balance can be regained and long-term sustainability can be ensured without fighting capitalism are avoiding the first and the foremost step in the long march towards this goal. Those who think that it is possible to get rid of the capitalist pattern of production and consumption without getting rid of capitalism are proposing to remove the ever-proliferating consequences without removing their root cause. Those who think that humanity will turn back to the ancient modes and adopt preservation of a pristine Nature as its supreme goal are nothing but romantics pining for an imaginary world. They too, in their own way, end up externalizing and objectifying Nature. Humanity cannot be imagined without Nature, but Nature too can no longer be imagined without humanity and its interventions. The real question is: what kinds of interventions can ensure sustainability as well as progress worthy of a humanity that is prosperous, emancipated and free, and what kind of system can ensure such a future for humanity?

On the other hand, those who think that capitalism has inbuilt mechanisms for correcting its practices that create ecological imbalances have, at best, a naïve faith in the supposed rationality of capitalism. They forget that capitalism's rationality is a captive of capitalism's logic. It cannot transcend the limits set by this logic. If capitalism does appear to correct some of its environmental misdeeds, it also forces humanity to pay a very heavy and a very unjustly distributed price.

However, fighting capitalism cannot be the beginning and the end of the struggle for ecological sustainability. Those who think that socialism would automatically ensure ecologically sustainable practices are afflicted with another kind of naïve faith. They forget that socialism would arise out of the conditions created by capitalism and men and women who would themselves be products of capitalist societies would build it. It is hard enough to get rid of capitalism, but it would be even harder to get rid of all its creations and consequences. It is not in the interest of capitalism that men and women become conscious of the effects of their interventions in Nature. Indeed, unreflective instrumentalism is such a deep affliction of capitalism that it begins to corrupt even the natural self-reflexivity of science. It becomes more and more difficult to incorporate into the knowledge of Nature the impact of the human interventions into Nature, much of it driven by science and technology. Society grows accustomed to a Promethean ideology that seeks mastery over Nature without reckoning the consequences of all it does to establish and exercise such mastery. It will not be an easy task to undo all this in the immediate aftermath of capitalism. The creators of the new system would have to be aware of this challenge.

The struggle for ecological balance and sustainability starts with the fight against capitalism but it does not end with it. Humanity, in particular the working class, would have to put in place a system that achieves this goal and makes these concerns an integral part of human progress. Humanity cannot do without interventions in Nature and it cannot do without coming up with ever-newer forms of such interventions. But, these

interventions must incorporate wisdom and self-reflexivity necessary for preservation and reproduction of ecological balance and sustainability. There is no canonical model of socialism that can automatically ensure this. Instead, socialism would have to be freshly envisioned and designed to incorporate these concerns and achieve this goal.

The New Empire of Capital

If capital is at the root of all that is wrong with the world, why does the world, even after half a millennium of enduring its wrongs, continue to put up with it? If it exploits workers, deprives all toilers of much of the fruits of their toil, preserves and reproduces the social relations that keep women, dalits, people of colour, and other excluded and marginalized communities under subjugation and oppression, if it is responsible for putting the planet in peril, and if it prevents humanity from realizing its full potential, why after all this does the humanity continue to tolerate it? What is the secret behind this unreasonable longevity of capital?

Such questions have been asked right from the time the true nature of capital began to be recognized. And even as the core of the answer has been available for as long as the questions themselves, the answer has also changed over the course of time. Struggles against capital have gone through various phases, new realities have emerged, fresh facts have come to light and further insights have been gained. The apparent longevity of capital is to be understood in the historical context and fresh strategies to fight it must be designed in this light.

Capital emerged in a “little corner of the world” but its logic had a much wider potential and its ambitions knew no boundaries. Its unfolding also gave rise to new forces that would oppose it from the very beginning. Soon after bourgeois revolutions overthrew the old order in parts of Europe—the little corner of the world—revolutions against capital appeared on the horizon. But it was going to be a long and difficult struggle. Could capital be defeated in its original home when it had the whole world to spread out to? Capital usually has much easier time overcoming its structural crises and defending itself against its own logic when it has pre-capitalist systems and life-worlds to feed on—a situation that lasted for centuries and still continues in some measures.

Furthermore, the global spread of capital was not going to be a one-time process. It did not proceed uniformly and it was never going to culminate in a flat and a homogeneously capitalist world. Unevenness of growth and hierarchy of structures were encoded in the genetic make-up of capital. All through its history the global expansion of capital has moved in fits and starts with periods of rapid expansions interrupted by sudden crises, and at every stage capitalist development has been extremely uneven across the globe. This spasmodic movement of capital has taken it to the far corners of the world but it has also created conditions for massive upheavals and great revolutions. Capitalism has lived long because the world is a big place, but it has always lived a troubled life.

The first global empire of capital was created under the conditions of colonialism. By the end of the nineteenth century the world had been divided among the imperialist powers.

The colonial phase of imperialism was a combined outcome of the logic of capital as well as of the historically given conditions. Early capitalist powers of Europe had begun the process of colonization in the sixteenth century itself and the resources plundered from colonies had played a pivotal role in the initial accumulation for European capitalism. But it was only after the maturation of capitalism into the monopoly stage that colonies became structural necessities for the survival of capital. Colonialism became integrally woven into capital's global-imperial structure. Henceforth the unevenness of further growth created destabilizing pressures within this structure and brought the imperialist powers into irreconcilable conflict with each other, giving rise to the global wars of the twentieth century for re-dividing the world.

The same course of history also created conditions for a new wave of revolutions. These revolutions were very different from the ones that had potentially threatened European capitalism during much of the nineteenth century. Globally the revolutions of the twentieth century threatened the imperial structure of capital, but locally—in the societies where they actually occurred—they were not so much against capital as they were against monarchy, feudalism and colonialism. They were led by communist parties but, with the sole exception of October Revolution, working class was not the main force behind them. These revolutions broke the imperialist chain at its weaker links but internally they were invariably saddled with tasks bequeathed by undeveloped or underdeveloped capitalism.

During the twentieth century capital faced challenges on three interconnected fronts. First, it was challenged by the emergence of a socialist bloc. Twentieth century socialism had its own weaknesses and it was an internally divided bloc, but it nevertheless interrupted the capitalist order from becoming a unified global system. This challenge could have been met only by defeating socialism and by dissolving the socialist bloc. Second, the colonial structure of capitalist imperialism was challenged by the anti-colonial national struggles. This was not necessarily a challenge to capitalism itself but it definitely challenged the structure through which capital at the time operated on the global scale. This challenge could have been met either by defeating the anti-colonial struggles and maintaining the status quo or by creating a new global structure for capitalism that did not depend on colonialism. Third, capital was challenged by crises emanating from its own internal logic. This was not a new phenomenon but, during the twentieth century and in the monopoly stage of capitalism, it assumed menacing proportions. There was no permanent solution to this problem within the capitalist system but it became possible to get over these crises through a series of intensive restructurings of capitalism and through significant changes in the modus operandi of capital.

Together these three factors brought about major transformations within the capitalist system. The basic nature of capital remained unaltered but capitalism of the late twentieth century looked very different from what it had been a century earlier. It had gone through both extensive and intensive changes.

Changes of the extensive type are most clearly visible in the postcolonial order of global capitalism. In the colonial phase of imperialism colonies were appended to the respective imperialist countries that ruled over them. Such a segmented world of colonialism

afforded a global arena to the imperialist capital but, in the long run, it also acted as a barrier to the global spread of capitalism. Colonial plunder resulted in a massive accumulation of capital in the metropolitan centres, but very little capital was ploughed back into the colonies. Furthermore, the segmented structure of the colonial world severely obstructed the movement of goods and capital across the segments attached to different imperialist powers. From today's vantage point it looks like a case of self-inflicted double injury on capital. On the one hand, the colonial world order acted as a barrier to capitalist development in the colonies and made capital blind to the golden opportunity for augmenting itself in a less hazardous manner through investments in its own captive backyard. On the other hand, the over-accumulation in the metropolitan centres and the constricted avenues for global investments aggravated the capitalist crises and further heightened the inter-imperialist contradictions.

Imperialism did not willingly relinquish its hold over colonies. It did all it could to suppress and defeat the anti-colonial struggles. However, with the end of the colonial era, it has drawn necessary lessons and prepared itself for the postcolonial realities. During the closing decades of the twentieth century it fashioned a new global structure for itself and adjusted its modus operandi in accordance with the new realities.

In the postcolonial world order there is a significant movement of capital into the erstwhile colonies. Of course, this influx remains highly uneven, with only a few of the 'emerging economies' absorbing the lion's share while a large part of the third world remains 'capital-starved'. But, compared to the colonial times, the imperialist strategy has undergone a sea-change. Instead of acting as a barrier to capitalist development, as it did during the colonial times, it is now geared towards promoting such a development in the erstwhile colonies.

Also, the postcolonial world is much less segmented. A given country of the third world, or a given group of them, is no longer tied exclusively to a given imperialist country. There is a much greater realization among the imperialist powers that an unhindered movement of goods and capital across the globe enlarges the arena for capital in general, which is very helpful in softening its structural limits that would otherwise become incomparably more threatening. This is the main reason behind the recent spurt in the globalization of capital—a new strategy and a changed modus operandi of imperialism for the postcolonial times.

Effects of the new changes are unmistakable. Measured in quantitative terms the long term economic growth in the colonial world during the first half of the twentieth century was non-existent if not negative. In contrast it has been substantial during the second half, and in many of the countries, including the largest ones such as China and India, it has been extraordinarily rapid. Capitalists from the 'emergent economies' are joining the ranks of the world's richest and buying some of the largest corporations in the global metropolis. Subjects and compradors of an earlier era are now being welcomed as partners, even if in a junior status, into the new world order and the rulers of a selected few among the third world countries are finding a place on the high table of imperialists.

Such a situation would have been unthinkable not only in the colonial era but even in the typically neocolonial decades of 50s, 60s and 70s in the previous century.

Changes of the intensive type have been equally remarkable. Capital has not only refashioned its global empire, it has also changed its ways of working within each country and each economy. This internal restructuring was forced by the great crises of the twentieth century such as the two world wars and the great depression. It was also forced by the challenge that socialism posed especially in the first half of the century. One of the most important developments that came out of this restructuring was the emergence of the 'welfare state'. The pretense that an unfettered operation of capital was the best way to run capitalism and that the economy should be left entirely to the free play of market forces was dropped in practice even if it kept making appearance in the ideological stance. The state began massive interventions in the economy through the command and deployment of resources on a large scale and through regulation of capital and of markets in significant ways.

The economy has undergone other kinds of changes as well. New sectors of economy have emerged and these account for a large share of all economic activities. New goods have come into existence, new kinds of consumption habits and patterns have emerged, new markets have been created and new technologies have appeared in waves to be deployed in the new as well as the old sectors. Relative weights of the old sectors, such as manufacturing and agriculture, have been drastically altered and the new sectors have been articulated into the old ones in intricate ways.

The immense changes—both extensive and intensive—in the structure and dynamics of capital during the twentieth century helped it get over an unending series of crises and gave it new leases of life. But it has been a life afflicted with grave ailments and the future holds even greater risks. It is already clear that the new century isn't going to be a century of bliss. If the dying years of the twentieth century saw a financial meltdown and an enormous economic crisis in the South-east Asia, the first decade of the new century is ending with a much greater crisis on a global scale. If the former required an injection of hundreds of billions of dollars to avert disaster, the latter threatens to devour thousands of billions. Capital seems to drag itself out of one crisis only to walk into another of even greater proportions. And it never seems to be able to strike a balance, never able to find the elusive equilibrium. Risks of the market place force it into the lap of the state, but the costs of the state-driven strategies pull it back towards the market, only to be pushed back again by the threats of looming disasters.

And yet, it will be unwise for the adversaries of capital to expect that it is going to walk to its grave on its own. It will be erroneous to anticipate an absolute structural limit that is imminent and against which capital is about to crash—a predetermined point at which it will explode and beyond which socialism will unstoppably unfold and have a smooth sail. Undoubtedly, capital's rounding of the globe has greatly diminished its options to further displace its structural limits to the outer boundaries, but such options are far from completely exhausted. In addition it has found new ways to soften these limits by adding further layers in its internal structure. A century ago it looked moribund and great

revolutions succeeded in defeating it at its weak points. It was not unreasonable to expect at the time that further links in the imperialist chain could be broken and a crisis-ridden and besieged capitalism could be defeated even in its heartland. A century later the situation is markedly different. Capital hasn't discovered an elixir of immortality, nor has it found a solution to the problem of recurrent crises emanating from its own logic. But it will be a mistake to think that it hasn't learned any lessons. It will be a greater mistake to imagine that the strategies forged a century ago will still be effective in the fight against capital today.

More than ever before capital now is a global entity—a global mode of production and a global organism for social metabolic reproduction. It lives in and breathes through a global structure. In the final reckoning, it can be defeated and transcended only at the global level. Battles will surely be won at the local levels and revolutionary ruptures will necessarily be taking place at the level of nation-states, but these can succeed only as a part of a global strategy. Another organism can find a place and reside within this global organism but only to overcome it finally or be overcome by it.

This was true even a century ago when the previous wave of revolutions had begun. But it was not true in the same way and with the same intensity as it is today. Back then it was much easier to break the chain at its weak links. Now capitalism is much more integrated globally and the chain analogy does not work very well. It was relatively easier then for a socialist or proto-socialist economy to break itself away from the rest of the world and survive in a state of encirclement and embargo. The present economic and political structure of the world makes such a task incomparably more difficult. Back then revolutions took place in societies where capital was not yet entrenched and it was relatively easy to arouse the masses against the blatantly unjust and oppressive pre-capitalist and proto-capitalist social relations. Now revolutions are on agenda in societies where capital is already entrenched and capitalist relations have become much more firmly rooted among the people. This will require an entirely new strategy.

The global nature of capital today does not mean, however, that revolution against capitalism will be at once global. In spite of the rapid globalization of capital during the recent decades, the political structure of the world remains firmly rooted in the system of nation-states. Globalization has not brought the world any closer to having a global state, and such a thing is never going to happen under capitalism. The system of nation-states eminently serves the interest of global capital. The fences of the nation-states are no hindrance to the movement of capital whereas they are formidable barriers to the movement of people. They work very effectively in managing contradictions that arise continuously from capital's operations. Most importantly, nation-states are the best arrangements for acquiring popular legitimacy for the bourgeois rule. Defeat of colonialism has further strengthened the idea that sovereignty of nation-state is inviolable. A century ago it was possible for one imperialist power from a small island nation to keep half of the world under colonial subjugation. Today it is such an impossible task for the most powerful imperialist mammoth on the planet to establish a long-term military-colonial rule over just one country in the Middle East.

Nation-states, therefore, are not an unadulterated blessing for capital. The factors that make them inviolable in the eyes of people also promise significant protection from outside interference when they turn into arenas of revolution. The political structure based on nation-states makes it certain that the coming revolutions will still start out as revolutions within the nation-states. Capital can be finally defeated only at the global level but the fight will start at the level of nation-states.

Political revolutions, however, are only the first acts that inaugurate the long course of social revolutions. The revolution against capital too will begin in political revolutions, but the long struggle to go beyond capital will succeed only through a thoroughgoing social revolution. Political revolutions result in complete ruptures in the political arena—a complete dismantling of the existing state and creation of a new state on a new class basis. Those who think that political revolutions can be achieved through gradual transitions in which the existing state itself can be claimed and used for the purpose of creating a new society have been correctly denounced in the history of revolutions. Without a complete rupture in the political arena and without a complete replacement of the existing bourgeois state by a revolutionary state the social revolution against capital cannot even begin.

On the other hand, those who think that the social revolution too can be achieved through a complete and immediate rupture as necessarily is the case in the political domain are nothing but daydreamers. A whole society cannot be replaced by a new society at one go just as a ship on the high sea cannot be rebuilt at once into a whole new ship. It has to be replaced plank by plank while keeping the ship afloat. Social systems go through radical transformations while their reproduction continues. The task is further complicated by the fact that human beings who bring about these radical transformations are themselves a product of the societies they wish to change. Social revolutions require the revolutionary agents themselves to be revolutionized and transformed. The processes necessary for such a transformation are incomparably more complex and its time scale is necessarily long. The processes of social transformations feed into transformation of humans and the processes of transforming humans feed back into the structural transformations of the society.

The fact that revolutions against capital can begin only in political revolutions that will inevitably take place within nation-states, and the fact that social revolutions necessary for going beyond capital will go through a long process and the final victory against capital will be achieved only at the global scale, together place very challenging tasks before socialist revolutions. The complexities of social revolutions within nation states, immense as they are in themselves, are further compounded by the global environment in which these revolutions will have to proceed. More than ever before socialist revolutions will have to find ways to survive as alien organisms within the organism of global capital in such a manner that they are finally able to overcome this much larger organism. The strategy that dwells on refusing to deal with world capital and focuses exclusively on protecting socialism within a national boundary or else decides to march on to defeat capital globally before taking up the tasks of social revolution, as well as the strategy that begins to imitate capitalism within the boundaries of the socialist society, will both lead

to the same result—being overcome by the organism of capital. Among many challenges that confront the adversaries of capital and take them into uncharted waters, this one is perhaps the most formidable one. And this perhaps is the most pressing reason among all that call upon the revolutionaries to re-evaluate the lessons of the rise and fall of twentieth century socialism and to re-envision socialism for the future.

Socialism of the 20th Century

Socialism is bound to carry some birthmarks. Its shape and trajectory are necessarily influenced by the conditions in which it is born. Conditions are largely a product of the reigning system in the society, but they are also produced by the struggles against that system. How did the revolutionary agency, in past examples of successful revolutions, gauge the conditions in which it had to operate and how did its interventions shape those conditions are matters of great interest for revolutionaries today. The shape of future socialism would depend on the conditions created by contemporary capitalism, but it would also depend on how the revolutionary agency intervenes in those conditions. Such interventions, in turn, would also depend on what lessons revolutionaries have drawn from the experience of the twentieth century socialism. Re-envisioning socialism would, therefore, require a correct approach towards the vision and practice of socialism in the twentieth century.

Adversaries of socialism gloat over the fact that the system, which burst upon the world scene with a promise to put an end to capitalism, has itself collapsed. If some of its variants survive, they do so only by imitating capitalism. They also strive to create an impression that those who still believe in a future for socialism would like to turn the history back and would pray for a reincarnation of socialism as it was in the twentieth century. Such exertions of socialism's adversaries are understandable. But many of the upholders and defenders of socialism too adhere to a similar picture. They consider twentieth century socialism almost as the canonical model for future socialism. Actual conditions may impose variations on the outer form but the basic structure must conform to that model.

Such approaches are mistaken because they do not give proper weight to the conditions in which twentieth century socialism was born and do not correctly assess the impact of the emergencies under which it had to survive.

Socialism of the twentieth century was a product of the conditions of that century. Even the vision and the theoretical-ideological understanding underlying it had an imprint of those conditions. It was a socialism that was built in pre-capitalist or backward capitalist societies existing under varieties of feudalisms and colonialisms. It was also built under emergency conditions of wars, encirclements, acute hardships and other disasters. Its ultimate fate notwithstanding, it was highly successful in getting those societies out of deep crises and in putting them on a course of tremendous progress. As a result those societies became more prosperous, egalitarian, just and modern than they had ever been in their entire histories. In a nutshell, it was a backward socialism and it was a socialism

of emergency conditions. Given the circumstances in which it was born and raised, it was nevertheless successful.

Conditions determine the type of revolution and the path it must follow. They also determine the requirements for the subjective forces—what the leaders of the revolution must be good at. Revolutions of the twentieth century took place under conditions where one or two simple slogans—land, peace, democracy or national independence—were enough to mobilize the masses and galvanize them into revolutionary action. Revolutionaries did not need to engage in prolonged struggle with the masses to wean them away from the influence and hegemony of the ruling classes. The masses were ready to join the revolutionary armies and fight to death for the victory of the revolutionary cause expressed in those simple slogans. Those were the revolutions in which the “wretched of the earth” had risen with all their fury to run the heavens over.

Correspondingly, revolutions of the twentieth century required parties and leaders who would be good at waging wars and dealing with emergencies. Needs for ideological struggles, for charting out a course for post-revolutionary societies and for presenting a vision for humanity’s future were there, but the efforts to meet such needs were confined to leaders, intelligentsia and other advanced sections. It did not become a live concern of the entire society. The masses were not yet engaged with the task of envisioning a socialist future. They were convinced that once the age-old oppressors of their own societies and the new oppressors from foreign lands were taken off their backs, a new world would come into existence. They did not need the details. Whatever its nature, its structure, its institutions, designs and processes, the new system will be their own system under which they will be able to live with dignity—free from deprivations and oppressions of the past. Whether this world will continue on the desired course, whether it will be able to compete or coexist with other worlds in other countries, whether it will not give rise to new kinds of exploiters and oppressors—these were not yet live concerns.

But the initial stage of the post-revolutionary societies was not going to last for ever. As the conditions of wars, emergencies and acute deprivations gave way to more ‘normal’ times, new issues came on agenda. The “wretched of the earth” had now become owners of land, members of cooperatives, workers in factories, farms, and collectives. They were in transition towards becoming “workers of the world”. They were living in a different world and their expectations were very different from what they had been in earlier times. Now, the issue at stake was whether they would truly become masters of their own destiny and march onto a road leading to ever-higher levels of productivity, creativity, prosperity, democracy, choice and freedom. The issue of competition with capitalism also came on agenda. It is at this ‘normal’ stage that revolutions floundered. Parties and leaders, who had succeeded admirably in extra-ordinary conditions, failed in the normal conditions. Glorious revolutions of yesteryears ended in stagnant economies, uncreative and mechanical producers, politically inert workers, undemocratic polities, passive societies and dogmatic world-views. In the end, twentieth century socialism could not overcome the limitations stemming from the conditions of its birth. Instead of delivering a decisive and world historic defeat to capitalism, it became a detour leading back to capitalism.

Workers of the world, who are rightfully the proud inheritors of the achievements of twentieth century socialism, also have the responsibility and the task to draw necessary lessons from its defeat.

End of capitalist exploitation is the central component of a socialist programme, but this objective has to be achieved in a way that elevates societies to ever-higher levels of productivity, prosperity, democracy and freedom. Capitalism is an unethical and exploitative system that inflicts miseries on a large part of the society, but its mechanisms and processes also result in taking the social productive forces to higher levels. A system that ends capitalist exploitation but fails to surpass capitalism in developing productive forces would, in the end, fail to defeat capitalism. Furthermore, socialism cannot solely depend on the higher consciousness of the working class for its survival. It must devise mechanisms and processes that are organically integrated into the society and, at any given time, are consonant with the interests and aspirations of the working class.

The ownership structure of means of production is a key determinant of mechanisms for surplus appropriation. Under capitalism private ownership of means of production dominates this structure, although modern capitalism has learned to incorporate state ownership into its structure in a significant manner. Fundamentally, the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation remains the basic contradiction of capitalism.

Socialism in the twentieth century, although having collective ownership and small-scale private ownership in varying degrees, was based on the primacy of state ownership of means of production. This was seen as the only way to realize the ideal of ownership by the whole people and to resolve the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation. State, therefore, became the fountainhead and, in many ways, the sole arena of all economic and political processes, and party became, practically speaking, the sole constituter of state. In the given conditions of those times and those societies, a number of unintended but harmful consequences flowed from this kind of understanding of socialism.

First, state ownership could not develop into a form of ownership by the whole people. Instead it gave rise to bureaucratic control over the means of production. This was the main reason why twentieth century socialisms turned into various forms of state capitalism. A new class appeared that effectively became the appropriator of surplus. This class determined how this surplus was to be deployed. Primacy of state ownership required purity of the proletarian character of state. Given the stage of development of those societies this requirement came in conflict with the goal of establishing a genuine socialist democracy. Constituting and running of the state while preserving its proletarian character became increasingly dependent on the communist party and on a small section of the working class. In the prevailing conditions of those societies it was highly difficult to prevent emergence of state capitalism. The fate of various attempts to safeguard the proletarian character of state by stirring up class struggles in state, party and society is symptomatic of the fact that the material basis for emergence of state capitalism cannot

be eliminated by political struggles alone. Structures and mechanisms of the socialist economy will have to be designed in such a way that the ideal of collective producers becoming collective appropriators becomes progressively and actually realized with the maturing of socialism.

Second, the primacy of state ownership, in the given conditions, led to harmful consequences for the development of productive forces. The relationship between planning and market, for example, fell victim to a dogmatic understanding that equated planning with socialism and market with capitalism. While in theory it was recognized that the “law of value” would cease to operate only in the very long run when socialism will be approaching communism, in practice mechanical and idealistic means were adopted to liberate the economy at an earliest from this law. Apart from playing havoc with a suitable deployment of surplus for future growth of productivity and prosperity, this also made the working class as alienated as ever from decision-making in the processes of production, distribution and allocation of surplus. There was no objective and material mechanism for developing productive and creative powers of the worker except a hope that a higher consciousness emerging out of political education and class struggle will make moral incentives the driving force for development of productive forces. Material incentives were narrowly conceived in terms of better salaries, benefits and working conditions. Workers effectively remained suppliers of labour-power. They never learned to control, decide, manage, innovate, compete and take responsibilities for their enterprises. They never even learned to safeguard their own interests and build their own futures. All that was left to the party and the state.

Third, such an understanding of socialism led to erecting of an economic structure that had no flexibility. It worked like giant clockwork in which there was little scope for organic growth. This was one important reason why socialism could not become an autonomous and organic socio-economic process. There was no inherent mechanism or process that could on its own lead to emergence of new needs, new products, new sectors, and new technologies. Capitalism cannot survive without its state, but it does not depend on it on an everyday basis, so to speak, for its regular workings and processes. It becomes ‘natural’ even for those whom it exploits and rules over. Every individual is made responsible for taking care of her or his interest, and in the process the interest of capitalism gets served. The logic of capital gets imbibed into the ways of life and becomes an integral part of the socio-economic processes. Socialism too cannot survive without its state. But, even more than capitalism, it will also have to take root as a process flowing through the inner workings of the economy. It will have to become an organic and self-reproducing process of the society. It cannot expect to survive by hiding behind the state or by becoming a rigid structure operating like clockwork.

Fourth, this kind of economic structure also had damaging consequences for socialist democracy. The problem of democracy was not only a problem of political institutions and processes important as they all are. At a deeper level it was a problem of whether there was room in this economic structure for various class, sectional and other social interests to get articulated and whether there were organic as well as institutional mechanisms for resolution of all such contradictions. A rigid economic structure was

correlated with a rigid political structure and this was at the root of the problem of socialist democracy.

Fifth, there were problems also at the level of political institutions and processes. Undoubtedly, the conditions in which twentieth century socialism had to survive were not conducive for a satisfactory resolution of the problem of socialist democracy. But the consequences were nevertheless tragic. State was in control of the entire economy and to a large extent even of the society, and party was in control of the state. This led to a situation wherein all contradictions and all struggles of the entire society that should have been worked out in the larger arena of the society itself, even if with the help of the party and the state, instead found ways to become concentrated in the top echelons of the party and the state. This gave rise to political passivity and inertness of the working class and of the whole society and often led to bizarre forms of 'class struggle' inside the party and the state with tragic consequences for revolution and socialism.

Apart from such problems that arose from the economic and political structure, there were other problems too, which, in the final analysis, had their origin in the shortcomings of the theoretical-ideological understanding underlying the twentieth century socialism. If the historic project of emancipation of labour could make only faltering progress, the equally historic project of social equality and justice did not fare much better. Women made tremendous progress in the public spheres, but their conditions did not improve much in the private sphere. The problems of exclusions and inequalities based on social identities continued in various other forms. In general, processes of social and ideological transformations did not take place to the desired extent. All these shortcomings came into glaring light in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of major examples of twentieth century socialism when age-old maladies such as religious bigotry, racism, genocides and ethnic cleansing, nostalgia for czars, prostitution, social acceptance of extreme poverty and degradation, and many such long forgotten ailments made a sudden reappearance. They had managed to survive hiding in the social soil just below the surface and burst forth on the scene as soon as the socialist system collapsed.

Dreams turn into reality through revolutions, but the flow of reality often lags behind the dreams. Socialism was a dream that became reality through the proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century. It had glorious successes. It ended the oppressive old order of monarchy, feudalism, and colonialism and challenged the new order of capitalism in Russia, China and many other revolutionary societies. But, in the end, the twentieth century socialism could not escape the limitations of the times and the societies in which it was born. The 'wretched of the earth' did storm the heavens successfully, they did succeed in liberating themselves from colonialism and feudalism, and they did challenge capitalism by starting on the epoch-making project of building socialism. But this socialism turned out to be a socialism of backward societies and of emergency conditions. It was successful in rescuing these societies from the deep crises of the old order and it was victorious in the difficult conditions of wars and civil wars. But it could not inflict a final, world historic defeat on capitalism. It could not become such a model of creativity, prosperity, democracy, equality and freedom that would inspire the workers of the entire capitalist world to overthrow capitalism and build socialism.

It is an inalienable right of the working class to feel proud of the achievements of the twentieth century socialism, and it is its cardinal duty to analyze scientifically and dispassionately the causes of its defeat. The task of re-envisioning socialism and preparing for the revolution that will usher it depends crucially on adopting such an approach.

Visions of a Future Socialism

The key objective of socialism is to ensure that collective producers become collective appropriators of surplus. This includes provisions for collectively deciding how to deploy or expend the appropriated surplus. This objective does not uniquely determine the form of ownership of means of production. Depending on the prevailing conditions a wide range of ownership structures can be possible.

The most appropriate form of ownership of means of production to achieve this goal is collective ownership. But this cannot be the only form. If this were to be the case, the worker-owners of such means of production where productivity of labour is relatively low, such as an agricultural farm or a small-scale and low-tech enterprise, will be at a great disadvantage as compared to the worker-owners of large, high-tech industries with high productivity of labour. State ownership, therefore, will be an important component of the economy. But the state will be required to lease out its means of production to the collectives of workers in those industries or enterprises. Like any other collective enterprise, here too they will be the collective appropriators of surplus they would have themselves produced. Of course, they will have to give a portion of it to the state in accordance with the lease contract. As owner of the enterprise the state will be a recipient of a part of the surplus created in that enterprise but not a direct appropriator. Taxation will be another mechanism through which part of the surplus created in all kinds of enterprises, whether state owned or collectively owned, will be transferred to the state and to the local governing and municipal bodies. Private ownership can also be allowed but such owners of means of production will not be allowed to hire workers. They must work with their own labour. In general, the principle will be: whoever works with a given means of production has an equal share in the ownership of the same and participates in the collective decision of appropriating and deploying the surplus created there.

This does not rule out professional management of enterprises. It will not be feasible, especially in large enterprises, to decide everything by floor level democracy. Furthermore, it will take generations if not centuries before all workers become capable of handling all sorts of jobs, so that all responsibilities can be rotated and all vestiges of hierarchical divisions of labour can be done away with. Until such a time the economic structure of socialism will necessarily depend on a division of labor based on skill and capacity—a division that may appear relatively fixed in the short run, but in the long run it will be flexible, dynamic and changing. This does create problems in the sphere of social equality, but there will be ways to deal with them progressively. In any case, ideal forms of egalitarianism are approachable only in the very long run.

Socialism will succeed only if it ushers humanity out of the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom. Undoubtedly this will be a long struggle and a long process. It will crucially depend on how the new system makes a sustained progress, on a daily basis so to speak, towards prosperity and abundance. This, in turn, will depend on a rapid and sustained development of productive forces. Socialism must be a system that unleashes the productive and creative powers of all the people and provides them with opportunities and choices for a rich diversity of professions and ways of life. Such a progress will provide material basis for higher levels of culture and consciousness.

If socialism makes such a progress on a sustained basis and becomes a securely established way of life, it will eventually lead societies and entire humanity into the realm of freedom—a condition in which high levels of prosperity and consciousness will make the “law of value” wither away. Work as a forced condition for obtaining basic necessities of life will give way to work as a free choice for realizing the human potential.

Until such a stage arrives, the objective of sustained development of productive forces and continuous progress towards prosperity and abundance imposes certain constraints on the structures and practices of socialism. For example, “law of value”, even as its area of operation shrinks in many domains of life, will continue to operate, especially in the frontier areas of economy connected with further advancement of prosperity and standard of life. It is obvious that market and competition will remain in such a system, although they will be increasingly regulated and their areas of operation will progressively shrink.

Markets are not a creation of capitalism, although it takes them to a qualitatively higher and all-encompassing scale. They existed long before capitalism and they will stay until long after. Important point is that they have kept on changing and evolving. Capitalist markets are much evolved, but they are also heavily regulated by the capitalist state and by the rules of capitalism. Socialist markets will be further evolved and they will be even more regulated. Furthermore, markets are not the place where surplus, at least most of it, is produced and appropriated. Undoubtedly they are integrated and articulated into the capitalist system of exploitation and accumulation. Capitalist production is necessarily commodity production—production, first and foremost, for exchange. But this does not mean that all socialist production will immediately cease to be commodity production. It will be a long process before socialism can reach a stage where commodities would have withered away and all production would directly be for meeting social needs. One thing that will immediately lose its commodity character under socialism is labour power. Labour market will be abolished as soon as a socialist economy begins to properly function in the immediate aftermath of overthrowing capitalism.

There will, for sure, be large sectors that, from the outset, will not be a part of the market under socialism. Health, education, basic amenities are obvious examples. All such sectors will be responsibility of the state. Large parts of the surplus that state would receive as rent, interest or taxes will be deployed in these sectors. In such sectors too structures and mechanisms will be designed and put in place for management and control of the institutions by the workers of those institutions.

There will be many sectors of material production that cannot withstand full onslaught of the “law of value” and will be unable survive in the market on their own. This is the case with many sectors under capitalism, and this will also be the case with many sectors under socialism. State will have to provide subsidies and other forms of protection to such sectors.

Just as market, competition too is not a creation of capitalism, although it takes it to a qualitatively higher level and turns it into the central mechanism for development of productive forces. The key problem with competition under capitalism is that it gets harnessed into the mechanism of maximizing profits and accelerating accumulation. The threat of competition hangs over the head of every capitalist, but its actual burden is transmitted to the workers. Either it results in intensifying their exploitation or in pushing large numbers of them into the reserve army of labour. Besides, competition also gives rise to a perpetual state of turbulence in the capitalist economy. Recurrent recessions and depressions and the phenomenon of the so-called “creative destruction” are all part of the capitalist dynamics in which competition plays a key role. Most of the negative consequences of this dynamics come in the share of working people.

But competition cannot be done away with in the immediate aftermath of capitalism. The world-historic project of building socialism will start under the conditions bequeathed by capitalism and men and women themselves produced by capitalism will carry it out. Just as the case with market, competition too will be a necessity in the initial stages of socialism. Only in the long run moral incentive will become the principal driver of development of productive forces. Furthermore, the nature of competition undergoes a fundamental change as soon as collective producers become collective appropriators of surplus. It does not feed into the accumulation of capital owned by an exploiting class and its negative consequences no longer translate into deprivation of the basic necessities of life and an absolute insecurity for those who may not have fared well in a given round of competition.

Socialist economy will be a modern economy progressively climbing to higher levels of productivity and prosperity. This will necessitate continuous sectoral restructurings as productivity in different sectors will grow at different rates and new sectors too will come into existence. There will be large-scale movements of people and resources across sectors and to the newly emergent sectors. State will play an important regulating role in the restructuring process making sure that disruptions do not arise and the interests of the socialist system are secure.

However, the historic task of building socialism cannot be completed only by building a socialist economy. Indeed real socialism cannot be conceptualized, let alone realized, without a comprehensive programme of a radical reconstitution of social life. If oppressions, discriminations, exclusions and exploitations based on various social identities—gender, caste, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion and so on—are not eliminated, socialism will lose its meaning. It will not herald the liberation of entire humanity. In fact, even the objective of turning collective producers into collective

appropriators of surplus cannot be realized without putting an end to inequalities and oppressions based on social identities. The achievements of class struggle leading to elimination of class-based exploitation will come undone if exploitations and oppressions based on social identities are allowed to continue.

Defeat of capital will provide a solid foundation and an effective launching platform for such a radical reconstitution of social life, but it cannot by itself ensure it. It will have to be taken up as a positive programme running through the entire stage of building a socialist society. Furthermore, it is not a task to be achieved only by the socialist state, although, just as in other aspects of building socialism, state will play an important role in it. A radical reconstitution of social life will require a continuous churning of the social structure that cannot be accomplished only by laws and state policies. Such a churning is necessarily the domain of social struggles and movements. Socialism must be re-envisioned in such a way that not only there is room in it for such struggles and movements, they are in fact deemed as an integral part of it. This will have deep implications and far-reaching consequences for political and social structures of future socialism.

Similarly, socialism has to be re-envisioned to incorporate the requirements of ecological sustainability. This too will have to be an integral part of its positive programme. Capital has played havoc with the planet and its defeat will arrest humanity's descent into disaster. But to establish and secure a way of life that is prosperous as well as sustainable will need a fundamental change in humanity's approach to Nature. Human civilization cannot be conceived without human intervention in Nature, but this intervention must be guided by and designed according to the requirements of long term sustainability. Such an awareness and wisdom must be an integral part of the structure and processes of future socialism.

Populist tendencies to blame modernity itself for the ills and excesses of capitalism are widespread but mistaken. It is utopian and romantic to expect that humanity needs to turn back to the life-styles and consumption levels of pre-modern civilizations. The new social movements that question modern life and its pattern of compulsive consumption are legitimate and necessary critiques of devastations brought forth by capitalism, but they do not need to go over to a fundamentalist-romantic ideology. If there are physical limits to sustaining the levels and forms of consumption fostered by modern life, they will be recognized as such under socialism because it is not a system driven by the blind profit-seeking forces. A modern 21st century socialist system will be better equipped to deal with such limits and make necessary adjustments. Any expectation, therefore, of establishing something like an agrarian-communitarian socialism restricting modern industries and shunning modern and prosperous life is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Socialism is not possible without socialist democracy. The aim of the socialist vision and programme is to make the worker not only the appropriator of her or his own surplus, thus eliminating systemic exploitation, but also to make her or him truly a member of the new ruling class. Workers will be active and sovereign agents running the economy and

the polity. Political processes, institutions and structures will have to be designed to achieve the objectives of socialist democracy.

Creating a socialist polity will be one of the central challenges of future socialism. Due to historical reasons this challenge could not be met by the twentieth century socialism. State will continue to exist during socialism but it will be a fundamentally different kind of state. It will be constituted and operated through an active and progressively direct participation of all citizens under the leadership of the working class. Progressively the polity will begin to overlap with the entire society and the separation of state from the people so characteristic of the bourgeois as well as all pre-capitalist societies will be eliminated with the progress of socialism. The conditions that facilitate the progressive elimination of the state-people separateness are actually the conditions for withering away of state. Socialist state will, therefore, create conditions for its own withering away. Of course, such a withering away will depend on other factors such as elimination of class contradictions, eventual abolition of classes and the withering away of the 'law of value', but the political structure and processes too will have to be geared towards achieving this goal.

The party that will lead the new revolution will continue to exist during socialism, but it will have no claim to monopoly over the state, nor will it have any special legal status within the state structure. It will be a party of a different kind. It will lead the working class which in turn will lead the socialist economy and polity. This leadership over the working class will be exercised through wisdom, science, ideological authority and revolutionary credibility and not through a direct access to political power. It will be a party different from the other political parties of the working class—the political parties that will be direct functionaries of the socialist democracy. It will also be a party where the class struggles of the socialist society will appear on the ideological plane and will be fought over in the ideological domain. It will exercise ideological leadership over the working class in the political class struggle that will take place in the domain of the socialist state and the socialist polity and will be fought over according to the rules, laws and processes of this polity. In a way it will be a party that will always be in the making—that will continuously reconstitute itself. And it will itself wither away with the abolition of classes and with the withering away of the state.

Beliefs, Aims and Objectives of NSI/ISF

Our Beliefs

- We believe that only socialism can liberate humanity from the exploitation, misery, oppression and subjugation it suffers under the capitalist system and under the pre-capitalist structures that continue under the overall rule of capital.
- We believe that socialism must be re-envisioned in the light of the lessons learnt from the rise and the fall of the twentieth century socialism and in the light of the changes in the structure and modus operandi of capital during the previous century.

- We believe that socialism is defined by the following aims:
 - Elimination of capitalist exploitation by making the collective producer the collective appropriator of surplus
 - Elimination of all forms of oppression, exploitation and injustice based on social identities of gender, caste, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion and so on
 - Establishment of a mode of production and a way of life that brings prosperity and freedom to all and that is ecologically sustainable
 - Establishment of a socialist democracy in which state is constituted and run according to the socialist constitution through an active polity consisting of all citizens under the leadership of the working class
 - Prevalence of a culture that is based on scientific approach to reality, engenders creativity in all spheres of life, ensures human dignity, promotes cultural diversity, enlarges the arena of human freedom in the personal as well as social domains including the domain of personal beliefs

- We believe that socialism can be established only by putting an end to the rule of capital and the final victory of socialism can be ensured only after the defeat of capital on the global level. Such a socialist revolution, however, must start with the political revolutions against bourgeois rules within the nation-states and it must continue through building socialism within the countries of revolution till final victory is achieved at the global scale.

- We believe that the political revolution against the bourgeois state will require altogether new strategies when compared with the strategies of the twentieth century revolutions. The coming revolutions will succeed only when the working class and the people in general can be weaned away from bourgeois hegemony, when popular legitimacy of the bourgeois rule will be severely eroded, and finally, when the workers and all the toilers and the oppressed will arise together to overwhelm the bourgeois rule through a revolutionary mass upsurge.

Our **Aims** and **Objectives** follow from the understanding summarized in these points and elaborated in this manifesto.

Our Aims:

1. To create conditions for and to make preparations for a political revolution against the rule of capital
2. To help create a new kind of revolutionary party that will lead this revolution
3. To prepare forces and create conditions that will facilitate building of a socialist society

Our Objectives:

1. To organize and to participate in movements of workers and other toilers to stake claim to all productive assets, including land, and to improve their working and life conditions

2. To organize and to participate in movements for the emancipation of women, dalits, oppressed and subjugated nationalities and all other oppressed communities
 3. To organize and to participate in movements against despoiling of Environment and against unsustainable exploitation of Nature
 4. To organize and to participate in movements that oppose laws and policies of the state that favour the interests of capital and go against the interest of working people
 5. To organize and to participate in movements that oppose imperialist domination of the people in the third world countries
 6. To organize and to participate in movements demanding state provision of education, health and basic amenities of a civilized life for all, and exclusion of such aspects of life from the realm profit and market
 7. To organize and to participate in movements for protection of democratic and human rights of all people, for protection of groups and communities of people from violence by the state and for protection of oppressed minorities from violence of oppressor majorities
 8. To organize and to participate in the movements of students, intelligentsia and other aware sections of the society for creating socialist and democratic consciousness in the society and for creating an active political culture of mass initiative and participation
 9. To organize and to participate in cultural movements aimed at creating and strengthening a culture of equality, emancipation, dignity, reason, creativity and freedom
 10. To organize and to participate in experiments and practices that prepare workers and other toilers to collectively manage their productive assets paving the way for collective producers to become collective appropriators of their own surplus
 11. To organize and to participate in experiments and practices that promote ecological sustainability
 12. To organize and to participate in experiments and practices that promote socialist values and ways of life
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Ravi Sinha
November 28, 2008

**[Modified in the Light of Discussions during the Last Two
Years – August 22, 2010]**