

Grand Narrative of 'Terrorism'

As the politics of globalisation seeks to thrust upon the world a monolithic model of 'development', events of 9/11 have made it possible to nullify resistance a critique of that model by generating a monologic discourse about 'terrorism'.

BADRI RAINA

For long years now, liberal theory – the political expression of capitalist social organisation – has calumniated Marxism as the doctrine of 'economic determinism', one that denies that human freedom exists. The Marxian riposte to that charge has been that whereas the liberal tradition speaks a great deal about human freedom, it rests as a politics on a social organisation that is guaranteed to deny freedom to the great majority of human beings.

Furthermore, that in order to make freedom available not just to a dominant few but to mankind, the need was not to demolish social control over human activity but to produce a more refined and rational social organisation that would truly emancipate the lowliest from the 'struggle for existence' to which capitalism condemns them.

But, a more memorable rejoinder to the accusation about 'determinism' was to come from E H Carr's masterly work, *What is History?* – one that is directly to my purpose in what follows. Carr was to point out that if by 'determinism' we mean that all human behaviour, individual and collective, is motivated by some cause or causes, a great many of which are ascertainable, then surely Marxism may be understood as one theory of causation alongside many others (biological, mechanical, psychological, sometimes also metaphysical), whatever may be our particular predilection about that spectrum. (Carr was to underline the irony that whereas none of the other schools of causative thought are accused of being 'determinist' such interested labelling was quickly pasted on the work of Hegel and Marx.) But, to hold that human freedom can mean freedom from causation is to indulge in groundless abstraction. For example, should one day your neighbour of long acquaintance simply

and wordlessly punch your nose, it is unlikely that you would regard this occurrence as a demonstration of 'free will'; you would rather rack your brain to locate some cause behind your neighbours' seemingly unaccountable behaviour (quarrel with his wife, father terminally ill, a fallen mortgage may be). Indeed, when causes for unaccountable behaviour seem hard to find, we characterise the condition as madness. And, yes, then set out to unravel the reasons as to why the man may have gone mad.

The political economy of 'globalisation' has, however, located a godsent opportunity in the admittedly tragic event of '9/11'. As the politics of 'globalisation' seeks to thrust upon the world a monolithic model of 'development', that tragic event has made it possible to nullify resistance and critique of that model by generating a monologic discourse about 'terrorism'.

We are invited to believe that madness may have cause but 'terrorism' has none. Indeed, to so believe – that 'terrorist' actions may have cause is to declare oneself a 'terrorist' by propensity if not by action. In so denying a rationale, however twisted that rationale may seem, to violent resistance against forms of political and economic control, the way is cleared for the globalisers to deny dissent and democracy as well, and to forge a global-fascist state which the political economy of 'globalisation' requires in order to succeed. And, please to note, that all this takes place in defence of 'democracy'. As Terry Eagleton has recently commented in *After Theory* postmodernists must now worry about the grand narrative of 'terrorism'. Indeed, the globalisers may now well parody Engels and say that 'in the last analysis' it is not the economy but 'terrorism'.

Interestingly, the self-appointed global world-state that lords over these proceedings forgets, or chooses to forget, its own

once laudable ancestories. For a start, it forgets that King George the Third had christened George Washington a terrorist renegade – a fact to which the redoubtable Tony Benn drew Tim Sebastian's attention on a recent *'Hard Talk'* interview on BBC. The forgetting may owe to the circumstance that such historical recall would put it to great shame, although it is to be wondered if shame exists at all in its newly rediscovered Hobbesian lexicon. More recently, indeed, a court in the US has freed Cheema of the Khalistan movement vintage (wanted in India as a 'terrorist') on the ground that one man's 'terrorist' can be another's 'freedom fighter'; it is also to be noted that the stipulation, however, is not to be extended to the Palestinians who must be regarded by everyone as 'terrorists'. That definitional jugglery with concepts extends now to our own proceedings in India is evidenced by the fact that the government of India and the honourable Supreme Court have only the other day set down that mere verbal support to some 'terrorist' organisation is not to be regarded as a culpable offence; after all, how else is Vaiko to be set free!

But returning to America remember that the ideational energy of that first generation of white American leadership was drawn in no small measure from the stirringly rational challenges of the French *Philosophes* to the perfidies of the medieval religious and political doctrines that kept the western world in thrall over long dark centuries. The ringing slogans of *Equality, Liberty, Fraternity* had stood it in good stead as it battled colonial oppression and exploitation. From thence it drew the notion of 'unalienable rights' of 'all men' which crucially included the right to dissent. 'I may disagree with you, but I shall defend to the death your right to disagree with me' Voltaire had said. Thus, it could make of the slogan 'no taxation without representation' a potent instrument to overthrow colonial tyranny. The justly famous Declaration of Independence was to incorporate the following:

When any form of government becomes destructive of these ends (the right to life, liberty and happiness) it is the Right of the people to alter or ABOLISH it.

Indeed, under Robespierre, France was to carry that thought far further:

When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people

the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.

The point, however, is that whereas people, oppressed people, in wide areas of the world today might wish they also be permitted the right to take a leaf out of the book that yielded the American nation, they would be dead wrong. 9/11 helps the Bush-led Leviathan to float the narrative that it is America that is the most oppressed; that granted, the Leviathan then ascribes to itself, in Hobbesian phrase, 'by force or fraud' either to abolish other states or to cause insurrection to happen among them. 'Fraud' then also extends to erasing from historical memory its own deep complicity in spawning and bolstering 'terrorist' leaders and regimes, be it among the Zionists, or the Latin Americans, or in south-east Asia, indeed in Iraq itself, in Afghanistan, and some would say in Pakistan. Unashamedly, it exercises its veto to shield the erstwhile terrorist, Sharon (let us recall that some 98 Britains were blasted out of existence in the Camp David hotel in the usurpation of Palestine for the Jews) and thinks that the Nobel Peace

laureate, Arafat, may, after all, be a fit target for liquidation, much like Saddam or Castro. None of that, of course, counts as 'terrorism', but is to be understood as the global-states' self-assumed and self-evident crusade on behalf of 'freedom' and 'democracy'.

The facts, of course, are more complicated and troublesome. From the early days of the beginnings of exchange and capitalist organisation when new dominant classes espoused progressive ideas and propagated that in displacing the feudal slogans of 'loyalty' and 'honour' by the newer ones of 'freedom' and 'equality' they were seeking emancipation for all mankind, capital through that relentless logic of centralisation that Marx was to examine penetratingly has reached its present levels of global monopoly. And, whereas in those early days the new entrepreneurial classes cloaked their shennanigans by challenging feudal political/religious authority as a step in the project they called 'democracy' or the establishment of sovereignty in the general will, today's multinational corporate capital

requires not democracy but nasty and brutish control over the democratic impulse in order to scale the pinnacles of profit. It would have us believe that its global reach is coterminous with global prosperity. Now with the global-state behind its back, stacked with seemingly unchallengeable arsenals of destructive power, it brooks no question. After all, the 'cold war' may be a thing of the past, yet the arms industry requires that NATO continue to exist, and that war continue to be made wherever possible.

Questions, however, there will be, like it or not. Busy as the Leviathan is in dismantling not brick by brick but by brazen use of bulldozer the foundational edifice of democracy that suited its purposes at one time, we need to remember that between the 16th century and our own day all amplifications and refinements of the idea of democracy, equality, and freedom, have come about not through the willing exercise of state power but through the sometimes 'accommodating', often brutal interface between state power and the pressures of collective resistance. Be it the

abolition of slavery, or decolonisation, or universal male franchise, or the right of women to vote, or the regulation of the hours of work in mines and factories, or the dismantling of Apartheid, down to the right to paternal leave of absence, or of temple entry, these have been the products of resistance, often violent in the extreme. Exactly as Fascism and Nazism were to yield armed resistance among subjugated territories, leading, some historians believe, to that unparalleled and needless terrorist act over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is reason, after all, why the memory of Vietnam remains a beacon to the oppressed of the world. The problem is that the present-day Leviathan, successful in its propaganda, cannot understand why it may be resisted exactly as were the Fascists and the Nazis, or that the difference between the Gulag and Guantanamo is a thin one to people who take democracy seriously.

Imitating the 'Leviathan'

The Leviathan's violent impatience with dissent and resistance is also being imbibed by new states that harbour delusions of acquiring world-power status. Do we not in India feel everyday the coercion of the state in seeking our allegiance to the new god, the market, that seems to leave behind that other contentious god in Ayodhya, or a state that now deploys the latter to service the former. For example, with the closure of the textile mills in Ahmedabad, the consequent 'reserve army' of the unemployed have been taught to believe that their common antagonist is not capital but their own conflicting religious affiliation! Same with the adivasis in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and other parts of central India where the BJP has recently done so well among them by successfully neutralising class-consciousness and replacing it by communal consciousness. After all, any programming on corporate television may suffer interruption but never the god-like commercial break. Even serials about gods must give way to Action Shoes. That coercion, exactly as in America where today the flag must be worn on the sleeve and faces made up to look beardless, and, if possible, white and bright to announce true American citizenship, is accompanied by the fascist demand, imposed violently if need be by vigilante arms of the state, that all minorities, especially, predictably, the Muslims declare themselves as Hindus in essence and allegiance.

That, or else you are never far from being a 'terrorist'. Note also that in terms of cause it is the majority Hindu that we are to believe is on firm footing for vengeance, having ostensibly been reduced to second-class citizenship by the Muslim minority over centuries; thus, the Gujarat bestialities must be understood to have happened (the implication being happened justly) as a causal reaction to Godhra. But from that must not follow that the Gujarat Muslim Revenge Force, responsible, we are told, for the Bombay blasts did what they did in reaction to the Gujarat massacre. Remember, 'terrorists' have no cause except a general, sub-liminal animus against all those who are not jihadi Muslims! Only majority vigilantes have cause.

As we thus take over for our own the monologism of the Leviathan, we also indulge our own historical forgetting: as Washington was to the British King, so were Aurobindo, Bhagat Singh and other freedom fighters to the 'sedition committee' of the then British parliament – 'terrorists'. Yet, even as we believe that those braves had cause we cannot permit the thought that there may be others in our day who feel much the same way as the Bhagat Singhs did, since the very act of the framing of the Constitution must be understood to mean that justice has already been done to all throughout the length and breadth of the 'Republic'.

The impatience with democracy now takes on another expression, not among the uninformed but, indeed, the *crème de la crème* in the government of the day. For instance, the urbane and suave Arun Shourie, hero in the opposition to the suspension of democracy during 1975-76, chafes at the nuisance called the Supreme Court of India because, irritatingly, it reminds him of legitimate, democratic procedure. The minister cannot understand why the court sends him back to the House of the People to seek authorisation for selling off the peoples' assets to waiting private hands! A great berator of Chinese totalitarianism, democracy in India now draws his ire, as everyone here, says Shourie has a 'veto' unlike in China! Clearly, the highest court in the land, charged with the onus to adjudicate on the laws of the land, becomes an 'everyone' as indeed does parliament – all obstacles in carving a smooth and unfettered path for private capital on the road to 'development'.

The exhilarating thing is that the monster-Leviathan is never as puissant and self-sufficient as it believes it is; after the

big boys have been beaten, brave fire-flies appear from unknown crannies to set its tail on fire. That is now the story of Iraq as it was the story of Vietnam and Somalia earlier. The resistor, however, you name him/her is here to stay. (That goes as much for the Modis of this world as for the monster in the bush.) More particularly, the 'born-again' Bush must know that those who live by tyranny die by tyranny; indeed, in the words of the Bard, 'we but teach/Bloody instructions, which being taught return/To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice/Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice/To our own lips'. If that be language too tough for the world's most powerful man, here is what General Eisenhower had to say almost in the aftermath of the victory in Europe: 'those who seek peace in terms of military strength alone are, I am certain, doomed to end up in the agony of the battlefield. There is no peace in tanks and guns, and planes and bombs, and peace is most certainly not to be achieved by the most horrifying instruments of destruction that science has produced.' Pretty sound home-grown counsel one would have thought; but then, the general had no knowledge of 'terrorism'; nor the understanding that there would be the need for the state itself in America to become a 'terrorist' state if the world was to be saved for 'democracy' and, more to the point, for the multinational corporations that now spearhead the second colonisation, not just of some territories but of the world.

Thus, a 'born-again' Christianity must needs go hand in hand with the low-grade nuclear device, exactly as in India a 'born-again' Hindutva must aid the exertions of the captains of private capital in league with the tribe of the Rothschilds and the Halliburtons. And if all that leaves out the people, let them be designated 'terrorists'; the less their numbers the more easily may 'democracy' be 'managed' in the interests of profit. [PW]

Subscription Numbers

Subscribers are requested to note their Subscription Numbers mentioned on the wrappers and quote these numbers when corresponding with the circulation department.