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The Passive Revolution  
and India: A Critique

The story of Indian politics can be told in two quite different ways, through two alternative but mutually reinforcing constructions. The task of a proper Marxist analysis of Indian politics is to construct internally consistent accounts of our political history in these two ways, and to then provide a more theoretical enterprise which involves making these consistent with each other. One of these two narratives would tell the story of structures (if structures are things about which stories can be told).<sup>1</sup> This would be a story of the rise of capitalism, the specificities of transition, the formation and maturation of classes, the internal balance and architecture of the social form, the making and breaking of class coalitions, etc. Such things take long periods to happen, and occur through slow glacial movements. The second story would have to be constructed in terms of actual political actors, suspending the question of more fundamental causalities for the time being; it must be told in terms of governments, parties, tactics, leaders, political movements, and similar contingent but irreplaceable elements of political narratives. This second story—the narrative of the Indian state—would be related to the successes (in its own terms) of Indian capitalism and its failures, but would not be entirely

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<sup>1</sup> There is a theory which holds that structures are constructs of such a kind that they deflect and obstruct historical reflection. On this untenable idea there is an impressive body of literature, the most well known and long-winded being E.P. Thompson 1978.

reducible to them. For, in the growth of a late capitalism like the Indian one, the social form of capitalism itself realizes that the state is a historical precondition for much of its economic endeavours and for its political security. Paradoxically, this state, which seemed remarkably stable and legitimate when Indian capitalism was relatively weak, has come into an increasingly serious crisis with the greater entrenchment of the social form.<sup>2</sup>

Attempted critiques of the Indian polity, to be convincing, must attempt to do the three things I mentioned earlier: they must try to plot the simple narrative line of this crisis, i.e. provide a structure to the simple flow of political events. This is to be taken seriously as a *narrative*. Stories told of the same thing by various reporters differ: similarly, different types of narratives would differ as to where the ruptures lie, where the continuities, how much significance to accord to which incident, etc.<sup>3</sup> This kind of thing could be called an event-to-event line of causality. But this simpler narrative account must also reveal a deeper causal profile related to a structural causal field:<sup>4</sup> it must show fundamental structural incompatibilities which have expressed themselves through these upheavals. This could be called a structure-to-event causal line. In this essay I try to show the kind of political model that might work in the structural analysis of Indian politics; but also that it is inadequate in two ways. First, the model itself is sketchy; and second, I have not worked out how the narrative can be fitted on to the workings of the model adequately. I believe optimistically that such a model has better chances of success than the earlier, more wooden ones generally in use.

<sup>2</sup> Some modernization theorists do note this paradox, but they would give it a bland historical solution by asserting that in the earlier stages the state had to cope with much lower levels of political 'demand'. Present difficulties of the state arise from the fact that these demands have multiplied through greater mobilization but the state's resources for coping with them—its 'supports'—have remained static. This indefensibly marginalizes the question of economic development, and is indifferent to the enormous growth of state resources and its deliberate creation of a network of advantage distribution.

<sup>3</sup> In the periodization of Indian politics, Rajni Kothari, for instance, saw the break with the Nehruvian system as coming in 1975. On my reading, this rupture is a much more slow-moving affair, and begins much earlier.

<sup>4</sup> J.L. Mackie 1975.

Long-term structural compulsions on Indian politics, the choices of both the ruling bloc of propertied classes and the unorchestrated subaltern classes, arise in several well-known ways: (i) inclusion of the Indian economy in the capitalist international market and its division of labour; (ii) the received structure of colonial economic retardation; and (iii) the fundamental choice exercised by the leadership of the new Indian state in favour of a capitalist strategy of economic growth through a set of basic legal and institutional forms, e.g. the format of legal rights in the constitution, the set of ordinary laws ruling economic and corporate behaviour, the enactment of industrial policy and other similar initiatives. This was, in a historical sense, a choice which obviously structures all other choices. These structures and their internal evolution have received a great deal of analytic attention from Marxist economists. For an analysis of the state, we have to assume some well-known Marxist propositions on the nature of India's capitalist development. The social formation in India is generally characterized as a late, backward, post-colonial capitalism,<sup>5</sup> which functionally uses various enclaves of pre-capitalist productive forms.<sup>6</sup> Politically, however, it would be wrong to assimilate the Indian capitalist experience into either the model of late-backward European capitalism of the Russian kind,<sup>7</sup> or into a lower late-backward form in which the imminent collapse of an immature capitalism makes the possibility of a socialist revolution realistic.<sup>8</sup> Although much of the Indian countryside still shows the persistence of semi-feudal forms of exploitation, one can make a case for a characterization of the social form as capitalism, for the judgement involved in such things is not a matter of a simple statistical or spatial predominance. Marx had, in a famous passage in *Grundrisse*, provided a methodological injunction about how to characterize such transitional economies through a

<sup>5</sup> However, I do not find the theoretical positions worked out by Hamza Alavi about the post-colonial state persuasive in the Indian case.

<sup>6</sup> This is contrary to the traditional linear belief that pre-capitalism is *in general* (in this case, taken to mean in every instance) dysfunctional to capitalist growth and would be liquidated historically.

<sup>7</sup> Of the kind analysed by Lenin in his theory of the Russian revolution. Such differences are clearly marked in Lenin's discussions of the colonial question.

<sup>8</sup> Of the type exemplified by China in the Comintern debates from the fourth to the sixth Congresses.

complex, historically inclined, identification.<sup>9</sup> To translate his colourful metaphor is not altogether easy—what does the simile of a predominant light mean in precise economic terms?—but it would be generally accepted that the capitalist form predominates in terms of controlling the economic trends of the totality of the social form. Capitalist logic dominates and gives the general title to the economy through its ability to reproduce itself on an expanded scale, set the tone and the targets for the economy as a whole, and therefore to determine the historical logic of the totality of the social formation. Although there are obviously other sectors and types of production in the Indian economy, their reproduction has been subsumed, both economically and politically, under the logic of reproduction of capital. It is the second part of this nexus which ought to be of special attention in an analysis of the Indian state.

In countries like India the process of reproduction of capital depends crucially on the state. Although the state–capital connection has been extensively studied in empirical economic terms, surprisingly little theoretical use has been made of this in the study of the Indian state. Still, some minimal generalizations can be made as starting points of a *political* enquiry. The state in India is a *bourgeois* state in at least three, mutually supportive, senses. (1) When we say that a state is 'bourgeois' this refers, in some way (though this particular *way* can be very different in various historically concrete cases),<sup>10</sup> to a state of dominance enjoyed by the capitalist class, or a coalition of classes dominated by the bourgeoisie. (2) The state form is bourgeois in the sense in which we speak of the parliamentary democratic form as being historically a bourgeois form of government. This is not just a matter of registering that such forms historically arose during the period of rising capitalism in Europe and spread out through a process of cultural diffusion. Rather, the Marxist view would posit a stronger, structural connection between bourgeois hegemony (or domination) and this form of the state.<sup>11</sup> It arranges a disbursing of advantages in a particular way; and the democratic mechanism works as a usefully sensitive

<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx 1973: 106–7.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, the different political trajectories analysed by Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks*, especially discussions of the passive revolution.

<sup>11</sup> The sense in which Marx said that it is the democratic form which suits the capitalist mode most properly.

political index as to when the distribution of disadvantages, which is bound to happen and intensify in a capitalist economy, is becoming politically insupportable. This is the best construction of Marx's idea that democracy was the most appropriate political form for the capitalist mode of production. A more Lukacsian view would see this as a homology between a Marxist economy and a market-like political mechanism. Besides, it also lays down norms of management of interest conflicts in a way that, even though political grievances accumulate, their political articulation does not assume a pitch and form which makes the minimal stability required for capitalist production unobtainable. (3) The state expresses and ensures the domination of the bourgeoisie and helps in capitalist reproduction and a subordinate reproduction of other types of economic relations by imposing on the economy a deliberate order of capitalist planning. Those directive functions that capital cannot perform through the market (either because the market is imperfect or not powerful enough, or because such tasks cannot be performed by market pressures) the bourgeois state performs through the legitimized directive mechanisms of the state. The analysis of politics offered below takes such a minimal political economy argument on trust from Marxist economists. But what I offer here, in itself, is not a political economy argument; because I do not subscribe to the view that Marxists trying to understand politics too do the same enquiry as the economists, i.e. their cognitive object is the same. In my view, political scientists should not merely collect the political corollaries of the arguments of Marxist economists; their *object* is different. They study the 'other', the political side.

India has then a bourgeois state, but a state that is bourgeois in three different senses. The last two features are less problematic than the first. A bourgeois format of the state, or the bourgeois character of its legal system, property structure, and institutions of governance are clearly and undeniably evident.<sup>12</sup> These are revealed in the Indian constitution—in its central business of laying down some limits and prohibitions through the rights of property, etc., although this serious and

<sup>12</sup> Detailed analyses could be found in the work of S.K. Chaube and S. Dattagupta on the constituent assembly and the judicial processes, respectively. A more philosophically inclined discussion has been presented in Chhatrapati Singh 1985.

decisive core is surrounded by looser reformistic advisory clauses, and based on some necessary illusions of bourgeois power, such as its extreme constructivism: the myth, seriously believed by the early ruling elite, that patterns of laws can direct social relations rather than reflect them, an illusion which made the framers carry the constitutional document to an unreadable and agonizing length.<sup>13</sup> However, the original constitution reflected the accepted social plan or design of the ruling elite at the time of Independence, unlike the subsequent disingenuous insertions of ceremonial socialistic principles.<sup>14</sup>

A second institutional frame was provided by the adoption of the objectives and increasingly proliferating institutions of planning, which explicitly acknowledged the role of the state in the reproduction of capital and in setting economic targets in a way compatible with bourgeois developmental perspectives.

Clearly, however, of the three reasons for calling our state 'bourgeois' the last two are rather external. They depend, in any case, on the first condition of this characterization, and it is the first condition which is theoretically most problematic. It is a straightforward case of bourgeois dominance if the state is 'bourgeois' because it reflects a state of bourgeois dominance over society, if the bourgeoisie's political predominance is symmetrical with its directive power over the productive processes in the economy and its moral-cultural hegemony. In addition to economic control and directive power, states in advanced capitalist countries in the West employ what Poulantzas calls its 'institutional materiality' to reinforce, extend, and elaborate their dominance.<sup>15</sup> Our third condition can also be expressed in a Gramscian form: one of the crucial legal-formal principles of the capitalist state is the investiture on the state of the title of universality, a legitimate title to speak on behalf of the society 'in general'; this includes an implicit admission that other interests, at least in their raw, economic form constitute a 'civil society' representing the rule of a particularity of

<sup>13</sup> This is not merely a petty and querulous point. Constitutional documents must be read and understood by the people. The Indian constitution is a lawyer's document—a document of the lawyers, for the lawyers, by the lawyers.

<sup>14</sup> Particularly objectionable is the insertion of the term 'socialist' by recent amendment.

<sup>15</sup> Poulantzas 1978.

interests. Clearly, in the Indian case, though it would be wrong to underestimate the survival of democracy for forty years, the Gramscian hegemony model of the capitalist state does not apply in any simple, unproblematic form.<sup>16</sup> It is suggested here that the Indian capitalist class exercises its control over society neither through a moral-cultural hegemony of the Gramscian type, nor a simple coercive strategy on the lines of satellite states of the Third World. It does so by a coalitional strategy carried out partly through the state-directed process of economic growth, and partly through the allocational necessities indicated by the bourgeois democratic political system. Politically, too, as in the field of economic relations, the Indian bourgeoisie cannot be accorded an unproblematic primacy, because of the undeniable prevalence of pre-capitalist political forms in our *governance*; also because the vulgarly precapitalist form in the political life of rural India must be given appropriate analytic weight. Attributing political dominance to the capitalist class in a society in which the capitalist form of production is still not entirely predominant thus raises some theoretical problems.

#### Coalitional Relations of Classes

Marxists in India have commonly sought to solve this theoretical difficulty by offering a coalitional theory of class power.<sup>17</sup> Formerly, Communist Party literature asserted that power in India was exercised by an alliance of two dominant classes, the bourgeoisie (in some cases the monopoly stratum of the bourgeoisie, in others all fractions of the bourgeoisie as a whole), and landlords who still enjoyed precapitalist privileges and control. This picture did not standardly include the bureaucratic-managerial-intellectual elite as a distinct and separate element of the ruling coalition. In my judgement this was a flaw in the original model,<sup>18</sup> and stemmed from the tendency to underestimate

<sup>16</sup> I have tried to present an argument of this kind elsewhere: see Kaviraj 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Since Independence, almost all programmes by almost all communist groups assert that state power in India is controlled by an alliance of classes, although they differ about which classes, and their relative political weight.

<sup>18</sup> This was a flaw primarily because, though in economic life the public sector and state control on the economy were seen to be important, it appeared these had no political consequences or effects on class formation and class behaviour.

the significance of the political functions of the state and to view the state as merely an *expression* of class relations rather than a *terrain*, sometimes an independent actor in the power process. In earlier Marxist analysis of the 1950s or 1960s the historical necessity of a coalition of power was derived from the inability of the bourgeoisie to seriously pursue, let alone complete, a bourgeois democratic revolution.

The theory of a ruling 'coalition' highlights another essential point about the nature of class power in Indian society: that capital is not independently dominant in Indian society and state; and, for a series of other historical and sociological reasons, single-handed and unaided dominance in society is also ruled out for the other propertied classes. It is a political, long-term coalition which ensures their joint dominance over the state. So the coalition is not an effect or an accidental attribute of a dominance which is otherwise adequate; it is its *condition*. There are several reasons why, despite its weakness, capital exercises the directive function in the coalition. By its nature, it is the only truly universalizing element in the ruling bloc.<sup>19</sup> For, among the ruling groups, the bourgeoisie alone can develop a coherent, internally flexible development doctrine. Pre-capitalist elements have not had an alternative coherent programme to offer; their efforts have been restricted mainly to slowing down capitalist transition and ensuring comfortable survival plans for their own class. They have contented themselves by operating not as an alternative leading group, but as a relatively reactionary pressure group within the ruling combine trying to shift or readjust the balance of policies in a retrograde direction.

In class terms, the ruling bloc in India contained three distinct social groups and the strata internal to or organically associated with them: the bourgeoisie, particularly its aggressive and expanding monopoly stratum; the landed elites (which underwent significant internal changes due to the processes of agrarian transformation since Independence); and last, but not least, the bureaucratic managerial elite.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Although this is not the place for long or detailed theoretical discussions, I find Poulantzas's concept of a ruling bloc suggestive but inadequately clear.

<sup>20</sup> Though I advocate the inclusion of this group into the ruling bloc of classes, it is important to define the boundaries of this social group with precision. To include the entire administration in the ruling bloc would be absurd, but I would include the high bureaucratic elite and industrial management groups.

It must not be forgotten that the policies followed by the ruling bloc often had consequences for its own structure and internal formation. For instance, as a result of policies pursued over the long term, the structure of the classes themselves, especially of the latter two classes, underwent transformation. Although the redistributive aims of the land reforms were frustrated, they had some long-term effects on the class structure of agrarian society, particularly its upper social strata. Over the longer term, as a result of the decline of feudal landlords, a newer segment of rich farmers came to replace them in areas where the green revolution took place—a class of capitalist farmers. This has had serious consequences for Indian politics. Similarly, the third element has also undergone a remarkable expansion in its size, areas of control, and power in step with the development of the state-directed apparatus of economic growth.

Traditional Marxist accounts of the ruling coalition suffered, in my view, because they saw the bureaucratic elite as being too straightforwardly subordinate to the power of the bourgeoisie, and saw what was basically a *coalitional* and bargaining relation as a purely *instrumental* one. Actually, this third group was a crucial element in the ruling coalition of classes. Although not bourgeois in a direct productive sense, culturally and ideologically it was strongly affiliated to the bourgeois order. This class was, even before Independence, as some historical works show, the repository of the bourgeoisie's 'political intelligence', working out a 'theory' of development for Indian capitalism, often 'correcting' more intensely selfish objectives of the monopoly elements by giving them a more reformist and universal form.<sup>21</sup> With the constant growth of the large public sector, some genuine points of conflict between this bureaucratic elite in government and bourgeois entrepreneurial classes began to develop. Most significantly, however, they perform a distinct and irreducible function in the ruling bloc and its sprawling governmental apparatus. It is not only true that they mediate between the ruling coalition and the other classes, they also mediate crucially between the classes *within* the ruling coalition itself. They also provide the theory and the institutional drive for bourgeois rule.

<sup>21</sup> See Bipan Chandra 1979, in which G.D. Birla's behaviour is more startling than Nehru's.

Finally, a coalition is always based on an explicit or implicit protocol, a network of policies, rights, immunities derived from both constitutional and ordinary law which sets out, over a long period, the terms of this coalition and its manner of distribution of advantages. Changes in the structure, economic success and political weight of individual classes give rise naturally to demands for changes in its internal hierarchy and a renegotiation of the terms of the protocol; and discontented social groups use options over the entire range of 'exit, voice and loyalty'.<sup>22</sup> To understand the centrality of the third element, and also how the logic of politics intersects with the logic of the economy, I suggest a further distinction between what is generally known as *dominance* in Marxist theory and a different operation or terrain of what could be called *governance*. Domination is the consequence of a longer-term disposition of interests and control over production arrangements; and in this sort of calculation the dominant classes in Indian society would be the bourgeoisie, especially its higher strata and the rich farmers. This is clearly distinct from governance, which refers to the process of actual policy decisions within the apparatuses of the state. Surely the stable structure of class dominance constrains and structures the process of governance, but it is quite different from the first. This could be extended to suggest that the movement of public policies would be captured by a different concept which refers to configurations of vertical clientelist *benefit coalitions* that these policies create among the subordinate classes. Concessions to agricultural lobbies may create an affinity of interests among the large and the small farmers, or, say, among all those who sell agricultural produce on the market. Such benefit configurations are real and influence policy-makers' calculations of short-term political advantages accruing from policies. These also ensure that actual political configurations do not become symmetrical to class divisions in society. Evidently, this does not turn the small peasant into a part of the ruling bloc. But while it would be nonsensical to see him as a part of the ruling classes, it would be seriously unhelpful for political analysis to ignore such short-term nexuses of interest built up by directions of policy, since what are generally known as welfare programmes are explicitly used in this way. We can account for some crucial shifts in political alliances in

<sup>22</sup> See A. Hirschman 1970.

terms of such deliberate changes in benefit coalitions produced by public policy.

The coalitional nature of the ruling group has another serious implication for political analysis. The groups that are included in the coalition do not share equal power: power within the ruling bloc is evidently hierarchical. But if any of these classes is seriously dissatisfied and leaves the ruling bloc, that not only alters the structure of the coalition but threatens it with political disaster. Theoretically, it follows, any serious political move for each class or its representatives within the coalition is two-valued. These moves are of course in a general sense directed against the classes outside the bloc, but the choices of these moves have real effects on the internal politics of the ruling bloc. If a common objective, say, in industrial policy, can be achieved by three differently worked out policy options, x, y, z, their preference for these options would be often differently ranked by different components of the ruling bloc. These would result in different states of distribution of long-term and short-term benefits, and among these benefits very often figures the purely political strategic advantage of having a favourable format of procedure of decisions. This sort of a coalition theory may help us understand concrete moves and decisions of political life and link these with configurations of class interests, rather than standard academic coalition theories which use individuals as their standard political actors and plot coalition movements in reference to a formal minimality norm.<sup>23</sup>

### III

I have suggested elsewhere that the story of Indian politics since 1947 ought to be seen in terms of a crucial initial stage of political realignments, followed by four fairly commonsensically divided periods in our political life.<sup>24</sup>

#### Realignments 1946–1950

In politics, beginnings often—despite their contingent character—take on the nature of fundamental constraining structures over the

<sup>23</sup> Cf. W.H. Riker's well-known discussion on the size principle in Riker, 1970 (1962): 71–6.

<sup>24</sup> See Kaviraj 1982.

long term. No state is able to erase its beginnings completely: initiatives taken in formative years of the state tend to acquire foundational and determining character simply because of their historical priority. Political scientists have, in my view, been inattentive towards the significance of this period of fast and crucial historical change;<sup>25</sup> and consequently, discussions on Indian politics suffer from a myth of exaggerated continuity between the late years of colonial rule and the early years of independent power.

The Congress which assumed power in 1947 was not in many respects the Congress that won Independence. The post-war years, after it was generally known that Independence was coming in the immediate future, naturally saw a series of quick political changes. Besides, the formal constitutional structure that was adopted set the framework of the moves of different social classes and political actors for quite a long time, until constitutional and formal language fell into sudden disuse after 1969–71.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, this period formed a crucial stage in the history of the Indian national movement. Earlier, the objective of the movement was the rather abstract one of making Independence possible; now the objective of every political group within the broad national movement changed into struggling for determination of the structure of power of the independent state—not an abstract end of

<sup>25</sup> Recently, after the archives have been opened for these years, there has been considerable interest among historians about this formative period; however, not much historical research is yet available.

<sup>26</sup> Ordinarily, the period of large-scale disregard for constitutional rules is set at 1975. But it ought to be noted that many of the initial moves against bourgeois democratic legal norms were begun and legitimized in the immediately preceding period of the 'left turn'. The judiciary, for instance, was attacked as conservative and opposed to the parliamentary tendency towards progressive legislation. This was an argument taken from British political arguments of the 1930s. Of course, it is possible to make a case that the courts generally incline to be conservative, but Indira Gandhi used this to loosen bourgeois constraints over her government, not to strain towards socialism. Unfortunately, leftists willingly surrendered their arguments to her, in return for small favours. These were used systematically to justify precapitalist irresponsibility in governance. Much of the present wrecking of bourgeois democratic institutional norms was done with the help of a disingenuous use of radical rhetoric.

sovereignty, but a far more concrete question of the form of the society and material allocation of advantages. Different political groups showed their common appreciation of this historical fact in their differing ways. Muslim separatism became more strident in demanding a separate state. Communists registered the same urgency by intensifying their struggles for peasant rights. Congress groups responded to this climate of approaching power by a greater ideological polarization and crystallization of political factions. And Gandhi, most interestingly and unpredictably of all, responded by suggesting that the Congress, bearing the imprint of an earlier age, ought to be disbanded in a typically theatrical convergence of the symbols of fulfilment and denouement.

Alongside these secessions from the earlier ambiguous unity of a single nationalist movement there were significant internal realignments within the Congress. Congress's paradox of continuity began from its very early days. It is not only that Indira Gandhi's Congress was very different from Nehru's, although claiming continuity; Nehru's Congress itself was different from the organization it inherited. Within the apparent hegemony of the Congress over the national movement, these two years saw serious political realignments; and, what is more, many of these tended to nullify earlier historical shifts in the Congress organization in a relatively radical direction. After 1942, socialists and their assorted allies came to occupy an important position in the Congress in the Hindi belt, an area that has been since the mid 1960s the despair of radical groups. Popular mobilization of a spontaneous form became widespread and began erupting outside the formal structure of the Congress. In the years just before Independence, the Congress was rising as a paradoxical mass wave, a wave which made its coming to power irresistible, but also a wave that the Congress leadership wished to see controlled rather than encouraged. For it may have meant, if it continued indefinitely, the crystallization of an early radical popular challenge to its new government.

When the Congress assumed power, since questions of social design and distribution of advantages through the legal form had become central, polarization within the party naturally became more intense. Thus the tussle between Nehru and Patel should be seen as a serious conflict of strategy within the ruling coalition, the outcome of which

would have seriously affected the fate of the state, the nature of the economy, and the even purely social formation of these classes themselves. This was not, as sometimes claimed, a struggle between a bourgeois and a radical petty bourgeois programme of development of the nation; but equally certainly, it was no mere personal tussle for power between individual factions. It was a conflict between two quite different strategic perspectives within the general direction of capitalist development. And a victory of the more reactionary segment within the Congress could have meant great differences in public policy regarding the public sector, the extent of state control, the play of market forces, the nature of planning and foreign policy. Strategic differences assumed a sharp form between an old style, liberal laissez faire form of capitalist programme, and a reformistic state-centred strategy advocated by Nehru supporters within the party. Eventually, the historical outcome of this strategy conflict turned out to be deeply paradoxical. Through a combination of economic reasonableness and fortuitous events (like Patel's sudden death) the comparative reformists around Nehru won the strategic debate within the Congress, though their complete dominance in policy-making had to wait till the Second Plan.

But something else, less newsworthy and noticeable, also happened at the same time within the Congress Party. This highly spectacular victory of the reformists concealed a more fundamental weakening of their forces. Through a series of political squabbles, socialists who were within the Congress gradually left the party—to form most of the time relatively ineffective and regionally limited opposition groups. Subsequently, socialist groups in North India followed suicidal moves common among political parties suffering the pressure of declining mass support. Under Lohia's influence they went in for slogans and motifs which they thought would stop the erosion of their base and turn North India into a socialist fortress. Actually, this eventually turned into a prison. The adoption of a parochial agenda saved their base temporarily in the North, but ensured that it could not extend its appeal or mass base in other parts of India. It was a heavy price to pay for an advantage which eventually did not last. Besides, the strong anti-communism of the socialists also precluded any collaboration between the two major left parties outside the Congress; though, had they

worked together as a joint political pressure group for radicalization of social policies and their implementation, it could possibly have counteracted the disingenuousness of Congress land reforms.

However, the paradox was that the Congress was formally wedded to what we now describe as the Nehruvian reformist programme at a time when the radicals inside the Congress became woefully weak, and when whatever little striking power they had was mainly concentrated at the centre. From the early years of the government, because of the federal distribution of powers, practically all measures adopted towards any reform of the agrarian structure were effectively countermanded by its own recalcitrant and more conservative state and local units. The Nehru government, thus, began its career by playing false to its own adopted programmes. And the quick decline of socialist influence in the states of Bihar and UP, where there had been strong peasant mobilizations in the not too distant past, remains among the large uninterrogated phenomena of recent Indian politics. The departure of the reformist elements from the Congress led to a feeling among the small elite around Nehru of being encircled within their own party organization. It provided the initial condition for, and pressure towards, a 'passive revolution' strategy.

#### Experimentation 1950–1956

Out of this historical situation arose the enormous programme of a capitalist 'passive revolution' that the Congress adopted in the Nehru period.<sup>27</sup> First, of course, the programme of serious bourgeois land reforms was abandoned through a combination of feudal resistance, judicial conservatism, and connivance of state Congress leaderships.<sup>28</sup> Legal arrangement of property institutions, sanctioned by the constitution, reinforced such opposition and gave it juridical teeth. Thus the only way in which agrarian transformation could take place was through a conservative, gradualist, and 'molecular' process.<sup>29</sup> Feudal and other conservative resistance could, in principle, be broken down if the Congress encouraged the mobilization of the masses and was

<sup>27</sup> For the idea of 'passive revolution', see Gramsci 1971.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed account of this process, see Frankel 1978.

<sup>29</sup> Gramsci 1971.

willing to use the already achieved mobilizational levels for radical purposes consistent with its own programmes. But one of the central decisions of the Nehru government was on this question: even though it sometimes did not abrogate its reformist programmes, it decided to give them a *bureaucratic* rather than a *mobilizational* form. For the Congress leadership, clearly, the political task after assuming power was to demobilize its own movement, not to radicalize it further. It also discreetly renounced promises of distributive justice which had come to constitute part of its informal programme in the last stages of the national movement. The basic contradiction of Congress politics in these early years has been analysed in detail in the academic literature: the needs of long-term economic strategy and ideological legitimation in a poor country made an abstractly redistributive programme imperative; but the ends of mobilizing the effective levers of power in the countryside during ordinary times made a dependence on rural magnates equally unavoidable.<sup>30</sup> No party can, after all, expropriate its own power (as opposed to electoral) base.

Although the Congress was content to accept the continuance of semi-feudal rural power, elsewhere in the economy it adopted massive plans for capitalist development. But such plans can assume quite different institutional forms and political trajectories. Evidently, the Indian elite decisively rejected a trajectory of satellite growth, a common destiny which befell most other newly independent Third World states. Consistent with this general objective, the ruling elite adopted a plan for heavy industrialization and institutional control of capital goods industries through the state sector, a largely untried experiment at the time in underdeveloped countries. Economic plans led to some serious shifts in the internal power distribution of society, though primarily within the elements of the ruling bloc itself. Political mistrust of foreign capital and, to a lesser extent, of the potential power of private capital in India, led to much of this new, crucial, and politically privileged segment of the economy being given over to a new and fast-growing public sector, in the face of strong political opposition from internal conservatives.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Frankel 1978.

<sup>31</sup> The *politics* of planning and the public sector, alas, remains a seriously under-researched area.



The larger theory and the economic projections for this huge state-controlled sector, which, in turn, controlled some crucial parts of the larger economy by financial mechanisms, came from a new bureaucracy of economic and technical personnel who entered the earlier, more limited format of the colonial law and order bureaucracy, and changed its structure and practices. Planning assisted and ideologically justified an enormous expansion of a 'welfare bureaucracy' which set in motion some internal conflicts in the administrative apparatus of the state, e.g. the debate about the relative decisional weight of technocrats and bureaucrats, and, more crucially, the division of their respective domains of control.

At the general level, however, they had some common interests. They gratefully accepted the chance of a quick proliferation of bureaucratic occupations and a consequent tendency to bring under bureaucratic administration any new field of social activity. And since the decision about how much the bureaucracy should expand was made by the bureaucracy itself—though occasionally under some thinly assumed disguises of committees and commissions—it is not surprising that this sector spread rapidly in size and increased its strategic control at the expense of more traditional controllers of productive resources. This led in the long run to the growth of a large non-market mechanism of allocation of resources, a process which was originally justified by 'socialist' arguments of controlling private capitalist power, but shown by later events to be increasingly prone to arbitrary distribution of economic patronage by politicians. Originally, this social group had enthusiastically supported the spread of an intricate regime of controls through licences, permits, and government sanctions, which they saw slipping out of their grasp and being put to retrograde uses. Eventually, this entire state-directed economic regime could be singled out for criticism for its political arbitrariness and inefficiency, although actually the public sector is criticized by using examples that travesty its functioning.<sup>32</sup> Anyway, politically this allowed the bureaucracy to gain control over other people's time frames, if not actual decisions.

<sup>32</sup> The ways of the Congress Party are truly inscrutable. It expels leading members for being too vocal about economic scandals and kickbacks, but allows its minister for culture, Vasant Sathe, an equally important member, to launch frontal attacks on the public sector, presumably an important part of

The more Nehru was politically weakened inside the party organization, the greater the resistance at the state level to his reformist policies, the more he was forced into the passive revolution logic of bureaucratization, which saw the people not as subjects but as simple objects of the development process. The theoretical understanding behind this development strategy was also in several ways excessively rationalistic: it falsely believed that external 'experts' naturally knew more about people's problems and how to solve them than those who suffered these problems themselves. By the mid 1950s such an over-rationalistic doctrine became a settled part of the ideology of planning and therefore of the Indian state. 'The state', or whoever could usurp this title for the time being, rather than the people themselves, was to be the initiator and, more dangerously, the evaluator of the development process. A partly superstitious reverence for natural science, undeservingly extended to economists, sociologists, and similar other pretenders to absolute truth,<sup>33</sup> justified a theory which saw popular criticisms of state-controlled growth as 'civic disorders'.

Every advance of this rhetoricized bureaucracy in the control of social life was celebrated as a further step towards a mystical socialistic pattern of society in which, although 'socialists' controlled state power, economic and distributive inequality of other sorts rapidly increased. Although it is important to undermine its unfounded and arrogant socialistic claims, it would be unrealistic not to see that this state, under this particular balance of its ruling bloc, worked out a fairly elaborate theory of import-substituting industrialization and ran a limited, in the sense of unevenly spread, system of parliamentary democracy. Two points, however, have to be mentioned about the

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its own economic programmes. Evidently, the Congress follows a special logic in defining consistency and programmatic loyalty.

<sup>33</sup> This group of course emphatically includes political scientists who had convinced themselves that the truisms they uttered about Indian politics were different from popular wisdom by the important fact that theirs were produced by the application of *the* scientific method. I have omitted them from the list because the spirit of the age has not been in their favour, and they were given much less advisory importance than their colleagues in the dismal science. Although their labours in the spread of a degenerate form of positivism was second to none, they never made it to the high advisory councils.

internal balance of the regime. Successful functioning of this regime depended on, first, the existence of a strong constitutional–legal system, which enforced legal responsibility; and second, it worked successfully in the early years because the relation between the bourgeoisie and the new bureaucracy was relatively antagonistic rather than collusive. Bourgeois political interests attempted to fight it out frontally, in an ideological battle, trying to argue through political doctrine that a more market-oriented approach would be better for economic growth than allowing a ceremonial programme to stay and buy surreptitious reprieve from its rigours through large-scale corruption. Both these conditions were reversed in later years.

#### Consolidation 1956–1964

To emphasize these features of the political economy of the Nehru years is not to deny that modern India is still held together by a partially infringed frame which is a legacy of his period, despite the best efforts of the party he had once led to break down its structural principles during the rule of his political successors.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi can be seen only as his filial, not his political, inheritors. If his policy frame has not been entirely destroyed, it is certainly not from any want of effort from his party or those who followed him into power. Nehru's historical importance is signalled by the fact that any programme of bourgeois reconstruction still speaks of a return to his 'system' as opposed to the later Congress performance in the political and economic fields.

It is false to claim, as Nehru's official admirers often do, that Nehru was a political theorist who had worked out a prior strategy for 'independent capitalist development' which he slowly unfolded when in power. In fact, he was no theorist; but he had an overwhelming sense that political programmes in countries like India must be set in the frame of objectives in the historical long term, so that, for him, political ideology meant an interpretation of historical possibilities rather than populist gimmicks. Nehru's regime thought seriously that reduction of poverty would necessarily be slower in a state in which legal bourgeois rights to property exist; Indira Gandhi's regime cheerfully

promised its abstract eradication in the elections of 1971, though none of the conditions which forced Nehru's hesitation had changed. Although no theorist, Nehru certainly had a statesmanly nose for reading 'the dialectic of the concrete', and he picked up the elements of a fairly coherent social and political design as he went along, mainly reading the logic of colligation between one basic policy and the next. The use of political power by a ruling elite involves serious recursive calculations about the effects of earlier policies, and ensuring conditions for the success of one policy by means of others. If the bloc in power survives over a long enough time, this makes it likely that a coherent policy design will gradually emerge. But here again a prior political condition is that the elite must feel securely in power and work on a certain short-term dissociation between the political objectives of continuance, economic distribution, and creation of resources. It is this which can allow tying up resources in investments with longer periods of gestation, against the temptation to use resources in the form of direct subsidies to volatile sections. Since Nehru's regime never had serious doubts about its electoral future, it could embark on programmes like the Second Five Year Plan; for later governments, similar uses of economic resources under government control became politically unfeasible.

Although Nehru did not enter office with a fully worked-out programme, he did eventually create a distinct policy design. In its final form, its elements were internally coherent. Political stability and the realization of independence of decision-making required an improvement in the food situation, since American food aid, from early on, was used by the USA to exert political pressure on basic policy issues. This meant that in foreign policy India should seek alternative sources of international support. Parallel considerations—of protecting the political sovereignty of developmental decisions—led to the major thrust of the Second Plan towards primary sector industrialization. Gathering the results of these policies depended to a large extent on keeping these sectors of the economy under direct control of the state. Driven by political-economic calculations of this kind, the Indian state opened up its diplomatic relations with the USSR. Of course, a whole range of external circumstances helped this process of a surprising connection between the leading socialist state and the country in the Third World in which capitalism had a somewhat greater chance of success. This

<sup>34</sup> I have tried to deal with this in Kaviraj 1984.

was greatly helped by the fact that the USSR pursued in its foreign policy minimal objectives as opposed to the unpractically maximalist ones of the USA.<sup>35</sup> This mutual need was the ground for early friendship between the two countries, rather than an Indian attempt to build a version of socialism, or Soviet assistance to a regime trying to build a 'non-capitalist form' of society.<sup>36</sup>

However, there were two ways in which the Nehru model was subverted by later political initiatives: much of it was an inversion 'from inside', as it were, as in the case of bureaucratic control over the economy—turning the power of overriding market mechanisms by the state over to the service of an arbitrary granting of favours to pliable corporate houses, companies, and individuals. On some questions, however, there was a more explicit reversal of formal government policy about the generation of growth and managing its distributive effects. One significant element of the Nehruvian growth model, discussed at length during the finalization of the Second Plan, was the connection between industrial and agrarian strategies, a doctrine decisively rejected during Indira Gandhi's regime. A strong push towards industrialization in the heavy industrial sector was supposed to be related to a parallel drive for land reforms through a large programme for cooperativization. This involved pressing reluctant and procrastinating state governments to enact more serious land reform legislation. Government doctrine asserted that the requirements of raising surplus resources for massive industrialization, increasing agricultural productivity, and preventing a fast cost-push inflation could be served by change and redistribution of control over land and resources in the rural sector in a more egalitarian direction. The Nehru regime, with its finer sensitivity to legal propriety, had felt legally handicapped

<sup>35</sup> A simple definition of minimal and maximal objectives in international politics would be as follows. When state A wishes state B to do what it wants it to do, that could be called a maximal target; a minimal objective is one when A wants B to do something different from what its rival C wishes B to do.

<sup>36</sup> See the famous controversy in communist circles about the article by Modeste Rubinstein arguing that the Nehru government was proposing to follow a non-capitalist path. Ajoy Ghosh wrote a remarkably scathing reply to this article.

because land came under the state list in the constitutional division of powers.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the federal division of powers could be seen in terms of our model as a coalitional proposal directed at the regional bourgeoisie and dominant agricultural interests, giving them relative autonomy in their own regions. The insistent requirements of capitalist development now threatened to infringe that agreement within the protocol. Besides, the decline of the zamindars and direct feudal landholders left the field free for the accumulation of power in the hands of a stratum of richer farmers who wished to inherit political immunities implicit in the initial protocol. This introduced a conflict of interests within the structure of the ruling coalition in India, the effects of which were significant in the long run. Nehru's policy initiatives in the late 1950s and early 1960s led to a double process of polarization in politics. Government initiatives in three interrelated areas—creation of heavy industries in the public sector, increasing reliance on Soviet assistance in their construction, and pressure from the planning element in government for changes in the agrarian sector towards cooperativization—led to sharp criticism of the Congress. Individual capitalists, sometimes even the entire class, have to be pardoned for occasionally failing to see what was to be beneficial to the system as a whole. These Nehruvian policies, celebrated now as a triumphant design for the successful construction of retarded capitalism, came under strong fire from a panicking combine of representatives of proprietary classes. The Congress's industrial policies were interpreted as the thin end of the socialist stick; land reform proposals, shamefully mild and solidly bourgeois, appeared to them as the programme of an agrarian revolution from above; the public sector, intended merely to displace the centre of control towards the state, was seen as an attack on private enterprise. For the first time, a large right-wing coalition of conservatives inside and outside the ruling party seemed to be emerging.

<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that Indira Gandhi's regime increasingly freed itself of these legal encumbrances, leading to a general decline of the institutional system. Initial arguments in favour of this softening of bourgeois legal norms were made by using 'socialist' ideas; but, remarkably, the room for manoeuvre created by this has never been utilized for radical reforms.

The political consequences of such misreadings of Congress policy were considerable. Two trends of political realignments began soon after the adoption of the Second Plan package of policies. Grievances against industrial policy and related issues led to the formation of the Swatantra Party; but more significant changes happened in the rural political scene. Congress pressure for cooperativization came just at the time when the beneficiaries of the agrarian changes were enjoying the first impulse of their power. This led to serious shifts within the ruling bloc. Although, in terms of the distribution of unequal benefits, the rural elite must be considered to have been part of the ruling coalition, they constituted undoubtedly its most quiescent part. There were imaginary threats of disadvantage;<sup>38</sup> but, more concretely, grievance against the fact that they were not getting a larger share of advantages, and that their rising economic power was insufficiently translated into political authority because they thought the rulers of the parliamentary game constantly wrongfooted them, made them increasingly restive.<sup>39</sup>

The farmers' groups, in other words, demanded a more equal share of the fruits of inequality. There was large-scale exodus of farmer support from the Congress and the formation of regional farmers' groupings. This should be seen in my judgement as a move by these two subordinate and quiescent groups to set up relations across the boundary of the coalition with other dispossessed groups.<sup>40</sup> All over India, but particularly in the more agriculturally successful states, peasant parties sprang up and became part of the growing opposition blocs in the fourth general elections. Their typical leaders were Charan Singh and Rao Birendra Singh—the latter more typical than the former, because he later rejoined the Congress. Because his self-respect was not plastic enough, Charan Singh could not do that. Some of these

<sup>38</sup> There is always a hypothetical calculation of possible benefits made by classes and groups quite apart from threats of disadvantage.

<sup>39</sup> Most of these demands are spelt out clearly in Charan Singh 1978.

<sup>40</sup> If the whole society is made up of the letters of the alphabet, and abc are in that order wielders of power, if c is disgruntled, it can establish alliances across the boundaries of the ruling coalition with d e f . . . This would bring instability to the coalition where a + b + c was a *condition* for their being in power. But c's leaving the a b c coalition would not be read properly if we do not see this leaving itself as an offer to return to an a c b coalition.

disgruntled elements retained their loyalty to the protocol by announcing that they would retain their Congress labels with suitable adjectival modification.<sup>41</sup>

The fates of the two critical realignments were eventually very different. The relative success of the policy of heavy industrialization and the Second Plan was soon generally accepted by even the recalcitrant bourgeois groups; and the Swatantra Party consequently sank into political irrelevance. But the secession of the farmers' lobbies over much of northern India, led first to a political debacle of the Congress, then to internal changes in Congress policies. Their withdrawal of support from the Congress weakened it seriously in both class and party terms; and the Congress leadership saw it as a double-valued move: an exercise of the *exit* option, which concealed a proposal to return if the protocol was restructured in their favour. In coalitional politics, every threat is an offer. Changes in Congress policy in agriculture towards a 'technical' solution of the food problem, through heavy government investment in 'advanced' sectors—which was known to be likely to result in an accentuation of rural inequality—showed that the Congress had read this move correctly and was prepared to make alterations in its policies to accommodate the ambitions of regional farmers' groups.<sup>42</sup>

Foreign policy issues so heavily dominated the last years of the Nehru period that some of the long-term consequences of his programme of passive revolution took longer than normal to surface. The imbalances left behind by Nehru's government affected the policies of successor regimes. Such imbalances threatened to rupture the coalitional

<sup>41</sup> The country was full of non-national Congresses of all kinds—Bangla Congress, Kerala Congress, and so on—asserting the reassuring concreteness of regional identity as opposed to the greater abstractness of the national one.

<sup>42</sup> Surprisingly, the farmer lobbies were proper examples of the theory that there are unmarked, but very significant frontiers of regional consciousness. Thus, a potential national combine of such groups—which would have been *formidable, if not simply overwhelming—has not really come into existence*. Peasant lobbies seem incomprehensibly trapped within frontiers of regional consciousness; for some reason, they cannot recognize an entirely abstract we, linked entirely by modern economic interests, unsupported by any directly available form of historical self-conceptualization like Jat, or Kamma, or such cultural identity. If they describe themselves as inhabitants of UP, this would indicate a more abstract consciousness of territoriality.

unity of the ruling bloc by creating a rift of interest between the bourgeois, bureaucratic, urban segment, and regional bourgeois interests and agrarian propertied classes.<sup>43</sup>

This picture of the Nehru period should not be taken as unhistorically one-sided and pessimistic. Although all Third World societies with ambitions of capitalist growth have failed, I do not deny that Indian society has failed much better than others.<sup>44</sup> There are undoubted advantages to the Indian case over other competing models, like Pakistan, or now, more fashionably, South Korea. India is quite obviously better than the tinpot but nonetheless vicious dictatorships in Latin America and also some unproductively austere regimes in Africa that were given a prematurely lyrical reception by radicals in the 1960s. Such successes of the Nehru regime are accepted, but remain unstated here because I primarily intend to draw something of a causal line from what we consider our 'best' period to our worst.

#### Instability 1965–1975

Contradictions in the policies of the Nehru period surfaced after the somewhat artificial national unity of the mid 1960s disappeared. Nationalist hysteria naturally created a temporary alliance of sentiment which brought together political forces from the hard right to the mild left into an easy patriotic combination that isolated the communists, especially the CPI(M). But the artificiality of this was shown by the fact that, within three years of Nehru's death, left forces could regroup sufficiently to form coalition governments in states.

India passed through a deep political crisis in the immediate years after Nehru's death, a crisis that, in policy terms, was fraught with the most serious retrograde possibilities. An orchestration of pressures—from both internal and external reaction—created a situation in which

<sup>43</sup> For an economic pursuit of this phenomenon, see Ashok Mitra 1977.

<sup>44</sup> Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the abandonment in the 1970s of the argument popular with Western bourgeois theorists that India and Pakistan were two opposed models of development for Third World societies. Although the attachment of large Western democracies to an oppressive and economically unsuccessful tyranny like Pakistan was always difficult to explain, now Pakistan has become too obvious an ideological liability and is defended by purely security arguments.

the Nehruvian plan for a reformist capitalism, with its policies of public sector, state control over resources, planning, and a relatively anti-imperialist foreign policy could all be renegotiated.<sup>45</sup> Indira Gandhi's government initially gave in to some of these pressures, its most celebrated collapse being acceptance of the devaluation of the rupee. In the fourth general elections, Congress fortunes declined alarmingly, and it was evident that to get out of the deepening politico-economic crisis, the party needed some drastic measures. The initiatives taken by Indira Gandhi in the years after 1967 showed that in her view the Congress was facing a crisis of legitimacy. Unlike the years after Independence, it was not seen as a force of redistributive change, but a conservative party underwriting social inequality. Legitimacy could be renewed by restating the objectives of distributive justice with dramatic splendour. Some changes in economic policy were evident to the earlier policy on agriculture, with an implicit acceptance of the iniquitous social consequences of the new line and the gradual decline of emphasis on planning,<sup>46</sup> and the policy of large investments.<sup>47</sup>

The politics of the Indian state and the Congress Party entered a different historical stage by the fourth general elections. Earlier, electoral survival of the Congress, and the simple control over state governments which was a precondition for making and shaping policies, was never in question, although Nehru's electoral majorities were never dramatic.

<sup>45</sup> I have sketched this out more fully in Kaviraj 1986.

<sup>46</sup> Planning had become too much of a slogan for the Congress to be dropped altogether, and the concept carried pleasant reminders of Nehru. Although the thing could not be dropped entirely, its substance could be hollowed out and thrown overboard. Economists who are critical of government policy have concentrated too much on the technical economics of the plans rather than their larger ideological concept. To an untechnical eye, whatever its mathematical triumphs in recent years, planning seems to have degenerated increasingly into an accounting and housekeeping operation rather than a directive mechanism for the productive forces of the economy. Planning was a blessing for the self-reproducing bureaucracy. Every claim for creating the post of an unproductive, and possibly corrupt, bureaucrat could be said to be in the general interest of the country's economic progress. Thus, although we have much less planning, we have, happily, a much larger commission.

<sup>47</sup> Several Marxist economists have forcefully stressed this point. Cf. Bardhan 1985.

Going by purely electoral statistics, Nehru would appear retrospectively to have been permanently insecure, enjoying unspectacularly simple majorities in parliament. By contrast, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi would appear unassailably secure, riding great waves of popular affection. This only shows, in the face of much political science in the last twenty years, that electoral 'behaviour' is a rather poor indicator of what a people politically do to themselves. Actually, there was a displacement of the question at the heart of these elections. Formerly, the major question was not whether the Congress would remain in power. It was assumed that it would; the debate was about its policies. After 1967, every time, except in the last elections, the question was whether it would remain in power or not. Thus pre-1967 politics revolved around real ideological issues—what should be the path of national development, what would be the distributive character of economic growth? After 1967, the attention of Congress politicians went entirely into electoral issues and the matter of staying in power. In my view, contrary to what is often said, Indira Gandhi's politics became decidedly less ideological.<sup>48</sup>

By a populist move Indira Gandhi solved this electoral crisis of her party.<sup>49</sup> But the long-term effects of her policies have created a crisis of a different kind. Congress politics was marked by a paradox of continuity. No one would normally claim that Indira Gandhi wished to take the country on a very different line of development or diverge sharply from the policy design left behind by Nehru; yet probably no one would claim either that she left this design unaltered, or deny that her initiatives or interpretations have had serious negative consequences for the Nehruvian model.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For the contrary view, cf. Ulyanovsky 1974.

<sup>49</sup> I have suggested that this has altered the significance of elections and turned them into plebiscites: Kaviraj 1986.

<sup>50</sup> Some criticisms of the argument of this essay at the seminar where it was presented touched on this point. Several critics thought that the line was too heavily 'structuralist' in the sense that it did not recognize the possibility that politics of indubitably bad consequences could have originated in 'innocent', defensible, and entirely understandable intentions. Structuralism need not deny the necessary untidiness of political life and the complex, asymmetric relation between intentions and consequences. It is simply required, in the face of such criticism, to state a sufficiently complex theory of intentionality and accept

It is not necessary to retell the melancholy narrative of how quick but indecisive victories contributed to a long-term crisis of the state, and how the state structure was centralized to such an extent that the political difficulties of the leader or the government party became generalized into a crisis of the entire state.<sup>51</sup> We shall simply mention the political shifts introduced by her 'pragmatic' translation of Nehru's political strategy.<sup>52</sup>

In one sense, Indira Gandhi faced a situation similar to the one Nehru had encountered, with the difference that she obviously, in the mid 1960s, lacked Nehru's irreplaceability within the party. Thus, by the logic of the situation she had to intensify the passive revolution features of the Nehru period, often however to a point where these tended to subvert their own original purpose. Control over government initially, because of the parliamentary format of political power, depended on her control over the party. Since after Nehru effective power within the Congress had shifted to the state bosses, and they could and did mount an offensive against her leadership position, she set about systematically undermining state Congress caucuses. This had two types of effects: first, party posts and patronage at the state levels

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a weak truth in these objections. Surely, Indira Gandhi did not wish to wreck the Indian state, but equally certainly, she nearly did. Part of the problem lies in our ambiguous use of the verb phrase 'Indira Gandhi did x', which is underdetermined between 'intended to do x' and 'effected x'. Even unacademic observers of politics would admit, I suppose, that between two lists—the first of which showed what Indira Gandhi wished to but failed to do, and another which showed what she perhaps did not deliberately intend but nonetheless caused—the second would be the analytically more serious one. A structural argument need not entirely erase intentions, only de-emphasize them. It has no quarrel with the reporting of intentions as long as that does not displace the causal line. For instance, as long as intentional arguments do not go into rationalizing forms saying 'Indira Gandhi intended to eradicate poverty, but unfortunately, *unimportantly*, she could not', they are not seriously harmful. It is in this sense that S. Gopal's book tells half the story of the Nehru era and gives an account of Nehru's intentions. To use our argument a trifle lightheartedly, it requires a complement which would state more fully Nehru's consequences.

<sup>51</sup> Kaviraj 1984.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

shifted towards less effective leaders, to people who had no political base in their states. Though on some occasions the process of replacement of older Congress leaders by the new type was accompanied by ideological rhetoric—for instance, the new leaders being dedicated removers of poverty—this was not taken seriously by the public, nor was the pretence kept up for too long. No one suspected the new leaders of harbouring ideology. In the event, most of them proved themselves to be men of astonishing doctrinal suppleness. In the days of the socialist forum they thought only socialism could end Indian people's sufferings; but during the Emergency they were quick to appreciate the advantage of the Brazilian path; and some, the subtlest of all, declared in the days of the Shah Commission how they had nothing to do with the Emergency regime but helplessly enjoyed its benefits.

Second, after the fall of the earlier, older generation of state leaders, Indira Gandhi's Congress did not allow electoral processes to be revived, and these organizations, nominated from the centre, remained completely ineffective. The resultant ineffectiveness of the state Congress machinery made it inevitable that power would be shifted even more towards the bureaucracy.<sup>53</sup> And this was a bureaucracy that would soon declare itself 'committed' to unspecified ideals.<sup>54</sup> Mine should not be seen as an argument that prettifies the older state leadership of the Congress. Earlier leaders of the Congress, like Atulya Ghosh,

<sup>53</sup> As the internal linkages in the party turned increasingly one-way, governance required some two-way flow, and it shifted to the only alternative—a degenerating bureaucracy.

<sup>54</sup> A committed bureaucracy was an odd idea. And it was not consistent with the professed purposes for which this idea was advanced. If this meant that the bureaucracy would remain committed to the elected government, the idea was redundant, because it was meant to be so anyway. If it meant commitment to a party irrespective of its electoral fate, this was blasphemous, because it went right against the principle of democracy. If it meant a commitment to socialism, it was the most paradoxical of all, because socialism is a matter of policies; and either before or after the bureaucracy's commitment to the government, the government failed to commit itself to socialism. If it meant a coded appeal to leaders for preferment to a small coterie of politicians and bureaucrats for their commitment to socialism in some mistily distant past, this was understandable and part of a solid tradition of sycophancy stretching into medieval times.

S.K. Patil, and Nijalingappa, never enjoyed great moral stature and dealt in quite a malodorous form of patronage politics—and thus Congress did not have much moral eminence to lose. But the new leaders were not even products of local factional conflicts; they were simply imposed on state parties externally. They were not even significantly hated, they were merely unspeakable non-entities.

In such circumstances, it was hardly surprising that although securely in power as long as they enjoyed the confidence of the central leadership, these leaders lacked the ability to resolve state problems or serious regional conflicts, and tended to send up all local issues for a central settlement. The advisers of the Gandhi regime read the shirking of responsibility by the new vassals as a touching mark of their loyalty. Although this certainly showed loyalty to the centre and kept the minions gainfully underemployed, it tended to overload the centre in terms of the sheer number of decisions it had to make. In effect, this also shifted the power of decision-making from those who knew state politics well to those who knew it less, and accounts perhaps for the wildly fluctuating pragmatism of Congress rule in the states after 1971.<sup>55</sup> The new state leaders lacked the ability to hold political equilibrium in the states by the creation and manipulation of interest coalitions and factional politics—an unpleasant but efficacious art that Congress leaders had perfected in the earlier period of condominium with a more distant, non-interfering centre.

The destruction of state-level Congress organizations was not accidental, for it happened not only at the time Indira Gandhi was under pressure but continued way beyond 1971, when she was in uncontested control of the party and the state, and the Congress went on in unembarrassed cheerfulness with nominated state committees, reducing state leaders to mere clients rather than supporters of the

<sup>55</sup> Congress pragmatism was fluctuating in the following sense: various social lobbies—ordinarily caste and regional groupings—perpetually contended for control within the Congress Party. Access to high government positions made it possible to restructure governmental benefits in their favour. Often, one interest lobby of this kind would be replaced by another, and immediately restructure benefit legislations to the utter detriment of consistency in government policy. In recent years, this has happened most frequently through caste-related reservation legislations, for example in Gujarat in the very recent past.

central authority.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Indira Gandhi changed the Congress into a highly centralized and undemocratic party organization, from the earlier federal, democratic and ideological formation that Nehru had led. It should be a minor issue of Indian politics that the party which vowed to defend democracy in India could not retain it within its own fold. Also, the earlier unstated doctrine was that a strong centre could be based only on powerful states; in her regime, the power of the state governments and of the centre began to be interpreted in entirely zero-sum terms, irrespective of whether states were controlled by the Congress or opposition parties.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, we witness a further paradox of power. The Indira Gandhi regime's answer to a general sense of gathering crisis was an obsessive centralization that defeated its own purpose. She was arguably a more powerful prime minister than Nehru in terms of control over the party and the state. But she presided over a system which, though more centralized, had actually become far weaker.

Gradually, the redundancy of state parties also extended to the centre, and effective power shifted entirely to governmental echelons. Ceremonial leadership of the Congress Party became a redundant function: either Indira Gandhi herself was the leader but derived her legitimacy from being the premier; or when it was someone else, his position was purely decorative. This development implied the destruction of one of the checks within the Nehruvian structure: the party could often balance the governmental wing. Except in times of elections, Indira Gandhi ran what could ironically be called a partyless government, in which, symbolically, some of her minor office functionaries assumed more importance in terms of access, timing, and powers of facilitating and delaying decisions, than senior party leaders.

But this decline of the party could not have happened had not Indira Gandhi changed the entire nature of politics. This new, populist

<sup>56</sup> Tendencies of this kind towards atrophy of the party mechanism have been studied for quite some time, not surprisingly more often by liberal academics than by Marxists.

<sup>57</sup> The central Congress leadership appears as suspicious of an H.N. Bahuguna as of a Jyoti Basu, an extraordinary attitude if one took party divisions seriously.

politics turned political ideology—a serious disputation about the social design during the Nehru era—into a mere electoral discourse. Her use of vacuous slogans were not meant to be translated into government policies. The shift of Congress to populist politics quickly set up a new structure of political communication in which Indira Gandhi could appeal directly to the electorate over the heads of party organizations. The relation between the party and its leader was turned around: instead of the organization carrying her to power, she carried them. Naturally, the Congress became a less serious political mechanism because both of its significant functions were slowly taken away: elections were won by Indira Gandhi's ability to directly appeal to the masses; daily governance was slowly given over to the official government machinery and an increasingly politicized administration. During its great electoral victories in the early 1970s, amidst the celebrations the Congress Party as a political organization died a quiet death.

A natural correlate to this was the gradual shift of political (as opposed to administrative) tasks to the higher echelons of the bureaucracy, which became increasingly more powerful at the cost of becoming more politicized.<sup>58</sup> As the logic of modern bureaucracies is centralist, this aided the tendency towards a mindless centralization of increasingly irresponsible power. Countervailing institutions gave way, through a simultaneous decline of parliament and the court—though the first was less remarked because much of its humiliation and ineffectiveness was self-inflicted. Majorities became so large as to make their tending and discipline unnecessary, leading eventually to the comic situation of the present Congress Party worrying about the attendance of its members in crucial debates in parliament.<sup>59</sup> Although shortsighted bureaucrats may have initially rejoiced at this accession to power, often misreading this as an instrument of reformist policies, it was gradually

<sup>58</sup> 'Politicization' here does not mean the bureaucracy's devotion to social programmes on ideological lines, but to a personal leadership of the state. Ironically, it became so devoted that it lost all capacity for self-defence when the high coterie fell for the seductions of the 'Brazilian path'.

<sup>59</sup> The Congress Party had to issue a particularly stern admonition to its members to respect the whip. There was an alarming tendency among parliamentarians of the ruling party to take their massive majority for granted and pursue other interests when parliament was in session.



realized that bureaucrats could not always perform the tasks of political leaders, and the decline of procedural civilities of capitalist democracy could be eventually used to the detriment of all elements. Particularly fatal was the loan that the CPI lobbies made to the Congress of its own slogans, symbols, argument, and language—to their own detriment, as it turned out in 1976.

A remarkable feature of the new politics was the quickening of the political cycle. Indira Gandhi had carried her party to power in 1971 on promises which were more radical and proportionately more unrealistic than earlier programmes. Factors which obstructed the realization of milder promises still remained and equally prevented any realization of the stronger promise, if of course this was taken literally. Governments had to pay the price of such populism sooner than expected. Under Nehru, the electoral majorities of Congress had never been comparably large; yet none of those administrations had difficulty in seeing through their appointed constitutional terms. Remarkably, after Indira Gandhi's victory in 1971, no government has actually lasted its term. By 1973, Indira Gandhi's large parliamentary majority notwithstanding, she was in deep political crisis. The Janata government, with a large majority, lasted barely three years. Indira Gandhi, in her second term in power, was politically in trouble at the time of her death.

This calls for some explanation. In fact, the textbook translation of electoral majorities into administrative capability to rule was failing to take place. Indeed, it seems that the larger the majority of the government, the more difficult it finds the general business of orderly governance. I have claimed elsewhere that this is due to a change in the nature of elections—which was initiated by the government party, but later used by the electorate to register its protest against the current political dispensation.

Elections have turned increasingly into populist referendums, in which a highly emotive, rhetorical issue is placed before the electorate immediately before the polls, screening off from view the mixed record of an incumbent regime. This has given these governments exaggerated electoral majorities without clear mandates; but, more significantly, it has destroyed the effectiveness of the electoral mechanism as a register of popular dissatisfaction. Thus, governments which a few months

earlier achieved massive mandates, could face equally massive popular movements, as happened in Gujarat in 1974. Popular criticism of governmental performance was deprived of its legitimate channel in elections because of populism spilling out on to the streets. Indira Gandhi's answer to previous electoral instability under opposition rule in the states was not much better than the earlier situation. Instability was not reduced, but internalized. Instead of unstable opposition coalitions following one upon the other, now equally unstable Congress coalitions followed in quick succession; and since Congress did not have a clear programme in terms of policies they could follow widely divergent trajectories in distributing benefits to social groups.

The evolution of the Congress in the years of Indira Gandhi ought not to be seen in purely party or governmental terms. I have suggested that the Congress debacle in the late 1960s was related to a threatened secession of rich agrarian groups from the ruling coalition. But, as every threat is an offer, it represented their willingness to return to the fold with the terms of the protocol renegotiated in their favour. Under the pressure of the Emergency, and partly through the systematic concessions given to the agrarian rich, the Congress gradually got them back into its fold. Congress organizational positions were laid open to these politicians, who were sometimes unused to the subtleties of bourgeois democracy. The agricultural policy of the government showed reluctance to either tax or impose other levies on the major beneficiaries of the green revolution.

The Emergency, of course, overshadowed all other political questions for some time. Although initially defended by seemingly economic arguments, the Emergency regime soon ran out of arguments of justification in redistributive terms. Politically, however, it showed an extreme point of centralization. It showed literally how a personal crisis of the leader could be turned into a political crisis of the state. It showed how, through a combination of centralization and the suspension of normal constitutional procedures of responsible government, actual power could shift to extra-constitutional caucuses. In a country with such a rich and varied culture of past tyranny, this revealed a particularly dangerous trend. It also showed, finally, how an excessively authoritarian regime blocked off its own channels of communication to the extent of believing that it could win elections after the Emergency. Historically,

however, the experience of the Emergency demonstrated that a solution to India's political ills should not be sought in an authoritarian alternative. Democracy had lumbered on untidily for thirty years; authoritarianism took less than two years to make the country ungovernable for itself.

#### Crisis 1975–1987

Though the period after the death of Nehru was one of political instability, the character of political turmoil and the sense of pessimism associated with it were of a different character from the present gloom. What declined then was a government *party* and not the institutional structure of the *state*. Slowly, such distinctions have become obliterated, and the general tone of thinking in India has become perceptibly darker, moving from political disquiet to a deeper historical pessimism. And this sense of apprehension about the fragility of Indian democracy, and pessimism about the tasks which the young state had once hopefully set itself, is naturally deeply associated with the dark experience of the Emergency years.

There has been a great deal of debate about the significance of the Emergency period: whether it was inevitably caused by a crisis of capitalism or simply a generalization of a personal crisis in an excessively centralized state; whether it was an aberration or showed a more insistent long-term tendency towards authoritarianism. Although the form in which the political crisis erupted during the Emergency has gone into the past, I think it can be argued that the period marked the beginning of a quite different kind of difficulty for the political order in India. This is a process in which a crisis-laden ruling group is drawing the party, the governmental system, eventually the state itself, into crisis. Empirically the assertion that the period since 1975 has been one of almost uninterrupted political disorder hardly needs demonstration. Occasionally, the crisis has changed form, terrain, expression, nodal points—in structuralist language, its site, and its bearers. But a sense of a historical crisis—a sense of increasing vulnerability and exhaustion of the state in face of self-produced disorders—has scarcely ever disappeared in the last ten years. The way the Emergency ended showed that authoritarianism blocks off its own channels of political communication and response, and makes a violent retribution

highly likely. The Emergency did not improve either the state's economic performance or administrative functioning, and appeared a gratuitous exchange of bourgeois authoritarianism for bourgeois democracy. But it made some earlier detractors of 'bourgeois' democracy see its limited advantages—something that had not appeared clearly to some radical groups in the thirty years when rights were available became clear in the nineteen months when these were denied. An ironic 'gain' of the Emergency years has been a greater appreciation of the value and vulnerability of bourgeois democracy when no higher form seems to be in sight.

The end of the Emergency, however, did not see an alteration of this crisis politics. The Janata regime failed its mandate in all possible ways. First, it wrongly translated a matter of principle into a question of personal vendetta, which invited the nation to read the principles and issues involved in the experience in a wholly misleading way. Second, it entirely misjudged a negative vote against the Emergency into a positive vote for its more conservative policy inclinations. To put it rhetorically, its leaders first thought this was a vote of no-confidence by the nation against the Nehru model of policies; while, in fact, it was a vote calling for a return from the Emergency rule of Indira Gandhi to the policies of Nehru, a vote for the past Congress against the present one. In any case, it did not have a long enough term to clearly work out its policies on major politico-economic questions; so that its supporters and critics can carry on an infructuous debate, maintaining that if it had been in power for a long term this would have been, respectively, for better or for worse for India than under the Congress regime. Its internal factional squabbles, its inability to set its own terms of policy, its acceptance of the terms that an out-of-power Indira Gandhi set to it, converged to bring about an ignominious departure from ineffective power into abusive exile. But its greatest failure was in not being able to restore politics to policies and principles of bourgeois democratic government. In fact, its attacks on Indira Gandhi actually increased the indistinctness of persons and institutions. The joyous enthusiasm with which the liberal intelligentsia joined these personal debates and debased questions of principle into a ledger of personal qualities contributed to this denouement. As a result, what could have been turned into an occasion for restating an agenda of political principles went waste.

As the Janata Party failed to pose questions of principle, Indira Gandhi's return to power in 1980 did not involve any serious critical self-reflection on the part of the Congress. Consequently, several tendencies opposed to bourgeois principles of democratic governance, introduced during the Emergency, came back with her restoration to power. The equation of the fate of a nation with that of the Nehru family, the open support for hereditary succession to power, and the total suspension of electoral forms within the Congress remained entirely unchecked and uncriticized within the ruling party, due mainly to the ineptness of the Janata Party in posing a principled challenge. These were simply the more dramatic instances of a reintroduction of retrograde, nearly feudal, forms of irresponsible power in the bourgeois state apparatus itself. And since the state occupied such a large space in modern Indian society and was, in a true sense, the educator of educators, appointer of appointers, and patron of patrons, these deformations travelled rapidly down the system into a quick subversion of principles and formats of equality of opportunity and merit at every level of institutional life. It helped do away with bourgeois principles of recruitment and advance, and replaced them with a system of patronage in the huge network of public institutions, starting from the planning mechanism to the socially irrelevant universities.<sup>60</sup>

The dominant patronage groups in such a system changed rapidly, along with bewilderingly quick changes of policy orientation—an abject indecisiveness rationalized in the name of pragmatism. The 'correct' ideology in the early 1970s was a vague espousal of socialism uncommitted to its policy realization. Those who attained eminence from this political group were replaced during the Emergency by politicians who favoured the 'Brazilian path' and forced sterilization as solutions to the country's economic problems, and confused improvement of society with the beautification of its capital cities. Subsequently, even these leaders made way for a newer group

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the kind of decline the universities have undergone, their pitiful collective inability to ensure the imparting of skills which their degrees certify, could have been tolerated by society only because they were in a large measure irrelevant. Had it been otherwise, there would have been strong counterpressures from interested groups like the entrepreneurial class and the middle classes to make them deliver the goods.

of 'modernist' politicians, believers in the powers of modern advertising and a judicious combination of religious and electronic superstition. What was remarkable about Indira Gandhi's leadership was the equal tolerance she extended to such diverse 'ideological' groups and the equal willingness to unsentimentally distance herself from them when the occasion arose.

Indira Gandhi's rule, notwithstanding its rhetoric, resulted in a decline of political ideology, a delinking of power from ideological and social programmes. This has led to a general debasement of political ideology in the popular mind (except obviously in states ruled by left parties which treat ideology as serious business), to which the opportunism and personalism of her opposition made a distinguished contribution. Eventually, her last years came to be dominated by two regional movements which, though superficially antithetic, were actually linked to each other by internal relations of a structural sort. These were related because they show two poles of the intensification of regional inequality due to unrestricted and unreflective capitalist development. At the time of her tragic death, Indira Gandhi faced, for the third time in her eventual political career, a threat of encirclement by difficulties and insurmountable problems. And even if she had fought the elections it is likely that she would have won with a far reduced and insecure majority. Her career illustrated the deeper crisis of Indian polity: that even dramatic electoral victories were indecisive and could turn dramatically quickly into their opposite.

Indira Gandhi's period in power, underneath the misleading formal continuity of the Congress system, revised some of the fundamental premises of the Nehru model. These are not accidental or style differences, but of principles of structuring the political order. The Nehru elite tried to take a historical view of the possibilities of social change and came to the conclusion, written into its social theory, that the construction of a modern, relatively independent capitalism required a reformist and statist bourgeois programme. Indira Gandhi's successor regime gradually abandoned the element of historical thinking as a matter of dispensable luxury and went for what it rationalized to itself as a more pragmatic programme. It reduced even the planning apparatus, entrusted by Nehru with the task of serious long-term developmental reflection, to more short-term accounting, though depending on its statistical ability to turn the poverty of the people into the wealth

of the nation. Its pragmatism led it to abandon some of the points of the Second Plan kind of strategy.<sup>61</sup> Gradually, the government allowed a massive campaign to gain momentum for the privatization of industry and other economic activities, reducing public investment, and altering the nature of the investment where it still existed. Its successor regime also started plans for extending this policy of liberalization towards greater foreign collaboration in order to obtain more sophisticated technology. Politicians within the cabinet began to launch open attacks on the public sector on the grounds of its inefficiency, though much of the inefficiency is due to the interference and wasteful exploitation of its facilities by the government bureaucracy and politicians. It abandoned the earlier strategy of institutional changes for agricultural growth in favour of a green revolution strategy unaccompanied by any redistributive controls.

Political changes were equally vital. The Congress government under Indira Gandhi gradually allowed a profitable breakdown of bourgeois frameworks of formal propriety since they were occasionally inconvenient encumbrances in its path. In bourgeois political systems, there must be a reliable relation between the structure of classes and the format of parties.<sup>62</sup> The abandonment of ideological politics by the ruling party and cheerful retaliatory imitation by opposition groups causes this relation to break down through defection, the bending of constitutional norms, etc. This can destroy popular faith in democratic institutions. Besides, the breakdown of ground rules of political behaviour tends to make the political world unfamiliar and unrecognizable to the political actors themselves, encouraging behaviour that is blind, wild, and anomic.

The Congress under Indira Gandhi, in effect, renegotiated some of the fundamental definitions of Indian political life. Two of these crucial principles were those of 'the national' and 'the secular'. Some amount of regional political articulation was unavoidable in

<sup>61</sup> There is a fairly large and incisive literature in Marxist economics about this turn in the nature of government economic policies and the consequent retrogressive trends in planning.

<sup>62</sup> This does not mean, however, that a single class would be represented by a single party. It simply means that for social pressures to work through the party system, there must be some reliability in party programmes.

the aftermath of Independence. Capitalist development increased the economic power of two regionally conscious groups, the rich farmers and the regional bourgeois interests. In face of the first wave of regional movements in the 1950s, the Nehru government had made a relatively clear distinction between cultural and economic questions, and had conceded the first kind of demand. Demands for linguistic states or the use of vernaculars in state administration, occasionally even negative sensibilities, such as opposition to the introduction of Hindi, were accepted through a generally consultative process. Strikingly, acknowledgement of such demands did not weaken the process of centralization of planning decisions about the economy. Decisions regarding development investments were left, partly due to the political quiescence of these groups, to the central planning machinery.

Under Indira Gandhi, the situation changed drastically. Increasing pressures were now mounted for regional allocation of heavy industries and other such symbols of regional prestige. It is misleading to believe the vulgar theory that opposition parties alone pressed for economically unjustifiable regional demands. Indeed, many of these regionalisms were first articulated within the ruling party itself, Congress often having absorbed them.<sup>63</sup> Indira Gandhi's state increasingly gave way to such internal regionalisms. Often, it would have been better to describe the Congress as the only party which was hospitable to regionalisms of all areas, with a thin crust of the central leadership and, naturally, the central bureaucracy providing a failing counterweight. Worse, occasionally the regime played one regionalism against another, as it also did with religious communities, hoping to benefit electorally from their double insecurity. Surely, these were clever manoeuvres in the short run; in the long run they undermined the bases of nationalism. In fact, the region of the national capital came to develop a pampered regionalism of its own.

Evidently, similar things happen with regard to communalism too. Concessions given to religious communities as communities undermined the theory of a common individual citizenship and created

<sup>63</sup> The two clear examples of Congress hospitality to regionalism in recent times are the handling of the Andhra agitations of a decade ago, and the early encouragement to breakaway groups from the Akalis in the hope of splitting the Akali vote in Punjab.

the grounds for a rapid increase of majority communalism. Telling Muslims or other minority communities that their fate was secure only with the ruling party kept such insecurities alive. Most seriously, the government allowed a subversion of secular principles of the state by increasingly invoking the religious principle of *sarvadharmasamamaya*, entirely incompatible with democratic secularism. The Indian state today declares itself to be multireligious, a complete reversal of the Nehruvian principle that there was an equality of all religions to be practised as the private affair of individuals. Finally, the inability of the Congress government to clearly denounce the communal riots after Indira Gandhi's death provided a significant encouragement to the forces of Hindu communalism.

The state curiously believes even today that the best way of controlling religious fanaticism is to lend the government-controlled media to religious leaders, and give the greatest coverage on TV to routine religious practices. During the Nehru period, Dussera, Diwali, Id, and Christmas, celebrated presumably with customary enthusiasm, passed off unnoticed by radio, in contrast with the present coverage by secular television. A state armed with such suicidal weapons does not need communal parties for its destabilization. Remarkably, the subversion of the definition of secularism was not done by communal forces and political parties but accomplished by the state.

The lack of historical self-analysis by the state and its supporting intelligentsia and its conversion to a doctrine of pragmatism meant, in effect, that even normal rational procedures of reflection on effects of earlier policies have been abandoned in favour of an exclusive search for electoral power. Its correlate, pointed out by economists, is a tendency to channel resources increasingly into 'dole' programmes rather than the creation of productive resources, which have longer gestation periods and cannot be adapted to the eventful electoral calendar.

Politicians of the Nehru era would have been surprised if told that, forty years after Independence, the state they had set up would be riven by conflicts over two retrograde forces—regionalism and communalism. And the regionalism that threatens to engulf the polity today is quite clearly a consequence of the inequities of the capitalist growth process. Governments have been consistently inattentive to regional economic inequality inherited from the colonial period. Capitalist development

has further intensified these imbalances. Nowhere is this revealed more than in the internal incompatibility between regional demands. Regionalism in Punjab is essentially an anti-redistributive agitation which insists on retaining and extending the economic advantage of the state, particularly of farmers, over other states, regions, and classes. The Assam agitation presses what are, in essence, redistributive demands on the central government; and the two kinds of demands are incompatible.<sup>64</sup> The centre also sometimes plays up regional demands with incredible shortsightedness. At present, it is mildly encouraging the causes in Gorkhaland and fighting the consequences in Punjab, a subtlety of approach truly worthy of the present Indian elite.<sup>65</sup>

A crisis can be called structural, not conjunctural, if it arises from inside the basic laws of movement of a system, rather than from externalities. Several aspects of the present crisis of the Indian state need to be noted. It is not a simple crisis of the economy translated deterministically into political disorder. Some of the cultural processes of crisis have hardly anything to do, directly at least, with the logic of economic development. No deep economic logic made it destroy elementary definitions of secularism. The cheerful indifference with which it has allowed the education system to decline is certainly not induced by economic necessity. This has given the state a great choice of weapons with which to deal self-inflicted wounds on its own structure. Interestingly, these trends have appeared not because capitalism has not been able to develop adequately but precisely because of the

<sup>64</sup> It is remarkable how the logic of regional demands of the 1950s and the 1970s differs. The demand for a linguistic state, once conceded in one case strengthened the case of other, similarly placed areas. In the case of the demand for economic resources, the game is principally zero-sum, with the share of one state cutting against the share of all others.

<sup>65</sup> Since the writing of this essay, the state has brought about a truce in the hill areas of West Bengal. But how far and how long it holds is to be seen. The few years of Rajiv Gandhi's rule have been strewn with the debris of pacts and accords. He has made more pacts than Metternich; and the fact that internal conflicts in the Indian state are attended to in a style of diplomacy says something about the processes of national integration that the Congress has set in motion.

manner of its growth. So, with greater growth of capitalism, these incompatibilities are likely to intensify and not ease off.

The idea that capitalism is a social form implies that to expand or to simply carry on, its economic structures require some political-institutional complements. There are certain types of political-institutional forms which constitute preconditions for a purely economic reproduction of capitalist society. Indian capitalism is in a state of serious *political* crisis. Conservative economists would argue, though I think unconvincingly, that the Indian economy has done reasonably well, if you ignore the distributive performance of the system; no political analyst can, however, claim that the Indian state has done reasonably well in quite the same sense. It is reacting defensively, and adopting undemocratic and precapitalist responses on vital issues. Most alarmingly, it is increasingly proving incapable of providing the most vital precondition for bourgeois development—the provision of political stability.

The state's difficulties should be seen as a structural crisis. Political crisis may break out through the mismanagement of political options by rulers, or sub-optimal decisions by the ruling bloc. A crisis is *structural* if it arises out of self-related difficulties, because it emerges not out of the failure of the social form, but its successes. It is not a condition of 'abnormality' which could be expected to disappear with a change of leaders or parties. It is coming to be a condition of stressful, violent normalcy of this late, backward, increasingly unreformist, capitalist order. It is different even from a standard Gramscian case; because here even a passive revolution has not succeeded, but is lapsing into failure. Those who would see present difficulties as 'failures' of Indian capitalism would find this difficult to explain. It is the 'successes' of Indian capitalism that have caused them. So, if it becomes more 'successful' in the ways it has pursued over the last twenty years, these problems will not go away, but perhaps intensify. The tragic thing is that the crisis of ruling-class politics plunges not only the ruling bloc, which has ruptured its protocol, into serious disorder, but the whole country. An exhaustion of the politics of the ruling bloc does not automatically prefigure a radical alternative. It is a particularly sad chapter of a story which had begun with the promise of something like an 'Indian revolution', an understandably unpractical and sentimental beginning which promised to 'wipe every tear from every eye'. Even if

we consider only the socially relevant tears, the promise is as distant today as at the romantic time when it was made.

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