



# Struggle and Dialogue

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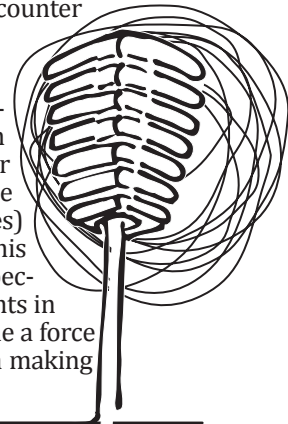
It had already been decided that I needed to rework the editorial. Now I have to mention the Delhi blasts, though the addition might seem strained. I was returning from the University when I heard. A friend sent me a message. I had boarded the metro at the University at six and came out at IP in thirty-five minutes. I spent the next half-hour calling friends who were likely to be out. It will sound clichéd but the incident did drive most other thoughts out of my head. Five blasts all over the city and many bombs diffused. Apparently an Islamic outfit took responsibility.

The paranoia that an incident like this creates is huge. Blame is thrown on the police, on the Home Ministry, on Shivraj Patil's softness on 'terrorism'. Solution plans fly from all over the place. I distinctly remember how I annoyed I was with the manner in which a RJ kept repeating how such incidents can be averted if we like responsible citizens inform 'concerned authorities the moment we see unattended objects'. The most interesting solution was proposed by possibly the biggest terrorist in the country—re-invoke POTA. For a moment I bracket out the interests of Hindutva in the re-invocation of the act and concentrate on other aspects. Everybody is bent on treating it as a 'law and order' problem. A few decades ago my criticism could have been different (discussions of socio-economic causes of acts of violence have become so common that they are not considered serious anymore) but I now feel that mere common sense and experience should be enough to teach us that the problem lies somewhere else. I do not suggest that law and order are not in question, nor am I taking the 'terrorists-are-also-humans' stand. I merely wish to point out the fact that stricter laws and greater protection have never ever helped in curbing acts of violence. However I do not wish to go into diatribes against this blindness nor is my agenda to offer an alternative solution (I have none to offer)—I seek to make a different point, or rather I wish to target a different bunch of people.

The situation of the Left in the country is very interesting. If I try to put my finger on the stand of the Left at large on issues like terrorism and communalism I am struck by a sorry realization—there is no stand to pinpoint. The Left is so stuck in the creation of counter-discourses or participation in discourses that are already ideologically compromised that its own discourses cease to exist. Try to locate a few genuine attempts in the country to understand fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy (to name one issue) from a Left perspective and you will understand what I'm talking about. The 'mainstream' left is the busy guardian of bourgeois secularism and the not so mainstream left is busy attacking the mainstream left. When an incident like this one takes place the only thing the Left leaders can do is offer condolence. And because they themselves do not have anything to offer all they can do is try and counter what the Right offers—in this case it will probably be POTA.

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Struggle provides us with what is perhaps our only real chance of continued freedom from reification. It entails the forging of alliances that can help transcend the experiences of fragmented modern existence. The process of changing society is also the most effective manner of transforming our own existence and the only way of bringing about fundamental change is struggle. This magazine is a medium to take forward the idea of struggle. The revivification of struggle (in all its possibilities) needs us to first understand what threatens this idea and then strategise to counter these threats. This magazine is an attempt at doing just that—it will try to bring together counter-hegemonic perspectives on important questions and help provide the sense of community essential for the participants in counter-hegemony. Without this community an idea will hold no bearing on reality—it will become a force only when shared by persons. In this editorial I will lay out some of my thoughts on the situation making some observations regarding problems that I think important.





I was in conversation with a person whom I know to be more than a mere sympathizer of the Left and I am using some of his words when I say that these are depressing times for those people in India who want to believe in the validity of a Left politics, with the organised Left in danger of succumbing completely to the social democratic “Third Way” and the fringe Left more often than not caught in the mires of sectarianisms and adventurisms. It is easy in such circumstances to give in to the lure of consumerism and it becomes compulsive to “enjoy one’s condition”; the easiest thing indeed is to give up the idea of struggle and go out to shop. This consumerism too is not limited to the mall but seeps into and becomes the defining signifier of all actions and social phenomena, even resistance. Trapped in the tri-partite struggle between i) the inertia of a long history of anti-establishment struggle ii) the apparent uselessness of this struggle and iii) the desire to join the system (that one cannot fight) by choosing a career, some call a truce and resistance is chosen as a career option—a symptom of this is the manner in which instead of the Party being a means for struggle, struggle becomes solely a way of “building” the Party (it is important to emphasize the word ‘solely’ because it alone signifies where the problem lies).

We discuss at length the importance of looking at things dialectically. In theory dialectics is something we have a copyright over; but it is hard to maintain it in practise. I do not deny that in concrete political engagements it is not that easy to constantly double check with what’s on paper but to completely lose sight of it is not altogether advisable. I feel that one needs to be wary of this ontological blindness that advertises itself on the name ‘practicality’ and allows not only actions that one would otherwise completely condemn but also disables faculties that the original idea had provided us with. But then we also need to question if the problem is that we understand and do not practise our ideas or whether there is a problem in our understanding of ideas that we call ours. I don’t think the former is possible.

A great sign of decay is the manner in which people are scared of ideas. Doubt is losing its self-reflexivity and is changing into callous lack of trust; conviction is being transformed into prejudice. Both acceptance and rejection lose their Hegelian essence and begin to precede understanding. The process is a vicious circle—because conviction comes before understanding it is shaky, because conviction is set on weak grounds one is afraid of the other’s convictions lest they be stronger and since one cuts communication from the other, one’s own convictions seem unquestioned, and since our own convictions go unquestioned there seems no need to engage with the other’s convictions. A fundamental lesson of dialectical materialism that no idea is completely false and all ideas are only partially true—seems lost.

There is need for a struggle to make struggle more dialogic—dialogue here refers to the capacity to be able to incorporate the other’s voice into one’s own without dominating it; it refers to the removal from language of the violence that destroys the heteroglossic nature of correspondence. Reviving dialogue is one of the most important tasks that face us. We must remember that though internal strife may affect the establishment, fear of revolt and the need to maintain a net profit keeps it together, united against us. On the other hand by keeping a large percentage of the working population unemployed capital makes sure that at all times every worker steps in the market against every other worker. Resistance to the establishment starts off with a huge disadvantage. If we have to counter this disadvantage we cannot allow dialogue to disappear from our interactions with each other, just as we cannot afford a non-dialectical approach unless a skewed and limited picture of reality is what we wish to achieve. Without dialogue neither solidarity nor true criticism can exist. Fear of ideas is a characteristic of hegemonic authority—hegemony has this funny property of being in a constant state of decay. Hegemony is also by definition based on violence and is opposed to dialogue. Resistance on the other hand is a process that survives and disseminates through collective action, solidarity and dialogue.

The preservation of dialogue and a dialectical understanding of things require us to stay in touch with our reality. It is vital that we grasp all that is typical and get rid of all that is superfluous. The commodification of resistance and the concomitant monologising of the space of protest is a sign of the failure of forms of resistance to comprehend the nature of capital. This will indeed be the eventual fate of all forms of resistance that lose what is actually the fundamental link that will allow them to truly engage with capitalist reality, the link with class struggle and the struggle for the interests of the working class. Capital is a result of exploitation—it exists on the production of surplus value and production of surplus value requires labour power. Any struggle as a result, to be a struggle against the system of capital needs to create and preserve its link with the “actual” producers (workers). Capital makes use of various methods to hide this essential logic of its running, to hide this essential fact, the key that has to be grasped to get rid of the chains that bind us. Perceiving the true nature of determination in capitalism would allow us to look through the various illusions that we have to confront each day and this in turn allow the re-establishment of productive ties between fellow beings.

To facilitate the re-establishment of such ties and to allow exchange of perceptions of reality, dialogue is needed. The role of this magazine is to participate in the building of this dialogue—to encourage discussion by actively participating in various discourses and by allowing discussion within its folds is the idea that will underlie its working. It will try to start a dialogue of ideas between individuals, between different organisational streams and also between the reified parts of the same whole that take the form of various disciplines in formal education today. The basic idea is to achieve the true likeness of the elephant and overcome our subjective blindness.