

## **Chicanery versus Humanity\***

**Prabhat Patnaik**

The current protests in US university campuses demanding “divestment” from firms linked to Israel’s military machine, are reminiscent of the protests that had swept these campuses in the late sixties and early seventies demanding an end to the Vietnam war. There is however a major difference: the US had then been directly involved in the war, while today it is not. This had meant a draft then in the US while today there is none, which makes the current student protests completely free of even a shadow of self-interest. By the same token, direct US involvement in that war and hence the daily loss of lives of US personnel had invested the calls within the US establishment for ending the Vietnam war with a seriousness that is sorely missing in all such calls today. The fact of the US not being a direct combatant therefore makes the protests of the students much more principled and serious, while it makes the pronouncements on peace of the establishment much less principled and serious.

The students in short are moved by a pure sense of humanity. Their protests are motivated by an abhorrence for genocide, for settler colonialism, and for imperialist complicity in an apartheid Zionist regime; they are an expression of humanity’s quest for peace and fraternity. The US establishment, on the other hand, indulges in double talk: while paying lip service to peace it does everything to prolong the conflict, and while professing opposition to the inflicting of cruelty on innocent civilians, continues supplying arms for inflicting such cruelty. The humanity on one side, the side of the students, is in stark contrast to the chicanery on the other side. If the first is the harbinger of hope for the future, the second represents the frantic dishonesty of a tottering imperialism.

This dishonesty is manifest at every level. For years now, the metropolitan countries have been committed to a “two-state” solution to the Palestinian issue, that is, to having a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel. The point is not whether a “one-State” solution, that is a single State with its central executive elected through universal adult franchise, and within whose boundaries the Palestinians and the Israelis live together, is better than a two-State one; the point is that a two-State solution has been accepted for long by international opinion and also by the imperialist countries. A corollary of the two-State solution is that a Palestinian State should come into being immediately and be recognised as a full-fledged member of the United Nations. And yet whenever the issue of admitting Palestine as a full member of the UN has come up, the United States, despite being apparently committed to the idea, has exercised its veto at the Security Council which has the final authority in the matter.

This is what happened on April 19. The Zionist State of Israel does not want an independent Palestinian State for that would put an end to its settler colonial project; and the United States, despite its public posturing, goes along with this Zionist project whenever matters come to a head. On May 10 again the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly (with 143 in favour, nine against and 25 abstentions) for full membership of Palestine, and requested the Security Council to reconsider the matter. While the US, along with some of the arch right-wing regimes of the world like Argentina and Hungary voted against, other metropolitan countries (with the

exception of France alone which voted in favour) abstained. The US, when the matter comes again before the Security Council, will no doubt exercise its veto once more to thwart not only any prospect of peace, but also the will of the overwhelming mass of the people of the world to resolve the problem.

The same dishonesty is visible in the manner in which the US establishment treats the student movement. Police have been sent to several campuses to break up the encampments set up by the students and hundreds of student protesters have been arrested, despite the fact that the protests have been peaceful. The use of strong-arm methods to deal with peaceful protests constitutes an assault on the freedom of expression; but it has been justified by the entire American establishment, from Donald Trump to Joe Biden to Hilary Clinton. Donald Trump has talked of “Radical mobs taking over our college campuses” and accused Biden of being complicit with such “mobs”. Biden in turn who has openly supported police action against students, as at Columbia University, in conformity with “liberal” opinion in general, has charged protesting students with “anti-semitism”, a bizarre charge given the fact that student protesters have included a large number of Jewish students! Hilary Clinton has accused the students of being ignorant of the history of the middle east, as if awareness of such history could condone the perpetration of a genocide!

The anti-Vietnam war movement had at some point acquired the support of important American public figures like Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, but that again was because of America’s direct involvement in the war. In the present case the entire phalanx of establishment politicians has lined up in favour of the war and against the students.

Similar student protests have broken out elsewhere in the metropolitan world and similar strong-arm tactics have been used in many campuses. But there have also been instances of opposition to strong arm methods. In Britain for instance Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s advice to vice chancellors of universities that have seen such protests, to use the State machinery to break them up has not gone down well with all vice-chancellors; some have even refused to attend a meeting called by him. But in America there has been no such opposition; university heads who have sought to assert their own judgement on how to deal with the protests, have been forced to resign.

It is this suppression of thought on campuses that has brought the charge of a new McCarthyism being unleashed in the US. Then as now it is a group of right-wing lawmakers that are in the forefront of the attempt to suppress independent thinking on campuses. But the question arises: in the 1950s the context for McCarthyism was provided by the Cold War and the fear of Communism; what is it in the present context that is driving this new McCarthyism?

There can be little doubt that the new McCarthyism is linked to the rise of the right and to the ascendancy of neo-fascism in the capitalist world in the context of the crisis of neo-liberal capitalism. What the rise of neo-fascism has done is not just to thrust fascist elements that had hitherto occupied the political fringe to the centre-stage, but also to let such elements hegemonise the so-called “liberal” political forces, to create a more or less unified right-wing consensus that beats down all efforts at a revival of the Left.

It is noteworthy that when Jeremy Corbyn had been elected the leader of the Labour Party in Britain and had mounted a challenge against the establishment that had threatened to “get out of hand”, a conspiracy had been mounted against him by dubbing him “anti-semitic” (because of his sympathy for the Palestinian cause) and even removing him from the Labour Party itself.

Students and teachers in universities still constitute in the metropolis an independent source of thought, and hence a moral force that poses a threat to this right-wing consolidation. Control over universities therefore becomes an important item on the agenda of this right-wing consolidation. Independence of thought must be destroyed, every trace of humanity must be destroyed, if this right-wing consolidation is to have its way. What we are seeing in the United States today is this brazen attempt to destroy independence of thought.

Protesting genocide is dubbed anti-semitism. Neither the students nor Jeremy Corbyn was anti-semitic; in fact it is among their detractors that one can find elements that have had links with anti-semitic movements at home and abroad (like the movement started by Stepan Bandera of Ukraine who had collaborated with the Nazi invaders). But “weaponising anti-semitism” comes in handy for right-wing consolidation in metropolitan countries.

What is happening on US campuses therefore is of great significance. The struggle between humanity and chicanery that is being played out on campuses today presages decisive class struggles in the days to come.

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