

Assaults on Indians in Australia: Globalisation, Recession and Renewed Racism

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The continuing spate of attacks and violence against Indians and Indian students in particular in Australia has once again exploded the much touted myth that globalisation promotes and respects pluralism and multiculturalism. The response of the Australian govt. has been shockingly muted, trying to cover up and even deny the racist dimensions of the attack, terming them as just routine robberies and muggings. If so, why do Indians constitute a disproportionate share of the victims – 30% in Melbourne? One of the important demands of the protesting Indian students is to make the records of the assaults public – which would bring out the actual extent and dimension of these racist crimes. The least that the Australian govt could have done in the wake of these attacks was to unequivocally apologize; but far from that, the Australian police has unleashed a brutal crackdown by thrashing and arresting the peaceful student protestors agitating against the attacks. It is really shocking that while the Aussie police swooped down on the Indian students to thwart their protests against racist violence, the same police has hardly displayed any urgency or sensitivity to stop the spate of crimes and violence so far. This brings out the real attitude and intent of Aussie authorities towards this phenomenon.

The Australian authorities deny racism – but their own pronouncements and assumptions are racist! Take for example the “advice” of one Inspector Scott Mahony of the Melbourne police force, who asked Indians “not to talk loudly in their native language in public or travel around with expensive items such as mp3 players on display.” Is it not racist to blame the victims for the “display” of their “native language” and their electronic equipment?!

Attacks on Indians, though not a new phenomenon in Australia, have been especially violent during the last few weeks. There have been at least 60 to 70 incidents of serious nature. According to police records at least three cases of crime against Indian students are registered on a daily basis. Partly, of course, Indian students are being targeted for shining academically and because they are perceived as getting better jobs than local Australian unemployed youth. But that is not all the story.

Remember that not long ago, taxi drivers of Indian and Pakistani origin had protested against the Australian police’s indifference to a series of attacks on them. That story had not been highlighted much by the corporate Indian media because it made less interesting copy for elite India than the attacks on “people like us.”

The truth is that racism is deeply entrenched in Australia’s state policy: the worst of its racism is directed at its Aborigine population, from whom the country itself was stolen by colonial Europeans. Today, a disproportionate percentage of Aborigines are jailed, or killed in ‘encounters’ on the streets, and there is no Aborigine representation in Australian parliament. Australian Ministers have time and again got away with racist remarks against immigrants – the “boat people” who come seeking refuge to Australia. Australian policy treats such immigrant refugees as criminals – penning them into jail-like detention centres for months. And of course, that is not to mention the rampant and rising racism against Muslims in Australia, in the wake of the “war on terror.” The episode of

Dr. Hanif was only the tip of the iceberg – the Australian Government’s racism today is reinforced by its role in the occupation of Iraq, and its partnership with the US in sponsoring Islamophobia. The attacks on Indian students are no aberration – they are part and parcel of the deep-seated racism in Australian society and politics finding renewed expression in the wake of the globalised recession.

Commentators have dubbed the recent developments as the “present day Pauline Hanson phenomenon.”, Pauline Hanson was the conservative politician who got elected to the Australian Parliament in 1996, openly speaking of the “swamping” of Australia by people from Asia and the consequent unemployment of “Aussie battlers”.

Racism is a simmering phenomenon not just in Australia, but also in other countries like the US and the UK which are championing globalisation. For them, globalization means the free mobility of capital to usurp the land and livelihood of people of developing countries; it has never meant the free movement of labour to their countries. Predictably, in the wake of the current economic recession spawned by their disastrous policies, we are seeing a renewed offensive of racism against migrant workers from the third world in these countries – from attacks on Sikh cab drivers and retrenchment of Asian teachers in the US, to Gordon Brown’s call for “British jobs for British people”, the drum of racism is clearly being beaten by the ruling class to divert and mislead the anxiety of the working class in the face of recession.

As we protest against the attacks on Indians in Australia, we must also, however, remind ourselves of India’s own homespun variant of ‘anti-migrant’ chauvinism – such as the violence unleashed by MNS and Shiv Sena against North Indian migrants in Mumbai.

It is high time that the people of the third world and the working class all over the world speak out against the present spate of racist assaults and the politics of hate and chauvinism in which the promoters of recession-hit globalisation are seeking a convenient refuge.

AISA Held Protest, Burns Effigy of Racist Australian Government

Against Continuing Racist Assault on Indian Students in Australia!

AISA held a protest demonstration on Parliament Street in New Delhi condemning the continuing racial assaults on Indians in Australia. Young students like Shravan Kumar from Andhra Pradesh, Baljinder Singh from Punjab and Sourabh Sharma are victims of such attacks in last month itself.

AISA appealed to the student community to extend support and solidarity to the students and workers in Australia who are bearing the brunt of racist attack and demanded that both the Indian and Australian governments act decisively to book the culprits and guarantee security to the Indian students and workers.

P.S.

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