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India

Statement of Radical Socialist on the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA), the Proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Ongoing Protests Against Them

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The Radical Socialist Group (RS) salutes the students up and down the country that have been the real spark that has ignited this popular agitation against the iniquitous CAA [Citizenship Amendment Act] and the proposed all-India NRC [National Register of Citizenship] that is already being prepared. [1]

This agitation really took off when peaceful protestors against these two measures and about other intra-university concerns in Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) University and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) were singled out for particularly harsh physical punishment and brutality by the police. Their use of lathis, gas grenades, tear gas, even live ammunition within as well as outside the university campuses caused a couple of hundred or more injuries among students and civilians. The brutality of this assault on these students is not an accident since they are both Muslim minority educational institutions having a higher than average proportion of Muslims students even as the majority of students, faculty and employees are not. Clearly, the Central government in Delhi and the Yogi Adityanath government in UP deliberately gave a long rope to the police for they would not otherwise have dared to behave in this way.

In localities where a significant proportion of Muslims live, there is growing recognition that these measures are seeking to punish Muslims in particular; hence other marches and demonstrations which have led to confrontations with the police. UP in fact has been turned into a war zone with the police firing and killing with intent against residents in predominantly Muslim localities. For the first time since Emergency Section 144 preventing public assembly of more than five people has been imposed on the whole state – a sign of the viciousness and ruthlessness of this Hindutva-wadi government! Nevertheless huge assemblies have still taken place in Bareilly and Kanpur deserving our admiration for the courage and persistence of the participants, Muslims and Non-Muslims alike even as the former have had to bear the brunt of these attacks.

To be sure there are other protestors. A huge number of non-Muslim students were involved in these demonstrations and protests throughout the country as also a wide cross-section of ordinary citizens from various walks of life. The push given by the students has been caught up by masses all over India. By Christmas, 2019, about 12 to 13 million people have marched across India. In Assam and some states in the northeast, the motivations of most protestors reflected more specific sentiments of regional rather than religious exclusion, i.e., concerns about non-Assamese and non-indigenous peoples whether from other parts of India (many) or from Bangladesh (much fewer) changing local demographic patterns. Such sentiments are to be seen in the context of violation in Assam Accord and make it very difficult for the BJP, the Sangh Parivar and their in-house elite trumpeters to champion their cause. Of course many parties opposed for their own reasons to the BJP have jumped into the fray. But because they are not the initiators nor the dominant presence in these protests, the public credibility of this movement has been higher and public support and sympathy that much greater.

The struggle has led to fissures opening up in the bloc the BJP sought to cement. At the same time, it has shown why inadequate attention to specific oppressions can lead to sections of the oppressed being co-opted by the Sangh. Thus, on one hand, the NRC in Assam having already declared over 2000 transgenders as non-citizens, members of the transgender community were seen in some places as significant visible protestors. On the other hand, however, a much larger community, the Matuas of (mainly) West Bengal, who are mostly Namasudras (Dalits) forced out from East Pakistan/Bangladesh, have felt aggrieved. Many of them have been deprived of citizenship due to the 2003 amendment. As a result, they are a group who are being targeted by the BJP through the CAA. While the left, including RS and its predecessors, have supported the right of this community, the fact that the BJP is in power, as well as its ability to fan hatred of the Muslims among sections of the Dalits, have meant that they are turning to the Sangh and its politics. Without diluting our hostility to the CAA, we stress that there is a need to ensure the

restoration of the rights of this community, which were clipped in 2003.

There are three main reasons why students have come out in this way. First, to show solidarity with fellow students and their rights within and outside university campuses to exercise freedom of speech, assembly and protest without having to face such brutal police assaults resulting in hundreds injured and even a few deaths. Second, what is very welcome is the growing recognition that this attack on secularism automatically means an assault on the principles and practices of democracy itself. Third, this government since 2014 has systematically sought to severely weaken the independence of thought and behaviour of students and teachers by pursuing policies of (i) privatization hurting the access of poor and not-so-poor students, especially but not only among the lower castes, to cheap and decent education at the tertiary level; (ii) communalization of syllabi and in faculty selection as well as in the appointments of of VCs and senior administrative staff; (iii) centralization to weaken the control and influence of non-BJP ruled state governments since most educational institutions come under their authority.

So much has already been written (and very widely) about the contradictions and iniquities of the CAA and of what an all-India NRC would do. There is little point therefore in repeating what has been said. This RS statement will speak about what needs to be said but has hardly been highlighted. Time and again, left and progressive forces have underestimated if not the determination, then the degree of longer term planning behind some of the key policy manoeuvres of this Hindutva government.

Take the CAB, now an Act. It was brought into the public discourse in 2016 and introduced into Parliament only after 2019 when the BJP was confident of it passing both houses. But in 2018 the RBI passes a notification allowing non-Muslim minorities from exactly the same three countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh to buy immovable property in India provided they had a long term visa. Furthermore, they could open non-resident bank accounts to stash their earnings in India. To call this geographical parallel a coincidence would stretch even the most credulous of imaginations.

The CAA in itself does not directly affect Indian Muslim citizens but of course we know it is the necessary prelude to the NRC which is aimed at domestically resident Muslims not just in Assam but throughout the country once the NRC goes national. Insofar as current events have pushed the SAD and BJD which supported the CAA to oppose the NRC extension, expect the BJP to now use stick and carrot to bring them in line. But the CAA on its own sends a very important message---a strong one to Hindus in the three named countries; a significant message also to Hindus elsewhere in South Asia and the world. It is the first time legislative flesh has been given to a political-symbolic statement that has regularly been repeated from the time of Savarkar and Golwalkar to Mohan Bhagwat today, namely that India is the natural home of Hindus and thus vice versa, Hindus are the 'true' people of India. Hindus in the three neighbouring Muslim majority states are being given an invitation to consider coming in thereby increasing the Hindu population. Other Hindus from Sri Lanka and elsewhere can also become naturalised Indian citizens, albeit for the time being, more slowly. This is the initial step in a longer term process of partially emulating Israel's 'right of return' for Jews, here for Hindus. And like Israel, Hindutva aims to forge a global loyalty among a diaspora of Indians of Hindu descent and 'blood' only. That the CAA and NRC can also promote conversions by Muslims and others to Hinduism has not escaped the minds of Sangh leaders.

As for the NRC, it has not one but two strategic aims. First, to terrorise and inferiorise Muslims by placing as many as possible in various detention camps and to more generally deprive them and others caught in the net such as non-Muslim political 'troublemakers' and many among the poor and lower castes (who can be discarded) of numerous rights including to vote, own land, having job permanency or creating other restrictions to make livelihood insecure and inadequate. In 1935 Hitler took away citizenship from Jews, Gypsies and others not 'German by Aryan descent'. Over the next few years, more laws were put in place to restrict movement, job opportunities, marriages with Germans, and so on till finally, in war-time, these stateless non-citizen Jews were put in concentration camps. Here, the journey time between Muslims and others made non-citizens, and placement in detention camps, will be much quicker.

The second goal encompasses the whole population. Census taking involves enumeration of self-declared responses to a set of questions. The proposed NRC will require much more detailed responses to many more intrusive questions from all households and their members so as to build up the most comprehensive collection of personal data. In effect this is crucial to creating a new and very powerful surveillance state that can carry out micro-level monitoring to better deal with actual and potential opponents in civil society. If this Orwellian vision seems far-fetched one needs only look at what has already been going on since 2014. Look at the efforts to link Aadhar to bank accounts, mobiles and to as much as possible of everyday activity. This has partially been restrained by the courts when it made personal privacy a fundamental right. But the effort to undermine this by creating exceptions in the name of national security and similarly claimed urgencies is an ongoing one. In the next Parliament session, a personal Data Protection Bill will be brought in which has been reworked to maximise exceptions thereby allowing various wings of the government to spy on targeted individuals and groups. This Bill has been sent to a parliamentary committee where the chair and majority membership are either BJP MPs or sympathisers from allied parties, so that the final product will be what this government wants. Given that the NDA holds a majority it will become an Act. As it is, the court of last appeal against violations of privacy will be the Data Protection Authority whose members will not be independent of the government but appointed by it.

Look too at the current efforts to erode RTI's functioning. Here the court of final appeal is supposed to be the Information Commissioners at the level of states and the Centre. They are supposed to help applicants when government departments unjustifiably delay their responses or simply evade matters altogether or give information not asked for or justify evasions on grounds not permitted by the terms of the RTI Act. Not only has the government deliberately not filled in many vacancies among these Commissioners but it has now eroded their independence by giving itself the power to decide the salaries and tenures of the Commissioners.

Finally, look at the huge hate-and-fake messages manufactured on social media by the Sangh Parivar's army of trolls. And if this social media can also bypass the largely suborned print and electronic media to also serve the mobilising interests and information spreading of progressive forces, as has been the case in the help provided in mobilising these latest protests against the CAA and NRC, there is the government's capacity to haul up internet providers and shut them down. In 2018 Over 70 percent of all internet shutdowns in the world among democracies was carried out by the Indian government which through its continuing internet lockdown in Kashmir Valley holds the world record for such continuity of internet blackout. After the latest protests began the government has again resorted to shutting down internet in select areas and in UP on a much wider and prolonged basis.

The RS applauds the remarkable struggle of the students and ordinary citizens across religious divides to overturn the CAA and prevent the NRC from taking place. Given the recent history of how the Supreme Court (SC) has behaved one cannot rely on it to strike down this Act or rule against the NRC.

The RS commits itself to the long term struggle against this fascistic force. The RS seeks to work with all those who have an uncompromising and principled opposition against Hindutva and its politics, economics and ideology.

December 25, 2019

Source [Radical Socialist](#).

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[1] See also *Radical Socialist* "[A Critique of the Central Government Responses to FAQs on the CAA](#)".