

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# Fight for a socialist future

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## INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE INDIA

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

**A Better Life For All**

Quality education, health care, sanitation, and the basic necessities of life are rights, not privileges. These must be provided for all, free of cost. We demand an expansive social safety net that can provide for the immediate needs of all, including quality public education and adequate pensions for all, tied to the cost of living. We stand against the privatization of education, healthcare, the rail system, electricity and other services.

**No More Evictions/No More Demolitions!**

No one should become homeless because of poverty, discrimination or eminent domain. In this same vein, we also condemn the use of eviction and demolition to wage a communal crusade against minority groups. Massive public investment in affordable housing is desperately needed, which will create well-paying jobs and green, climate change-resistant infrastructure.

**Legalize and Legitimize Contract Labor**

Indian workers in the informal sector lack legal protections and benefits granted to those in unions. We demand an end to the exploitation and casualization of these workers and the guarantee of safe working conditions, a liveable minimum wage, and benefits, and the protection of a contract. The right to form a union must be guaranteed to all. We support the demand for a minimum wage of 31,500 rupees per month.

**Land reform**

We need radical and democratic land reforms to break the grip of big landlords, food and agribusiness. We say no to liberalization and market “reforms”, and demand cheap credits for farmers. We want to bring the big banks under the control of the people through a democratically controlled nationalized banking sector. This should be run by workers and the community, including representatives of the farmers. Through voluntary cooperation of farmers we can increase productivity on a planned basis. Respect the hardworking farmers that feed India!

**Against Communalism, Islamophobia, and Caste Oppression**

We demand recognition of the massive diversity of Indian society and stand for equal rights for its myriad of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. We stand against Hindutva, the dangerous rise in Islamophobia and all forms of communal chauvinism. The right to self-determination is also a basic democratic right that must be fought for. We need an active struggle for the abolition of caste, and against all caste oppression. We also condemn discrimination based on religion, skin color, or communal background. Struggle in all fields of life must be taken to actively break caste and communal oppression.

**Against Oppression of Women And LGBT+**

All people have the right to do with their body what they wish, from clothing choices to healthcare. No one should be unsafe in public or become homeless because of their sex, sexuality, or gender identity. We demand legal recognition of LGBT+ marital rights, gender-affirming healthcare, free and safe abortion and contraception for all. The right to privacy is fundamental to the realization of these rights and must be protected. The capitalist brand of feminism aims to dismiss the issues of working class and caste-oppressed women through the exclusive lens of the ruling class. We stand for a socialist feminist movement that unites all working class people against gender violence, abuse and harassment.



# INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE INDIA

## WHAT WE STAND FOR



### Environmental Justice

We must stop the destruction of human life on this planet with a transition to a green economy under the control of workers and poor farmers! Through bringing the energy sector under worker control, we can replace the fossil fuels destroying our planet with renewable resources. We demand free and decent public transport controlled by the workers and the community. Only through a socialist planned economy can we do all of this while providing fair paying jobs and training for all those involved, and without displacing or endangering the local residents and indigenous people who have tended the land for millennia.

### For a Fighting Trade Union Movement!

Union strategy must be based around organizing the totality of workers in their sectors. Rank-and-file members must participate in the decision making process and the larger political arena, and take an initiative to control the union from below, not from the top down. The unions must act in solidarity with the working class as a whole and the oppressed.

### Workers Need A Political Voice

Massive struggles have broken out by students, farmers, and other underrepresented groups in Indian society which have demonstrated their willingness and ability to engage in acts of resistance to oppression. These struggles need to transcend isolated incidents and manifest themselves as definite political entities. Workers must stand in solidarity with the oppressed and powerless and use their greatest weapon—the strike, to bring about social change and resistance to the encroachment of the right wing. The right to vote safely and anonymously must be guaranteed to all, and we demand increased transparency to prevent voter fraud. Political representatives of the working class and oppressed must be held accountable for their choices, subject to recall, and earn the same wages as the average worker.

### Against Militarization

We oppose nuclear weapons and the ongoing new arms race in the region. Stop the military build-up along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and pull India out of the Quad. Slash military spending — for defense production to be put under democratic and public control, and to re-prioritize public spending and production into socially useful sectors. The “Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act”, which provides impunity and a license to kill for armed forces, must be scrapped. Demilitarize the Jammu-Kashmir Valley — disband the “Village Defence Guards” and all other forms of state-sponsored militias. Only the united struggle and self-defense action of working people across communal lines can win against war, terror and occupation. Stop jingoism against China and Pakistan — for fraternal relations between the working class and the poor of all countries, and a common struggle against their capitalist exploiters and ruling classes.

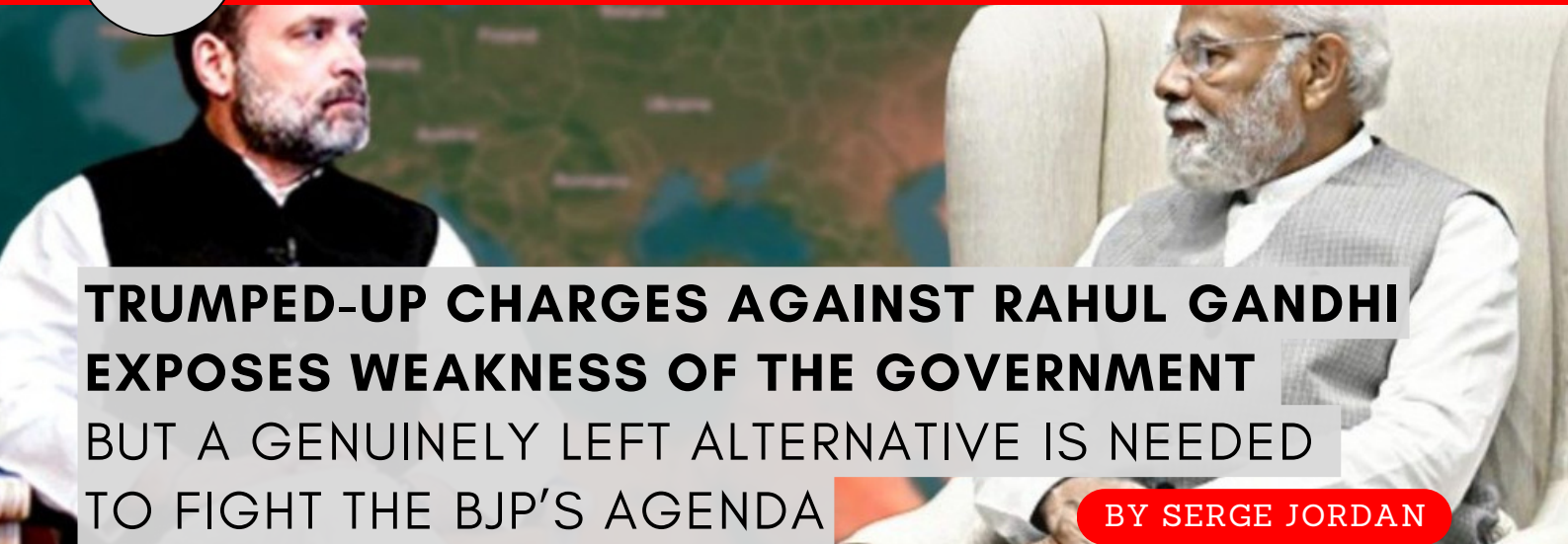
### For Socialism!

All of these struggles we face are not isolated issues we can tackle in a vacuum, but rather many threads of the same oppressive tapestry of capitalism. As part of an organization with branches in nearly 40 countries, International Socialist Alternative stands for true democratic and international socialism. We must unite working and oppressed people all around the world in the struggle for a permanent revolution, to bring an end to capitalism and build a new socialist future in India, the subcontinent, and the whole world. When we stand together, we can win!



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## TRUMPED-UP CHARGES AGAINST RAHUL GANDHI EXPOSES WEAKNESS OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT A GENUINELY LEFT ALTERNATIVE IS NEEDED TO FIGHT THE BJP'S AGENDA

BY SERGE JORDAN

**On March 23, Congress Party's most prominent leader Rahul Gandhi was disqualified as a Lok Sabha MP less than 24 hours after he was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison on the basis of a criminal defamation case dating from 2019.**

An MP can be disqualified if sentenced to at least 2 years of imprisonment. However, the disqualification is supposed to take effect only “after three months have elapsed” from the date of conviction if an appeal has not been registered by then before a higher court. The speed with which Gandhi was expelled from Parliament and his seat declared vacant, despite his legal right to challenge the conviction, underscores the political motivations behind it — so does the fact that the case was suddenly revived at the request of the plaintiff (Purnesh Modi, a BJP MLA) at the peak of a weeks-long campaign by the ruling party to try and silence Gandhi (including by repeatedly switching off his microphone in the Lok Sabha and by expunging parts of his speeches from the parliamentary records). Furthermore, the case was filed in Gujarat, a state ruled by the BJP for 27 years, instead of Karnataka, where he made the arguably “defamatory” remark.

### Truncated charges

As for the charges themselves, they are ludicrous. During a speech the Congress leader gave on April 13, 2019 in an electoral rally in Kolar, Karnataka, he asked: “Why do all these thieves have Modi, Modi, Modi as a common surname?” in reference to the Prime Minister and to two corrupt fugitive businessmen, Nirav and Lalit Modi. As a result, Purnesh Modi lodged a criminal complaint against Rahul Gandhi accusing him of “defaming the entire Modi community”. The very concept of a “Modi community” is entirely fabricated, as people with that surname live across various parts of India and are from various castes and religious faiths.

If defeated in appeal, Gandhi would not have the right to stand in the next general election in 2024. His condemnation is thus a transparent attempt to politically silence him, at a time he was raising valid and embarrassing questions about the BJP government and Modi's incestuous connections to

Gautam Adani and the latter's business empire — which the recent revelations from US short-seller Hindenburg Research have brought into tighter public scrutiny. The Congress is among a group of opposition parties that have sought a joint parliamentary committee investigation into this issue. This has touched a raw nerve for Modi, whose whole political career is closely tied up to the rise of the Gujarat billionaire, accused by the US firm report of having pulled the “largest con in corporate history”.

However, this attack has to do with far more than Rahul Gandhi and his party. It fits into a wider and escalating pattern of repressive methods aimed at voices critical of the BJP's rule, often branded as “anti-national”. It is with a similar stroke that the government banned the BBC documentary exposing Modi's role in the Gujarat communal massacre from being shown in India; along with the Hindenburg report, it was presented as an attack on India by hostile foreign powers. In March, BJP representatives had also accused Gandhi of calling upon the US and Europe to “interfere in the internal affairs of India” during a visit he made to London — a somewhat ironic line of arguments given that the criminal defamation law used to sentence him is a relic from British colonial rule.

### Independent judiciary?

Since then, a mantra from the ruling party to stand over this case has been to uphold the integrity of the judiciary, and to stress that “In a democracy, nobody is above the law.” But is that really so?

On January 24 this year, a local court in Gujarat acquitted all the accused in a communal massacre perpetrated by Hindutva men against 17 Muslims in Delol village in February 2002, for “lack of evidence” (despite 190 witness testimonies). On March 2, three of the four men accused of the brutal gang rape, torture and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in 2020 in Hathras district, Uttar Pradesh, were acquitted by a local court. On April 1, all the 39 accused of another communal carnage committed in May 1987 against 72 Muslims in Malyana, Uttar Pradesh, by troops from the Provincial Armed Constabulary and armed locals, were acquitted by a local court in the now BJP-ruled State.

The double standards of the Indian judicial system, delivering a maximum sentence for a mere quip while setting free rapists and communal butchers, is on full display. Those who have expelled Gandhi for supposed defamation are themselves longtime fervent adepts of outright abusive, inflammatory and communalist rhetoric, from glorifying rape to excusing Islamophobic violence and more. During the same 2019 election campaign, current Home Affairs Minister Amit Shah compared Muslim migrants from Bangladesh to “termites” and promised to throw them into the Bay of Bengal, but was of course never charged for saying so.

### **Defend freedom of speech — but let’s not stop there**

ISA condemns the political persecution of Rahul Gandhi, but also of the many activists, journalists, trade unionists, protesters and others whose basic democratic rights and freedom of expression are being trampled upon every day by this increasingly authoritarian government.

However, an effective struggle against the latter needs to reckon with the fact that while levying legitimate accusations at Modi’s regime, Gandhi’s Congress Party does not represent a genuine alternative for the working and oppressed people of India. The Congress’s own political record gives a reserve of ammunition for the BJP to counter-attack and play the moral high ground, which the ruling party has obviously not hesitated to use. After all, Adani did not only benefit from the BJP’s economic policies but was already an established capitalist magnate before, thanks in part to favorable business deals undertaken during the Congress-led UPA rule.

Shashi Tharoor, a Congress MP from Kerala, recently commented: “To my mind the fact that Mr Adani or any other businessmen benefits from government’s decisions is fine, because we are the party of liberalization which stood for the opening up of the economy”.

**The struggle against this government’s anti-democratic rampage and the struggle against the capitalist system of exploitation are two faces of the same medal.**

Similarly, BJP leaders are quick to remind people of the Emergency period under Indira Gandhi whenever the Congress calls out the threat to democracy represented by the BJP and the RSS.

The struggle against this government’s anti-democratic rampage and the struggle against the capitalist system of exploitation are two faces of the same medal. As long as capitalism exists, regardless of which party holds power at the center, super rich corporate gangsters a la Adani, who pillage the country’s economy for their own benefits while hundreds of millions languish in poverty, will thrive and will need the brutal arm of the state and of its appendages to perpetuate their rule and keep the majority of the population in check. That is why the workers, poor peasants and oppressed people of India need not only to defeat the BJP regime, but also build their own socialist alternative to defeat the rotten system that stands behind it.

## **KALAKSHETRA SEXUAL HARASSMENT NOTHING NEW IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD**

BY AKIBA

**In a whirlwind week for the prestigious classical academy, accusations of sexual harassment against Kalakshetra faculty in Chennai quickly developed into a massive scandal involving open student protests, a shabby and ham-fisted attempt at a cover-up, and an investigation by the state government leading to an FRI against and arrest of faculty member Hari Padman. This case has shaken to its foundations one of the core institutions of the Brahmin and Hindu upper classes in South India, and yet demonstrates a truth innately known to students across communal and caste barriers: that the rich and powerful will do all they can to protect their own.**

### **“We Have Investigated Ourselves And Cleared Us Of All Wrongdoing”**

The protests in March and April were the beginning of public attention, yet the history of sexual harassment goes back years. The case of Meera Krishna, a Bharatnatyam student who withdrew in 2019, and Student X, 2012-2018, demonstrates this.

Both allege that Padman verbally assaulted them repeatedly both in public and private as well as propositioning them, while complaints to director Revathi Ramachandran (also the head of the Internal Committee) fell on deaf ears. Ramachandran in her attempt to cover up the abuses went so far as publicly lining up the students and demanding they publicly expose themselves as victims, threatening them with legal action, and giving Padman an award. It deserves mention that he is only one of four teachers in the school who have been accused.

Such coverups are well familiar to young women in academia; behind recent high-profile cases of sexual abuse at Banaras Hindu University and Presidency University Kolkata, lies a festering cesspool of toxic academic culture. Any woman who has spent significant

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time in academia has a personal story to tell either of their experience or that of a friend. Coverups work on a system of cronyism: administration and faculty are often hired out of one academic or caste community, having ties to police and local government as well. A woman who approaches police having been sexually harassed or assaulted will face an uphill struggle as the police consider the suppression of these cases to be their job rather than resolution. Even attempting to report such a case can have negative consequences when confidentiality is broken between the victim and police. Institutions in the drive to protect their own name will do everything they can to destroy the accuser—threats of retaliation, public humiliation, legal maneuvering and even using the police as their private goons to harass and intimidate women. It should be noted that this happens to teachers just as well as students.

So-called “independent investigators” are often called in as a last resort to produce a loaded verdict in favor of the institution and its guilty associate. Whether personal friends or paid actors, more often than not they are relied upon to find the answer that the institution is looking for. “Fact-finding committees”, even when staffed mostly with honest and well-meaning members, are often planted with saboteurs who interfere with investigation and water down policy recommendations to decrease future scandals. Furthermore, their meagre recommendations frequently fail to be implemented by schools which have neither the desire nor the courage to see them through.

### **Treating The Symptoms, Not Curing The Disease**

An education institution which has built itself on the styling of an elite and upper-class haven is incapable of truly reforming. To implement effective change would amount to an admission that the system was flawed from the very beginning, or even more so, designed to uphold the oppression and exploitation of women. The Brahmin community cannot face up to its own participation in these crimes which it considers to be the realm of the “inferior” castes. Rather it closes ranks and does the bare minimum under pressure to alleviate and divert attention. Though Hari Padman and the other professors have been sacked, in all likelihood they will not face any real consequences. Serial offenders are simply shuffled from place to place, opening one door when another closes. Their upper class and upper caste cronies will always provide them with an out which allows them to retain their lifestyle complete with a new set of victims. Such is part of an unwritten code of the upper classes who understand the prime directive is to preserve the supremacy of their own community.

In terms of the victims of sexual harassment, “soft retaliation” or “soft blacklisting” is the name of the game. While the days of openly slut-shaming and otherwise denouncing victims openly using sexist, communalist and casteist slurs is coming to a close, the practice of punishing victims through isolation is in full swing. Whether driven by whisper campaigns or simply a matter of public knowledge, students and staff who fight against victimization are seen as problematic and controversial. Even institutions which take a neutral stance or consider themselves uninvolved prefer to provide opportunities to uncontroversial candidates and victims who speak out may find that for mysterious reasons, their funding dries up, opportunities are given to less qualified candidates, and potential collaborators or supervisors are oddly cold and distant. In its genteel and aloof manner, academia slowly smothers anyone who dares break the silence.

### **It Will Take A Movement To Win**

In spite of all of these efforts to silence young women, a robust protest movement is in full swing. The Indian people are renowned worldwide for our willingness to fight back in spite of the odds, and this is just one of many examples. Protests raise awareness and shape public opinion as well as show to those in power that we will not tolerate abuse. They provide an arena where victims can share in collective experience and feel empowered to shape their own destiny. And real victories have been won when sustained pressure is applied to the right places. Public fervor and mass action are the fuel that drives political change. Yet in this same manner, the spontaneous combustion of fuel can only have limited and localized effects. A political engine must take shape in order to drive a movement forward and move it beyond its limited scope into the wider world. Without building political power, we will only be able to win the limited concessions that the ruling class is willing to give us in order to shut us up. Only through sustained and consistent organized activity can women build the necessary power to realize real demands. We are not satisfied with scraps from the table.

Ending sexual harassment and abuse in schools is about more than just sacking teachers. Making the national sex offender registry public and barring offenders from educational work can help prevent sexual predators from becoming teachers. Effective security measures and even things as simple as street lights can cut crime. A committee of students and teachers, supported by a robust students union, and equipped with the power to take disciplinary action against offenders would do more than help students come forward and provide a real deterrent to sexual assault on campus. It also lays the foundation for further victories down the road by creating a political organization which exists to empower female students. In the long term, cultural and economic issues must be addressed. In the vast majority of rape cases, the offender is someone who is personally known to the victim. We must end the rape culture and the economic disempowerment of women which prevents victims from coming forward and from being heard when they do come forward.

All around the world, from America to Iran to South Africa and beyond, women are rising up and taking charge. In Ireland, ISA and ROSA comrades succeeded in overturning an abortion ban which was literally written into the constitution, where in Brazil, our comrades are still fighting for the expansion of protections against femicide, and in the United States, our socialist city council member Kshama Sawant in Seattle was part of the movement to successfully make Seattle the first sanctuary city for the right to have an abortion in the way of the historic overturning of abortion rights by the Trump-appointed Supreme Court. These victories do not come from spontaneous local outcry, but rather from sustained political action as part of a broader socialist feminist movement. And what the movement for women has done in other countries, we can do here.

### **Join The Fight!**

International Socialist Alternative (ISA) and Campaign ROSA are active all around the world. Our 2023 international conference in Vienna in March drew members from 20 countries, as well as many more online guests from across the globe. We are building our forces here in India, where nearly one-fifth of all women live on Earth. The need for international solidarity is mutual and reciprocal. If you are ready to fight back, contact us today about joining. We have nothing to lose, and a world to win!



## KARNATAKA ELECTIONS 2023

BY NAWAZ

### Understanding The Political Origins

Karnataka was created in 1956 by merging all Kannada speaking regions. Because these regions were overlapping between other regions, even today these differences are visible ideologically. There is large scale wealth concentration in the southern part of the state while the northern half is relatively agrarian and poor. This is mainly because the successive governments have focused on the southern region. This also creates irregular voting patterns across the states which often makes it difficult to predict public opinion. The proximity of neighboring states is a major influence on the voting patterns of border districts.

From the time of India's independence up until the 90's Karnataka was always counted on as an absolute bastion of the Congress party. Many first time politicians would contest parliamentary elections from Karnataka as a safe zone seats where newcomers could rely solely on the name of Congress. Leaders like Devraj Urs were staunch Gandhi family loyalists and held considerable influence in parliamentary politics. Whenever Congress has faced crisis at national level it has come down to Karnataka to revive momentum in the name of Gandhi family. For example, when Indira Gandhi faced a wipe out at national election due to her emergency era loss of face, she got her second chance from Karnataka's Chikamangaluru constituency to rebuild her image at national level, helping her to win a landslide in 1980 general election.

### Janata Party And The Birth Of The Third Front

In its entirety of unchallenged power in Congress's glory days, the most formidable challenge came from the Janata party which was an umbrella party formed in the 70's to oppose Indira Gandhi during the Emergency Era. The Karnataka faction of the Janata party, due to ideological differences with the central Janata Party leadership, became closer to the BJP. Other factions like the JD(S) claiming to be secular broke away in the leadership of H.D Devegowda and formed its own party called the Janata Dal Secular or the JS(S).

The JDS has a short lived unexpected national power when in a spectacular turn of events in 1995 when Delhi had a hung parliament. H.D Devegowda became Prime Minister albeit for 13 days.

JDS commands a strong vote base in the Old Mysore state region of Karnataka and among the farmers and Vokkaliga community. They have had a 20% vote share in every election since 2001.

They usually form coalitions with either BJP or Congress depending on whoever emerges as single largest part in state elections and always acts as king maker with no ideological loyalty.

Currently Devegowda's son Kumarswamy runs the party in his name which has led to accusations of nepotism. He was the Chief Minister of Karnataka after the last election. The JDS formed a coalition government with the Congress after the previous election when no party managed to gain enough seats in the assembly to form a government on their own. However the government fell midway when both the Congress and JDS had turn coats who left the party to join the BJP who formed the current incumbent government with their help.

### BJP Breaks Into The Scene

The entry of BJP into Karnataka was Congress's own miscalculation. Rajiv Gandhi who is often known for his bullet in his own foot politics is at fault. In 1989 Congress won 178/224 seats in state elections even when party was facing a down fall at national level. This was largely due to the popularity of the Lingayat leader Veerendra Patil. In 1989 Karnataka faced riots. Rajiv Gandhi in order to save face made Patil the scapegoat for the larger failures of government and without warning dismissed him from his position. The Lingayat community who saw this as an insult, en-masse shifted to the BJP. The Lingayat community form a strong base of the Karnataka caste equation and fit perfectly into BJP narrative. They became the core vote bank for the BJP to hold power within Karnataka.

The BJP in Karnataka was largely build behind one big Lingayat leader Yediyurappa. He held Chief Minister (CM) post several times but never served for a full term. BJP has never crossed the majority mark in Karnataka and always relied on support from JDS to form governments, except the previous time after the political crisis in the state.

In 2012 when Yediyurappa was the CM he faced corruption charges and was pushed out by the BJP. Insulted, he formed his own short lived regional party. This time feeling insulted by BJP the Lingayat community punished by voting against the BJP in 2013. The BJP faced a humiliating wipe out and fell down to 40 seats.

When Modi came to power in 2014 he convinced Yediyurappa to return but he was a loose cannon for the BJP high command to control. He was again pushed out by the BJP high command in the recent years and replaced by another leader and current CM Bommai who is the son of former Karnataka CM S. R Bommai. While BJP accuses the other party of nepotism it itself doesn't refrain from it in any manner.

The Lingayat community forms a strong vote base for the BJP, and in order to mobilize them, the BJP attempted move the public employment reservation away from the Muslims and give it to the Lingayat community. However due to the complexity of caste equations in Karnataka and the caste demographics being irregularly spread across the districts, the move backfired. Instead of angering Muslims, the move ended up angering the Tribal community of the state who saw their reservation equations affected.

### What Is At Stake?

**BJP:** Karnataka is the only southern state where the BJP has chances to gain power. It also has 30 seats at stake for MPs which will affect 2024 national election. The next election after Karnataka is the neighbouring state of Telangana where BJP has high ambitions. It aims to build momentum there by winning Karnataka. Metropolitan cities form the cash cows for party funding from members due to the urban wealth, and Bangalore is the only metropolitan city of India which the BJP has chances of gaining.

The BJP is currently plagued by internal factionalism and many turncoats jumping ship to Congress. Many senior leaders, unhappy by not being allowed to contest elections, have also jumped ship to Congress. The BJP high command also favours candidates being more loyal towards them rather than their capabilities and ability to govern. The BJP faces a huge uphill task with high anti-incumbency and must put up its best foot forward if its aims to win Karnataka.

**Congress:** Similar to the BJP, Karnataka is also the only state where Congress also has chances of winning power. It has a very strong election machinery in the state but it too has its own factionalism problems, with old guard leader Sidaramiah and younger leader D.K Shivakumar both aspirants for CM post. But due to the anti-incumbency mood against BJP, Congress looks confident in its play. The Dalits and religious minorities form the Congress core vote base.

**JD(S):** It is a make or break election for the JDS. Kumaraswamy is the main hope for JDS to retain its 40 seat strong pocket in the Mysore region. The farmers and tribal community form JDS's core vote banks.

### Previous Election results (2018)

No party was able to cross the 112 seat majority mark. Despite BJP emerging as the single largest party, the JDS decided to form coalition government with Congress as it could command more leverage. This bore fruit and Kumaraswamy of JDS became CM but this government fell at less than half of its term because of turn coats joining the BJP, leading to the BJP forming the current incumbent government.

### Main Problems For Karnataka's People

Crippling inflation is the main issue. Basic commodities like gas for cooking and petrol have become unaffordable. Infrastructure which is the main campaign point of both BJP and Congress in previous election is suffering all round. Bangalore's Metro rail has faced several delays and caused massive traffic issues.

Communal tensions are on the rise and border district disputes with neighbouring state of Maharashtra has created further problems to the same.

All parties accuse each other for dynasty politics but in reality all the 3 parties have open nepotism where children of sitting MLA's are given first priorities in candidature allocation.

The masses have demonstrated their total frustration with the political opportunism, neglect and corruption of JD(S), BJP and Congress in the back-and-forth nature of the previous elections. The Left parties are close to non existent in the Karnataka political landscape leaving the Kannada working class and exposed in barren fashion. The working class desperately need a political alternative to coalesce around, one that will stand by them unflinchingly.

## TAMIL NADU: DMK ATTEMPTS TO GIVE US THE BUSINESS

BY ARIBA

In a shameful and undemocratic fashion the government of Tamil Nadu has passed, then almost immediately retracted, a bill granting big business a victory it has fought long and hard for—the power to impose a 12-hour work day. This policy has been part of the BJP's agenda for many years but the move by DMK comes as somewhat of a surprise to supporters who viewed the party as one of the few major opposition parties to Central's anti-worker agenda. While the DMK was defeated in this effort by massive popular resistance, it signals an intention to undercut the working class of Tamil Nadu in an attempt to appeal to big business.

When raising Amendment 65(A) to the 1948 Factories Act, Industries Minister Thangam Thennarasu and Labor Minister CV Ganesan explicitly referred to the allure of foreign investment and influence of “representations...from many industries and industry associations [received] by the State government”. This amounts to an open admission by the very officials whose job it is to advocate for workers that they have been successfully lobbied by private interests. Ganesan was so bold as to reassure the public that “factories seeking exemption should obtain the employees' consent to extend the working hours and this should not affect the employees' wellbeing”. This half-hearted excuse would not pass the scrutiny of a ten-year-old child. If the government itself is a frequent violator of democratic rights, how much less can we expect private corporations and foreign manufacturers, whose expressed loyalty is only to their

bottom line, to respect those same rights? This so-called consent of the workers is nothing more than an invitation to factory owners to use selective layoffs, misinformation, and intimidation to force the door open. This half-hearted excuse would not pass the scrutiny of a ten-year-old child. If the government itself is a frequent violator of democratic rights, how much less can we expect private corporations and foreign manufacturers, whose expressed loyalty is only to their bottom line, to respect those same rights? This so-called consent of the workers is nothing more than an invitation to factory owners to use selective layoffs, misinformation, and intimidation to force the door open.

The truth of the reality is this: for-profit corporations and other private actors offer huge amounts of cash on all sides to political parties that will carry out their bidding. The DMK, despite its perception as a progressive party, continues to sell out to big business as they did with the Ford workers in last year's strike.

The truth of the matter is that this policy is a race to the bottom with several other states in the union lining up to compete for the most pathetic and willing victim to capitalist exploitation. In 2020 the central government attempted to change the OSH code to allow for a 12 hour workday nationwide. Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh followed through in spring 2020. Karnataka passed its own 12 hour workday in February, where the first major



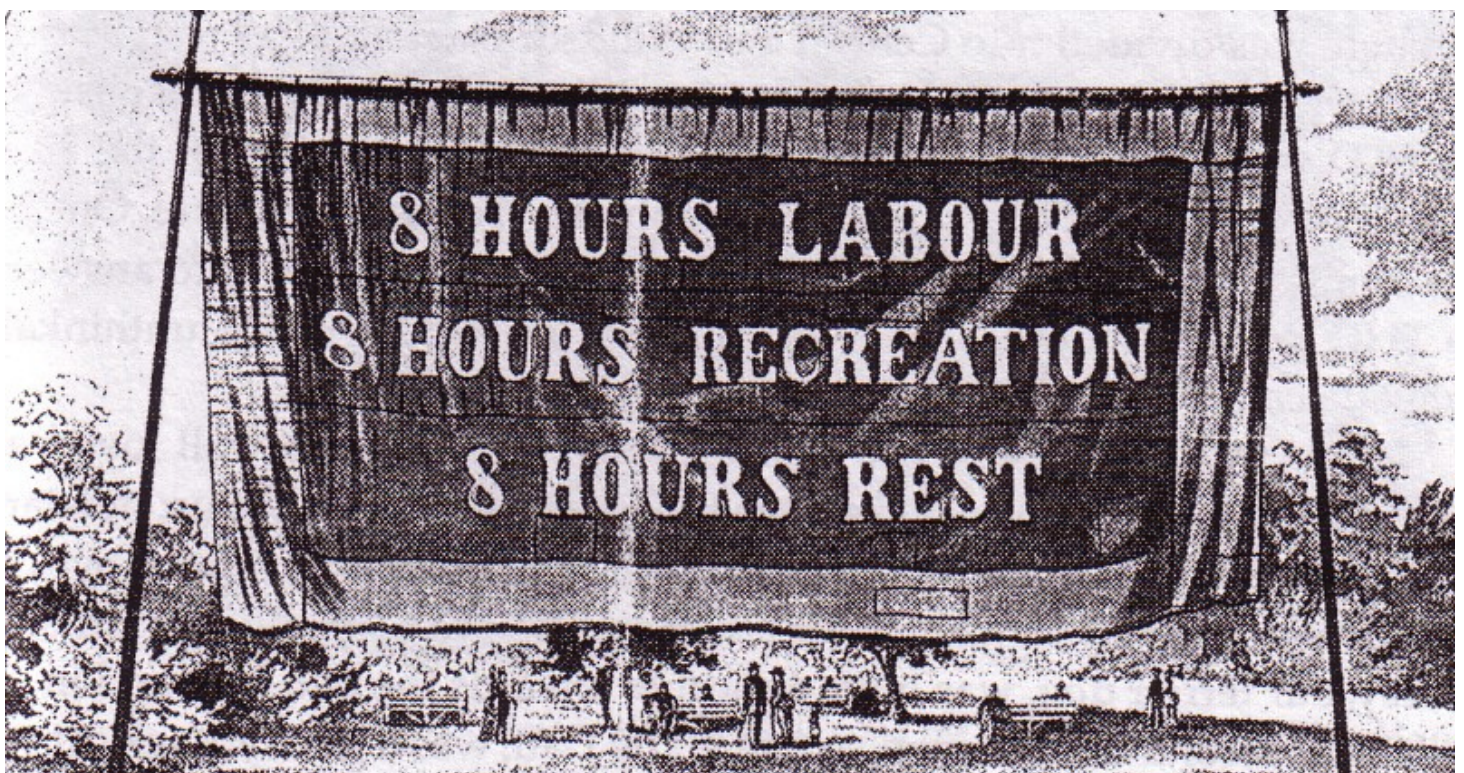
investor to step in to the region was Foxconn, the Apple manufacturing partner infamous for the suicide nets installed outside their factory windows. Surely not only textiles, electronics and software, but also the crematory industry will be singing the praises of CM Stalin very soon.

The Stalinist parties of CPI and CPI(M) have rightly raised an objection and staged a walkout, but to what end? While center-left parties like DMK, TMC and Congress actively collaborate with big business to undermine working-class power, the so-called communist parties are also guilty of this same opportunism, as with the Adani port in Thiruvananthapuram, and the infamous TATA Nano plant in Singur. These organizations vacillate between being allies and guides to the working class and using us simply as voter banks. The Indian working class is trapped in a viper pit of right wing bigots, center-left compradors, and pseudo-left opportunists. What we need is to create a movement that will educate, inspire, and organize the working class to actively fight for power. Workers must continue to fight against the encroachments by center-left opportunism and big business.

The capitalists say that it is necessary to have a 12-hour work day to maintain competitiveness, yet such a claim is obviously nonsensical. In India's dire economy, there is no lack of available workers to take up a relief shift. In truth, they are saving paises by turning their factories into sweatshops. The real motivation behind this change is to employ as few people as possible to do the maximum amount of work while subjecting them to wage theft, unsafe working conditions, and egregious safety violations. Companies like Foxconn are desperate to maintain their grip over factories which run like redlining engines, always at the brink of collapse or social explosion. In 2012, 150 workers threatened mass suicide at the Foxconn plant in Wuhan. Is this the kind of business the DMK wants to attract?

It is a clear fact that this kind of exploitation is unavoidable in a capitalist world. Capitalism needs to infinitely expand despite the finite resources of our planet. After the imperialists exhaust the resources of their own country, they turn to new markets outside their borders, yet find that while increasing their scale of production, they also decrease the rate of profit. As we can see now, international markets are flooded with inferior consumer products which are designed to break in order to be bought again, made by workers who can't afford to buy the products they make, and on whom the screws are constantly being turned in order to try and save the decreasing profitability of this doomed enterprise. The absurdity of this system is demonstrated in the fact that it is more profitable to build iPhones in India and send them to the United States while cheaper models are made in China and then sold in India rather than just maximizing domestic consumption.

There is another way. A planned economy directed by the workers and the communities they work in can deliver consumer goods to the actual communities they service. We can build factories with robust safety features, in which workers can work 6-hour shifts, 5 days per week and still make a living wage. We can build our industries around sensitivity to and respect for the natural environment and the local and indigenous people who are in today's world so often overlooked and exploited. Creating this future is not only possible, but completely necessary and it must start in our own neighborhoods and workplaces. Join us in denouncing egregious violations of workers rights and demanding fair working conditions! No to the 12 hour workday! No to Foxconn's sweatshop labor! Yes to worker power!





# AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIALISM AND A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

BY CHINMAY

**The world is at a crossroads. Rife with social turmoil, economic inequality, precarious employment, financial crises, violence and most importantly facing a looming environmental collapse, we can see by the rise of incidences of depressive and anxiety disorders the effect of the current state of the world on the people living in it. It is no surprise that many of today's youth feel either hopeless or apathetic when faced with these prospects. However it is equally evident that the current state of affairs are not solving any of the aforementioned problems and never will.**

So is there a way out? To paraphrase the German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, in order to prevent the collapse of human society into what would essentially be barbarism, we must transition it into a system that produces for human and environmental needs rather than profits and ensures the equitable and dignified distribution of resources among all of society rather than just certain privileged sections. What has been described here is the system of socialism.

The world we live in today is unequivocally capitalist, with an interconnected global market dominated by multinational corporations and mediated by capitalist governments of nation states. Capitalism has dominated global society for the better part of two centuries now, and although for much of the 20th century the bloc of countries led by the Soviet Union provided a counterbalance, the fall and dissolution of that bloc in 1989 has since seen capitalism once again become the dominant economic system in the world. Despite countries like China being formally communist, and led by a "Communist" Party, the economy is set up in a decidedly capitalist and authoritarian way, and China in particular plays a massive role in the world economy.

We mentioned the general problems that we face today after nearly two centuries of global capitalism, but what does living under this system mean in the day to day lives of ordinary people? Most ordinary people are workers in some way or another, and the workplace is the direct site of action for capitalism to affect us. We work a number of hours a day for an employer (a capitalist), usually in a place outside our homes (for which we need to commute for an amount of time merely to get to and from), and our labour contributes towards producing a product (or in technical terms, a "commodity"), which gets sold on the market by the employer for a profit. From these profits the employer portions out wages for us, which we then use to buy commodities - primarily food and other daily needs that ensure our survival i.e. our means of subsistence or "self-reproduction" but also, if we can afford them, any other items, luxuries even, that we may desire. And the cycle repeats for basically our entire lives.

If we then think about it, the wages handed out to the workers by the capitalists have to be less than the profits accumulated by the company, or else the company will suffer a loss, and eventually go under. One of the core tenets of capitalism is the principle of growth, hence a company has to keep making profits which it can use to reinvest in the company (or financial speculation) and produce commodities more efficiently i.e. increase its productivity, and so there is always a tension between the wages given out to the employees and the profits gained by a company. Karl Marx outlined this general principle in *Das Kapital* and his other works that workers, on average, do not get the full worth of their labour in their wages. The system is designed for this "surplus value" to be extracted from the workers and used to bolster the capitalists.

The workers, on the other hand, have to work for a wage as we described above, or else they will starve, because, crucially, they do not own the means of production from which they could create the commodities they need for their subsistence. This is the key dynamic of capitalism, and class society in general, where society is (broadly) divided between those who own the means of production and those who do not. All workers have is the capacity to work, which Marx calls "labour power" that they must "sell" to the capitalists for the price of their wage. (There do exist middle layers which consist of semi-autonomous tradesmen, small shopkeepers and street traders, etc. but these do not employ workers at the scale of the capitalists, and are themselves subject to the whims and fancies of the market in which they operate to survive in their trade.)

However, the workers do hold one trump card - they may be oppressed, but the system still runs on their labour. If we organise to withhold our labour as a class, the system can be brought to its knees. But even better still, if we go one step further and take control of the means of production (which we are in daily contact with), then we could re-organise society along drastically different lines. We will decide what gets produced, we will decide how much of it gets produced, and we will decide what to do with what gets produced.

This reorganisation of society will eventually lay the basis for a change in human attitudes as well, since the material basis for a lot of the divisions within society today will be taken away as the domination of the working class by the capitalist class is reversed. The capitalists that form the ruling class seek to divide the working class along various lines, be it religion, race, gender, or nationality. For example, while one's faith or religion plays a huge role in their personal life, often providing a sense of solace especially in situations of distress and suffering, it is thus also a useful tool in perpetuating the ruling class's hegemony. And religious institutions, acting as the authority of that faith, legitimise this hegemony of the ruling class and of the system. Besides, and as is clear in India's case, these institutions are used to foment unrest and hatred between religions, in an attempt to restrict working class unity and solidarity.

Gender oppression in the economic sense in the pay gap between genders and the difference in jobs carried out by women vs men, sexual and domestic violence and general misogyny are also amplified and reinforced under capitalism and is clearly a massive problem in Indian society. A similar phenomenon of capitalism using a pre-capitalist oppression to further its hegemony is that of caste in India. Most of the land-owning and capital-owning elites are Brahmins, and the oppression of Dalits and other oppressed castes is enshrined in the capitalist practices of India. Thus poor Dalits are oppressed directly by the ruling castes and any solidarity between poor Brahmins and poor Dalits who are oppressed as workers by the capitalists is also undercut by caste division.

All of these divisions are either reinforced materially (in the case of caste and gender), or brought about entirely due to capitalism (in the case of national conflicts) and hence any talk of resolving these problems of society cannot take place without workers' rule replacing the domination of capital. People suffering from each kind of oppression are found in the working class, with their one uniting factor being their domination by capital, and hence a societal upheaval that puts

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the working class in power will be the first and necessary step in eradicating these oppressions. In fact, no revolution will even be possible in the first place without a multi-gender, multiracial and international working class movement.

This will obviously not be an easy task as history has shown us. The ruling classes want to hold on to their position in society and have placed a number of safeguards in place to prevent a socialist revolution. In addition to the aforementioned divisions among the working class that it has fostered, the ruling class has an array of weapons in the form of the state apparatus that it can use to wield and maintain its power. It creates laws that limit worker rights and ensure these laws are enforced by the police. They use propaganda in all forms from school curricula to movies and news that promote capitalism and the ruling class's ideology. And above all they have access to all the wealth that they have accumulated from the working class's labour that they can use to bolster these state apparatuses. This is why, for example, military and police budgets are high and keep rising but wages stay low.

Hence, the major need of the hour for the working class is to get organised in a democratic mass movement under strong, unified leadership that has a clearly defined political program and strategy. We have the numbers and are the majority in society, what we lack is unity, organisation and program. Plenty of revolutionary movements in the past in India and abroad have petered out due to a lack of clarity in demands and tactics from the leadership. The ruling class prefers any such situation to devolve into a stalemate in order for the energy of the masses to dissipate and lose any momentum. Where protest movements have won victories, they have mostly been in the form of reforms and laws that serve as concessions from the ruling class to arrest the growth of the movement - these reforms can be then overturned at a later

point when it's more suitable to the ruling class. The point is to go beyond mere reforms and bring about a revolutionary change in society.

This leadership is provided by a revolutionary party of the working class. Its role is to educate, organise and mobilise the workers in a systematic, strategic and democratic manner to achieve their aims. The most successful example of this was the Bolshevik Party that led the Russian Revolution in 1917, bringing about the first successful socialist revolution and establishing the first workers state in the world, setting up workers councils (Soviets) to form the basis of the transition to socialism and creating a workers' army to defend the revolution. As workers across arbitrary national boundaries share a common bond as workers, the role of the revolutionary party is to link movements beyond nation states, in order to bring about an international revolution that results in a global socialist order. In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, subsequent revolutions in Europe, especially in Germany, could have brought about this cascade of change in society, but they unfortunately failed and the new Soviet state was left isolated. Any new movement needs to learn from the past in order to not repeat its mistakes.

As a global fighting organisation of workers, young people and all those oppressed by capitalism and imperialism, the International Socialist Alternative in India seeks to create just this leadership for working people in our country. Unlike the existing left parties here, the ISA is not stuck in the past clinging to the memories of Stalinist politics, nor are we content with merely being willing to reform a rotten capitalist system. Our aim is to organise the fight for a socialist society. As a democratic centralist organisation, we seek to develop a cadre of leaders that can carry the workers movement through this pivotal decade, not being controlled by a small top-down bureaucracy. Join us in the fight for a better world!

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This same approach was crucial in winning this week, with the movement having to overcome not only strenuous opposition from the Hindu right wing but also opposition of a different kind from Democratic politicians, who in various ways threatened to kill or undermine the legislation.

Our most high-profile opponent was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a far-right organization tied to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party. The VHP has been implicated, among other things, in the 2002 Gujarat massacre of Muslims. The right-wing Hindu American Foundation and the Coalition of Hindus of North America also set themselves against us.

Mainstream Democratic council members were overwhelmingly not on our side in this fight, and initially echoed some of the right wing's talking points—though ultimately all but one voted “yes” under pressure from our movement. But on the day of the vote, they hatched plans to delay or undermine the legislation.

That morning, I received a phone call from one council member who said they intended to bring forward an amendment to delay the law's implementation, based on a stated concern of inadequate funding for Seattle's Office of Civil Rights. It's true this office has been shamefully and chronically underfunded by successive Democratic Party

mayors and city councils, but it is in my view unconscionable for these same Democrats — who have frequently opposed my efforts to tax big business to fund services — to use this pretext to demoralize oppressed-caste workers and empower the right wing. (Said council member finally backed down, but it's a reminder how crucial it is to mobilize working people to overcome establishment opposition.)

As I have said throughout my tenure as an independent socialist, we need a new party for working people and the oppressed. This has been on full display in national politics of late, as self-described “pro-labor” President Biden was joined by both Pramila Jayapal and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in passing the strikebreaking bill against railroad workers fighting for sick leave and workplace safety. We've already seen the brutal consequences of Democrats' siding with the railroad tycoons, with the totally avoidable catastrophe in East Palestine, Ohio.

The very fact that we are having to defend American workers against the 2,000-year-old caste system in 2023 — in the wealthiest country in human history — shows once again the bankruptcy of the capitalist system. We need a fundamentally different kind of society: one based on solidarity, equality, and democracy — run by and for working people, not billionaires.

For now, let's spread our victory against caste discrimination to other cities — and put the new Seattle law into action by holding corporations accountable in the courts.



# BAN CASTE DISCRIMINATION FIGHT OPPRESSION & CAPITALISM

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BY KSHAMA SAWANT

## US. SEATTLE'S WORKING PEOPLE WON THE NATION'S FIRST BAN ON CASTE DISCRIMINATION

Standing in the Seattle City Council chambers on February 21, an Indian-American tech worker named Naresh recalled the caste discrimination he has faced beginning at age 5 in India. His voice quivered with anger as he thought about the dignity denied to him. If he touched a dominant-caste person, he said, they would claim that they needed to “take a shower because they consider me untouchable.” Over the course of the meeting, many other oppressed-caste speakers joined Naresh, sharing their own experiences with caste discrimination — often in their own workplaces in the United States.

Caste is a system of oppression that divides people into a rigid hierarchy of groups based on birth, with “lower” groups facing serious discrimination and even violence by those “above” them. The system originated more than 2,000 years ago in South Asia, but remains pervasive today under American capitalism, including in Seattle — a place many South Asians now call home, and where I serve as a City Council member.

For centuries, the caste system has been systematically used by South Asian ruling classes to divide and exploit the mass of ordinary people. Those who were designated as the “lowest” castes — historically called “untouchables” — were the most cruelly exploited. Today, most people in this caste prefer the identity of Dalits, which means “those who have been broken but are resilient.”

Much of the American ruling class were once plantation owners who relied on the brutal system of slavery for their wealth. They similarly promoted utterly false ideas of innate inferiority to justify their “peculiar institution” and the violence they used to maintain it. In every class society, the small minority who profit from the brutal exploitation of the masses rely on ideology and division to maintain their rule.

For people like Naresh and his family, the hope was that coming to the United States meant leaving caste behind. But as South Asian immigration has grown, so has the spread of caste-based discrimination. Studies from Equality Labs and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace have found workplace caste-based discrimination to be a pervasive reality for caste-oppressed workers in the United States.

Last week in Seattle, our movement achieved a historic victory for workers like Naresh, and for all those facing discrimination and exploitation. It was not only those born into oppressed castes who fought for our legislation but also Muslims, Sikhs, socialists, union workers, dominant-caste Hindus, and white and non-white working people. The strength and unity of our rank-and-file movement was what made it possible for Seattle to become the first city in the nation to ban caste-based discrimination—and the first globally outside South Asia.

This is just the beginning — casteism will not simply end because basic legal protections have been won, any more than racism has ended. But it is a major step, nonetheless.

Our movement based itself on a fighting strategy independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. For the nearly 10 years that I have been a council member, Socialist Alternative —my activist organization—and I have used our office to build movements able to wrest major victories from big business and the city’s Democratic establishment. We helped make Seattle the first major city to win a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, won our Amazon Tax to fund affordable housing, and passed landmark renters’ rights.

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