

## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

## From Yellow Vests to the Green New Deal



IT'S old news that large segments of society have become deeply unhappy with what they see as "the establishment", especially the political class. The "Yellow Vest" protests in France, triggered by President Emmanuel

Macron's move to hike fuel taxes in the name of combating climate change, are but the latest example of the scale of this alienation.

There are good reasons for today's disgruntlement: four decades of promises by political leaders of both the centre-left and centre-right, espousing the neoliberal faith that globalisation, financialisation, deregulation, privatisation, and a host of related reforms would bring unprecedented prosperity, have gone unfulfilled. While a tiny elite seems to have done very well, large swaths of the population have fallen out of the middle class and plunged into a new world of vulnerability and insecurity. Even leaders in countries with low but increasing inequality have felt their public's wrath.

By the numbers, France looks better than most, but it is perceptions, not numbers, that matter; even in France, which avoided some of the extremism of the Reagan-Thatcher era, things are not going well for many. When taxes on the very wealthy are lowered, but raised for ordinary citizens to meet budgetary demands (whether from far-off Brussels or from well-off financiers), it should come as no surprise that some are angry. The Yellow Vests' refrain speaks to their concerns: "The government talks about the end of the world. We are worried about the end of the month."

There is, in short, a gross mistrust in



Protesters light flares in the colours of the French flag during a Yellow Vest protest in Bordeaux.

PHOTO: AFP

governments and politicians, which means that asking for sacrifices today in exchange for the promise of a better life tomorrow won't pass muster. And this is especially true of "trickle down" policies: tax cuts for the rich that eventually are supposed to benefit everyone else.

When I was at the World Bank, the first lesson in policy reform was that sequencing and pacing matter. The promise of the Green New Deal that is now being championed by progressives in the United States gets both of these elements right.

The Green New Deal is premised on three observations: First, there are unutilised and underutilised resources—especially human

talent—that can be used effectively. Second, if there were more demand for those with low and medium skills, their wages and standards of living would rise. Third, a good environment is an essential part of human wellbeing, today and in the future.

If the challenges of climate change are not met today, huge burdens will be imposed on the next generation. It is just wrong for this generation to pass these costs on to the next. It is better to pass on financial debts, which we can somehow manage, than to confront our children with a possibly unmanageable environmental disaster.

Almost 90 years ago, US President Franklin D Roosevelt responded to the Great

Depression with his New Deal, a bold package of reforms that touched almost every aspect of the American economy. But it is more than the symbolism of the New Deal that is being invoked now. It is its animating purpose: putting people back to work, in the way that FDR did for the US, with its crushing unemployment of the time. Back then, that meant investments in rural electrification, roads, and dams.

Economists have debated how effective the New Deal was—its spending was probably too low and not sustained enough to generate the kind of recovery the economy needed. Nonetheless, it left a sustained legacy by transforming the country at a crucial time.

So, too, for a Green New Deal: It can provide public transportation, linking people with jobs, and retrofit the economy to meet the challenge of climate change. At the same time, these investments themselves will create jobs.

**The Green New Deal will have to be broadened, and this is especially true in those countries like the US, where many ordinary citizens lack access to good education, adequate health care, or decent housing.**

It has long been recognised that decarbonisation, if done correctly, would be a great job creator, as the economy prepares itself for a world with renewable energy. Of course, some jobs—for example, those of the 53,000 coal miners in the US—will be lost, and programmes are needed to retrain such workers for other jobs. Be to return to the refrain: sequencing and pacing matter. It would have made more sense to begin with creating new jobs *before* the old jobs were destroyed, to ensure that the profits of the oil and coal companies were taxed, and the hidden subsidies they receive eliminated, *before* asking drivers who are barely getting by to pony up more.

The Green New Deal sends a positive message of what government can do, for this generation of citizens and the next. It can deliver today what those who are suffering today need most—good jobs. And it can deliver the protections from climate change that are needed for the future.

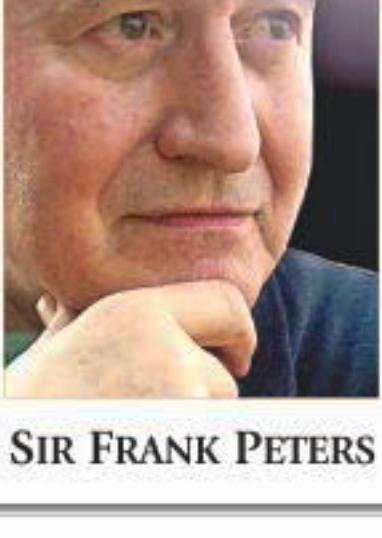
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The grassroots movement behind the Green New Deal offers a ray of hope to the badly battered establishment: they should embrace it, flesh it out, and make it part of the progressive agenda. We need something positive to save us from the ugly wave of populism, nativism, and proto-fascism that is sweeping the world.

Joseph E Stiglitz is the winner of the 2001 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences. His most recent book is *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited: Anti-Globalization in the Era of Trump*.

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## Corporal punishment was outlawed in 2011, but it still prevails



IT'S amazing how unhinged society can become if you don't pay attention to the smaller details and address them appropriately. Take for example violence in society. The majority of inhabitants of society detest and abhor violence. They're all unanimous in thought that such barbaric actions could not possibly be good for the development of humankind or bring them closer to God.

Nobody in their right mind wants to see his/her mother, his/her sister, or anyone they love being brutalised, hurt and in pain from a violent attack. It could be said, the 99.9 percent are totally against violence in any form to any one, and rightly so.

There is no doubt violence is ever present in society, look no further than the recent general elections. Where there's ignorance, there will always be violence and while we may go short from time-to-time on essential supplies like vegetables and rice, there's never a shortage of ignorance—there's always enough to go around and it's available everywhere. It's even being openly taught in some schools and many alleged teachers excel in its teaching.

While there is no single study that categorically attributes violence to one specific area, there are literally thousands that point a chastising finger and pinpoint's corporal punishment as being one of the major culprits. (Guilty, as charged, m'lord!)

Most people would agree corporal punishment cannot be blamed entirely for all the violence in society, but, no doubt, it is a major contributing factor. Let's look at life momentarily through the eyes of a child.

We are all products of our environment.

Our thinking is honed, our minds are developed and our learning begins from within that environment—good or bad. Monkey see, monkey do.

Poverty is not a child's number one enemy; ignorance is. Whatever the child sees and experiences is how things are ... it's the world they know. It's natural to them, they know no better. If a home is predominantly violent, violence is as natural to them as the *roti* they eat at breakfast and that's what they expect the outside world to be.

If there's love in the homes, schools and madrasas that is also what they learn and expect the outside world to be. Violence and love cannot co-exist. Violence should never be given shelter.

A child's mind is like a sponge and absolutely trusting. It will soak-in, without much questioning (or none) what is presented to it, especially if encouraged by a figure of authority, parent or teacher. It knows no better. It has a child-like faith and trust that the authority figure knows what she/he is

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doing and wouldn't mislead them. If only the latter were true.

Perhaps that's not entirely the fault of the parent or teacher. A teacher or parent can only teach what they themselves know. It is a known fact that in Bangladesh, there is a lot of scope for improvement. Having said that, there have been vast improvements over recent years in the education system and credit needs to be given where it is due.

While the qualifications and abilities of some people to teach may need to be questioned in the best interests of the children and the nation, there is no justification whatsoever for violence in the form of corporal punishment to be taught in the classrooms.

The two predominant areas in a child's life to learn violence are in the home and in the

school. While the home presents only a small selective audience and the violence is confined, perhaps, to only one child. The school is different. The audience is considerably larger, the influence is substantially greater and given time can spread, pollute and damage an entire community.

School is not a place where violence should be taught. No school should be a hellhole for any child (or teacher). A classroom is no place for bullies, sadists, mentally disturbed "teachers" or where fear and violence is bred. Neither should it be a place where the once-in-a-lifetime gift of angelic youth, fun, and joy is beaten out, and the horrific blight of hatred, anger, despise for society, and hellish revenge, are beaten in.

Dr Dharmakanta Kumbhakar, a

pathologist, at the Tezpur Medical College, Tezpur, Assam, recently wrote: "Children are the supreme asset of a nation. They are the greatest hope for the future of a nation. Every nation, developed or developing, links its future with the status of their children."

He then went on to say: "The future of a nation rests on healthy, protected, educated and well-developed children. They are the potential and useful human resources for the progress of a nation. Ignoring or neglecting the children means wasting the supreme national asset and loss to the nation as a whole.

If children are deprived of their childhood—socially, economically, physically and mentally—the nation gets deprived of the potential human resources for social progress, economic empowerment, peace and order, social stability and good citizenry."

To protect the supreme assets of Bangladesh, on January 13, 2011, the High Court divisional bench comprising of Justice Md Imman Ali and Justice Md Sheikh Hassan Arif outlawed corporal punishment in Bangladesh schools and madrasas declaring it to be: "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and a clear violation of a child's fundamental right to life, liberty and freedom".

While we can never eradicate violence in society totally, we can erase corporal punishment. It doesn't help to have the fundamentals of violence taught in our schools to impressionable minds by "teachers" paid from the nation's coffers.

We can draw a line under the violence that exists today; write it off to ignorance of the past, make a fresh start, engage the necessary changes and eliminate the teaching of violence from the schools and madrasas.

Sir Frank Peters is a former newspaper and magazine publisher and editor, a royal goodwill ambassador, a humanitarian and a respected foreign non-political friend of Bangladesh.

## ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Tajuddin Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam.

January 10, 1972

Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

After the liberation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was released from Pakistan jail and via London he made a triumphant homecoming, arriving in Dhaka on this day, January 10, 46 years ago, in the midst of joy and jubilation throughout the country. Hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life received him at the Tejgaon old airport, according him a heroic welcome. With Bangabandhu's homecoming, all uncertainties about the leadership of the new republic and the future of Bangladesh were put to rest. The Guardian (published from London) in an editorial on January 10, 1972 wrote: "Once Sheikh Mujibur Rahman steps out at Dacca Airport the new republic becomes a solid fact."

Pakistani occupation forces arrested him on March 25, 1971 from his Dhamondi residence during a late-night crackdown on the people of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). The Pakistan junta later sent Bangabandhu—who led our war of liberation—to Pakistan (then West Pakistan) and imprisoned him. Bangabandhu was subjected to inhuman torture in prison where he had been counting down days until the execution of his death sentence that was pronounced in a farcical trial.

When the nation achieved victory over Pakistan after a nine-month-long Liberation War, the then junta of Pakistan was compelled to free Bangabandhu—the icon of Bangladesh's struggle for independence.

SOURCES: BANGLAPEDIA, THE DAILY STAR

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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1 Almanac bit	32	Feeding, as a furnace	8 Western sight
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16 Sign, perhaps	40	button	19 Casserole bits
18 Outdo	41	Urges	22 Piquant quality
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21 Sculpture in St. Peter's	accompanier	Glue's kin	T A T S
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