



Break on Through to the Other Side: A Discerning Discourse for the Youth

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Abstract

The quest for the United Nations' sustainable development agenda for youth and by youth is incompatible with the unfolding worldwide discontents of capitalism. This paper addresses the resolution of this contradiction by reviewing some non-mainstream ideas which the youth may embrace for promoting socio-economic and environmental wellbeing.

Keywords: Youth, Sustainable development agenda, Discontents of capitalism, Radical hope, Non-mainstream ideas, Human rights

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) has been very euphoric about seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the youth and the youth, in turn, achieving them all: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals (UN, Undated).

Youth are not merely the beneficiaries of the achievement of these human- rights-oriented goals for materialising 'another world' that does not exist. More importantly, they are portrayed as the architects of goal-realisation by way of being "critical thinkers",

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“change-makers”, “innovators”, “communicators” and “leaders” (UN, 2018).

However, the role of UN itself has been recently subverted by the global corporates, and many of the youth and many other people, “like fish who don’t know they live in polluted water (because it is everywhere)”, “don’t know how they live in economically, socially and politically polluted societies” as pointed out, for example, by Standing (2016) and Gonick and Kasser (2018), and how they can break on through to the other side of “another world is possible” ala the erstwhile World Social Forum’s clarion call.

As such, how the agenda of “SDGs for Youth and Youth for SDGs” can be actualised is questionable, more so, if we do not consult, undaunted, the writings that have been ignored by the mainstream, from the “writers willing to set off into the dark forest to do battle with the evil dragon”, so to say following Griffin (1998).

This is the purpose and plea of this article, which sketches out a pathway of concerns and possibilities in relation to “another world is possible”.

Discontents of Capitalism

Conditions have already been created in the world in terms of the rise of rentier capitalism based on unabashed neoliberalism and its inherent corruption over the last four decades in which some sort of revolt by the youth and other people is increasingly likely, as the development and labour economist as also public intellectual Guy Standing had observed and elaborated in his numerous contributions since long.

Standing (2016) had summed up well the troublesome situation that has already materialised thus: “A global market system has developed in which a minority of rentiers – those living off income gained from property and other assets – are thriving at the expense of most people in most societies...International bureaucracies in Geneva, Washington DC, London and elsewhere have shaped the rules that have made the system so unfree and the gains by the plutocracy and elite so vast... One of the dirty secrets of this development is the stealthily built edifice of subsidies that in diverse ways flow to the plutocracy, the elite, their corporate equivalents

and other rentiers. Those below them pay the price in higher taxes, lower benefits and worse public services...The rentiers have shunted much of their wealth into tax havens...There is rise of systemic debt enmeshing millions of people into fear and sleeplessness...The way in which the public sphere and the historically created commons nurtured over centuries are being privatised and commercialised has accelerated the ecological crisis that threatens all of us and is transferring precious aspects of community life to the rentiers...Finally, there has been a phenomenal growth of the precariat, those living through unstable and insecure labour, in and out of jobs, without an occupational identity, financially on the edge and losing rights." Many youth have the grim prospects of joining this majority-and-rapidly-growing- precariat class in the population.

All these developments have been coterminous with the neo-fascist thinning of democracy (Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Bose, 2023; Prabhakar, 2023) and erosion of autonomy of educational institutions to pursue truth and interventions by pluralist inquiries (Lyer et al., 2023), almost everywhere.

They are also coterminous with widespread presence of crony capitalism. "Unchecked economic power of corporations has been translated into political power with disastrous effects for people's lives everywhere in the world. Corporations of vast wealth and remorseless staying power have moved into politics to seize for themselves advantages that can be seized only by control over government. The domination of big money over public institutions prevents governments from being responsive to the people in general and youth in particular" (Manohar and Kumar, 2021). There is research vouching for government benefitting special interests and benefitting big business and the wealthy. In short, the rule of the rich – plutocracy (Freeland, 2012) – and the way it is overwhelming democracy does not instil any optimism about the corporate-led governments taking care of the people's, youth's and planet's problems.

"Corporations have gone beyond lobbying national governments. They are integrating in policy-making at the national and international levels. From agriculture to technology, decisions historically made by governments are increasingly made by secretive

unaccountable bodies run by corporations! The United Nations, World Health Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation, Global Alliance for Vaccines and the like are in the grip of the unaccountable bodies of the corporates. The 'Great Reset' initiative of the World Economic Forum (WEF) as the 'fascist cabal' of corporates and their henchmen, is said to be nothing but the Great Takeover. It entrenches the power of those most responsible for the crises we are facing. It is a sleight of hand to make sure that things continue as they are which will lead to more of the crises like pandemics, climate change, inequality and employment crisis deepening" (Manohar and Kumar, 2021).

The WEF has put forward ideas of 'stakeholder capitalism' as better than the ideas of multilateralism. "The idea is that global capitalism should be transformed so that corporations no longer focus solely on serving shareholders but become custodians of society by creating value for customers, suppliers, employees, communities and others." This is to be done by means of "multi-stakeholder partnerships, bringing together the private sector, governments and civil society across all areas of global governance." This *prima facie* sounds warm and fizzy but this actually means giving corporations more power over society, and democratic institutions less. WEF partners include some of the biggest companies in oil (Saudi Aramco, Shell, Chevron, BP), food (Unilever, The Coca-Cola Company, Nestle), technology (Facebook, Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple) and pharmaceuticals (AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna). So, stakeholder capitalism in practice means that corporations are "the main stakeholders, while governments take a backseat role, and civil society is mainly window dressing. There are now more than 45 global multi-stakeholder groups that set standards and establish guidelines and rules in a range of areas. These groups lack any democratic accountability." They consist of private stakeholders (big corporations) who recruit their friends in government, civil society, and universities to join them in 'solving' public problems (Manohar and Kumar, 2021).

In this milieu, it is difficult to seriously consider and appreciate the employment and environmental sensitivity of WEF as

proclaimed by it on its website, however attractive the ideas may apparently be. For example, 'Forests for Climate' is a WEF "initiative to promote large-scale forest conservation to help meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement. The programme includes engagement with private sector companies from many sectors, the development and dissemination of research and opinion pieces, and public engagement via the Forum's media channels." WEF confidently elaborates on how a 'climate-smart forest economy' "could help mitigate climate change and its worst impacts."

The WEF has come under heavy fire from the Greenpeace International thus, though: "Many of the thousands of attendees travel to Davos by private jet, making a mockery of the WEF's proclaimed commitment to 1.5°C Paris Climate Targets. New analysis reveals the ecological hypocrisy of its attendees. Often travelling very short distances, over a thousand private jets flew in and out of airports serving Davos during the week of the 2022 WEF, causing CO₂ emissions four times greater than an average week, equivalent to 350,000 cars. Meanwhile, 80% of people in the world have never flown, and battle through more frequent and dangerous extreme heat, flooding and drought. Private jets and needless short-haul flights are the most striking illustration of climate inequality and invalidate any aspirations to climate conscience. Greenpeace is calling for a Europe-wide ban on the use of private planes. The WEF is a private event where most people pay to enter, and usually around 3,000 business leaders, political leaders and media representatives attend...The WEF elite have grabbed a devastating amount of power to prop up a dangerous, polluting and flawed system that works for their own benefit at the expense of everyone else and our planet... there is considerable evidence that past World Economic Forum meetings have stimulated free trade agreements, which have consolidated and extended the neoliberal stranglehold on national and local economies, while limiting the ability for policy makers to legislate in the public interest, as well as helping to water down regulation of the financial sector in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. The collusion between these private actors and those who should be making policy in the public interest serves the wealth and power amassed through environmental destruction, human exploitation, tax dodging and avoidance and political gaming. Prioritising private wealth has caused, and continues to

cause, widespread social injustice alongside climate and environmental collapse. The discussions in Davos exclude the very people most impacted by the problems the neoliberal proponents who descend on that small, exclusive ski resort help create. Solutions are not viable, nor will they get to the root of the problem, if they ignore the people who are most affected. Inviting a few token representatives of civil society does not make it an inclusive forum. Especially when those who challenge the dominant narrative aren't invited back. The Fight Inequality Alliance is calling for wealth taxes to reduce the extreme inequality creating and exacerbating so many crises in our societies. Oxfam's latest report shows that the richest 1% took almost two-thirds of all wealth created since 2020 – \$42 trillion – which is almost twice as much as the rest of us 99% of the world's population. Taxing the rich and their enormous wealth is such an easy step for public officials to take...By prioritising care and community over privatised profit at any cost, we can build communities, economies and societies that are more resilient and in harmony with our planet. There isn't just one form of development for countries to follow: especially given that rich countries got that way by exploiting others through colonialism, and more recently free-trade rules and militarism, we need to look to other more cooperative and peaceful means. Luckily, we have new socio-economic models to help us with this. Indigenous Peoples and communities provide us with especially useful guidance for our actions. They operate from the concept of taking actions today only after considering the impact those actions might have on many generations down the line. What if, before every decision and action we take, we ask the following question first: how will this impact the people seven generations after us? Or even just start by thinking of your children and grandchildren? As recent climate talks, plastics talks and biodiversity talks show, we need effective multilateral cooperation, ambitious and legally binding agreements, money from rich countries and big polluters, as well as thorough implementation of real solutions rooted in justice... Let's tax the rich to support healthy and well societies, cancel debt, go beyond GDP to focus on well-being rather than growth. Let's boost energy resilience, and protect climate and nature. We can build a future together based on solidarity and cooperation, where progress is measured in collective well-being from the local to the global level" (Stanton, 2023).

Crony capitalism of greedy, kleptocratic corporates, politicians and government officials not only destroys environment but also crushes the weak and the vulnerable people to languish in anguish and depression despite its clever-populist rhetoric in their favour. The lived reality of a vast numbers of Indians, for example, is a never-ending struggle under constant threat of humiliation and violence due to lack of good jobs, public goods and grave risks for lives and livelihoods due to dying rivers and worsening climate catastrophe (Mody, 2023).

Most people in the world complain of miseries of either growing unemployment or meaningless working along with cheap labour exploitation. There has been, since long from the early 20th century, a lopsided tug-of-war between the emotional needs of humanity and the imperatives of corporate profits. "Profits generally win, providing fresh reminders of their supremacy every time a thriving company lays off employees to appease colicky shareholders, or installs a monitor on your computer to measure how much time you've spent at your desk, or hands its CEO a duffel bag of cash for running a company into the ground. For workers, this has taken a toll. We are all alienated labour now. The soul cries out for relief" (Keohane, 2015).

In the name of efficiency for enhancing profits, the corporates have aggressively pursued strategies of destroying open-ended employment contracts, deskilling and underpaying labour, defeating unions, downsizing and intensifying work along with flexible automation (Deshpande and Haksar, 2023). Noting that labour-informalisation and precarious labour relations have become the global norm, Hammer et al. (2022) have hammered home the point that "It is a critical moment for research to focus on sustainable work and the challenges in achieving decent work".

This is not all.

There are many young activists whose life is in constant danger. Like trade union leaders and human rights activists engaged in social sustainability activism are harassed and killed, more and more land and environmental activists opposed to "extractivist model of development" are murdered. There are rape threats to women

activists. The rapacious planetary extraction of energy and materials is associated with terrible socio-ecological violence (Post, 2023).

As the NGO Global Witness (2016) points out “Land and environmental defenders are people who take peaceful action, either voluntarily or professionally, to protect environmental or land rights. They are often ordinary people who may well not define themselves as defenders. Some are indigenous or peasant leaders living in remote mountains or isolated forests, protecting their ancestral lands and traditional livelihoods from mining projects, dams and luxury hotels. Others are park rangers tackling poaching and illegal logging. They could be lawyers, journalists or NGO staff working to expose environmental abuse and land grabbing...(they) often clash with political, business and criminal interests, who collude to steal their natural resources. These powerful forces marginalise defenders, branding their actions anti-development. Many defenders face years of death threats, criminalisation, intimidation and harassment, but receive little or no protection from authorities. These activists defend internationally recognised human rights, such as the right to a healthy environment, the right to participate in public life, the right to protest and the right to life. As such, they are a subset of human rights defenders, meaning that governments are obliged to protect them as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, whilst business should respect their rights as per the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.”

Non-Mainstream Ideas

Radical hope, i.e. hope to change the world despite adversity and lethal danger, can emerge among the youth if and only if they can see the diverse transcendental possibilities mentioned below in relation to the troubles they now encounter.

To come together as equals, to determine their own lives and futures, the youth need to track the long continuities, gradual changes, crises and sudden upheavals that have defined the history of democracy (Keane, 2023). On this basis, they need to tackle how democracy can be reinvigorated, inter alia, by proportional representation (Prabhakar, 2024). Also, they may stand for a new social liberal and republican state which can undertake public management reform “to increase state capacity, to create a strong

state: able to produce representative and accountable democratic governments; able to protect civil rights and assure markets, and so liberal; able to promote social justice, and so social; able to resist corruption and rent-seeking, and thus republican." Democratic, liberal, social and republican objectives are not "intrinsically contradictory, although the political history of mankind is in many ways the history of the conflicts between such ideologies. They may have been conflicting historically, and they may still present major differences, but, provided that they are understood reasonably, they end up being complementary: successful political achievements" (Bresser-Pereira, 2004).

Or, alternatively, the youth may follow Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, which pursues radical research agenda on three main axes as pointed out on its website. It "studies developments in the contemporary capitalist economy, with a special focus on the unproductive growth of the financial sector, the rise of rentier forms of near monopoly firms, the expansion of a precarious working class, and the social effects of capitalism's structural imbalances; develops a theory that the wretchedness of contemporary capitalism has been produced by proponents of both right-wing free market conservatives and liberals and of social democracy; and tracks the various forms of socialism that are being developed in our time."

Komlos (2023) has sketched the outline of a capitalism with a human face, an economy in which people live contented lives with dignity instead of focusing on GNP. Alternative economic education on his lines indeed relieves the youth from clinging to an ideology that only enriches the 1 percent. The youth, especially the educated lot, need to be exposed to economic alternatives in terms of studying non-capitalist, cooperative enterprises; economic democracy as the working-class alternative to capitalism (Engler, 2010); and ecological economics of economic democracy (Akbulut and Adaman, 2020) in order to establish a just and sustainable future for humans and non-humans alike.

In economic democracy, "All inhabitants will be entitled to a voice and equal vote in their communities' economic and political decisions. Local, regional, national and international communities will own enterprises and direct public services. Workers in all occupations will democratically direct their labour time. Housing,

health care, employment opportunities, education, skills training, leisure and a fair share of socially produced goods and services will be provided to everyone as human rights. Individual enterprise will be encouraged. Discretionary goods and services will be exchanged through democratically regulated markets. Wage and salary differentials will be decided democratically. Science, technology and markets will be directed toward human well-being, not profit for a minority...The goal will be to transform capitalism..through gains and reforms that improve living conditions while methodically replacing wealth-holders' entitlement with human entitlement, capitalist ownership with community ownership and master-servant relations with workplace democracy" (Engler, 2010).

The unemployed youth need to stand for people's economics such as that of Tcherneva (2020) and Kelton (2021) in America and Bhaduri (2005) in India.

Tcherneva (2020) has made the case for jobs guarantee policies thus. First, "if somebody wants to work, they should have employment opportunities. They should not be going into the cruel environment, trying to out-compete the next unemployed person for the scarce jobs that are out there." Second, jobs guarantee honours the human right to work. Work, much of which is paid work, is the most important determinant of wellbeing. Third, because there are millions of working people who do not even earn the poverty wage floor and others who do not even have a job to earn, we need to firm up what constitutes a social wage or living wage or basic decent wage level above the poverty wage floor. Anyone, wherever they work, can and should earn it at least. Fourth, because the economy expands, contracts, expands, contracts and so there is periodically laying off en masse, jobs guarantee provides a stabilising mechanism. "When the private sector recovers and starts growing and provides better paid wages, then the job guarantee programme shrinks as people move to better opportunities." However, the problem is that the private sector of the economy considers employment as a cost and does not create robust, better-paid employment opportunities. "There are jobless recoveries and the jobs that are created are precarious. So, and given the fact that the higher skilled individuals do not tend to experience the scorch of unemployment, and if they do, they tend to have the assets to weather the short spell of

unemployment, jobs guarantee strengthens the labour market and provides better working experiences for those at the very bottom — like folks who might have not completed high school, folks who are regularly last hired, first fired, folks who are long term unemployed and so considered as bad by private employers, folks who have difficulty holding out certain private sector jobs like people with disability, and folks who are discriminated against on one ascriptive ground or the other” (caste, gender, etc.). This democratisation of work is the fifth plus point of the jobs guarantee. Besides, suitable jobs for the public purpose are provided — jobs in the public service sector comprising sanitation, care work, environmental work, social healing work, etc. When jobs are guaranteed this way, dignity of work as also job satisfaction is universally enabled and ensured. This is the sixth benefit out of jobs guarantee. Finally, jobs guarantee is backed by Modern Monetary Theory (MMT). This theory smashes the myth that “the public sector does not have financial resources and so we need to tighten our belt and we just cannot afford economic rights or anything else of public value. MMT talks about money, and specifically state money and the public purse. The public sector has, in a technical sense, unlimited funding capacity to pay for its priorities, to finance its budget deficits and debts. MMT also makes an ethical philosophical fundamental point that if we issue a currency, we also have a responsibility to provide it in a manner that is consistent with public objectives and consistent with economic stability and consistent with full employment and price stability. When we have unutilized or underutilized resources, including unemployed people, we can activate those resources through public payment without having a lot of inflationary pressure.” Jobs guarantee is less inflationary than the conventional ways of stimulating economy such as pump priming or providing subsidies and tax cuts to the private sector. These conventional ways stimulate the economy by picking up winners. Industrial sectors which are already at capacity and which have highly skilled labour and folks that do not experience unemployment are stimulated. Consequently, there is an add-on problem in terms of inducing “bidding wars in those sectors for skilled workers. As such, this kind of stimulus would be more inflationary than if you just went and employed the unemployed, and just provided the basic public job offer rather than hiring from the top. Similarly, if you dump

Universal Basic Income (UBI) into the economy, it does not create additional output on its own. Also, that money goes to folks who do not need it and it basically does represent a major fiscal injection that does not have the automatic stabilising feature of the jobs guarantee. UBI still does not create enough jobs for all. Giving unemployment benefit is also useless. It will not cause a lot of people to step out of some precarious private sector work. The private sector in any case will never create jobs on its own that satisfy the multiple social psychological health reasons other than income as to why people like to work, or want to work.”

In this connection, Kelton (2021) has argued that government balancing the budget like a household does is bad economics. And she has made the case for people’s economy as “a just and more prosperous world – one that combines ecological sustainability with full employment, well-being, lower degree of inequality, and excellent public services that meet the needs of all”. To achieve it, the government must remove many anti-people deficits. The government just needs to print more money and spend it on expanded government employment, healthcare, education, transportation, environmental issues, infrastructure, housing, retiree benefits, and on and on. In other words, more and more deficit spending is required.

Government is good if it runs “deficits to address shortfalls in investment, infrastructure and education, R&D – the kinds of things that enhance the economy's longer term productive potential; and bad if it just runs deficits to generate windfalls for big corporations and wealthy people. When conservative governments increase the deficit by cutting the corporate income tax to create greater incentives for businesses to invest, we do not see a boom in hiring and investments. By contrast, progressive central governments can run deficits which are good for the middle class and low income, poor people as well as state and local governments and small businesses.”

Kelton does not advocate unlimited government spending. She talks about real limits to spending as well like inflation and ecological constraints as binding constraints. The central point is that the government can just print more and more money and spend it more and more for people’s welfare as long “as the economy has the

ability to churn out the needed goods and services." The limit is the "economy's real resource capacity. We have the people we have, we have the machines we have, we have the factories we have, we have the technology we have, we have the raw materials. Those are our means of production. Those are our material means. Once we exhaust them, once they're all used and being put to use, then any additional attempt to spend into an economy that is maxed out is going to produce bottlenecks in production and inflationary pressures."

According to Bhaduri (2005), India needs development with high employment and participation. This requires "a universal employment guarantee scheme at a legally stipulated minimum wage. The right to regular income for a decent living, and the duty to contribute to social production constitute the essential economic content of participatory democracy."

This objective can be achieved by paying "greater attention to the size of the domestic market as compared to the foreign market. Focus on expanding the share of the foreign market and keeping the stock market happy typically results in anti-poor policies in the name of labour market flexibility, lower government expenditure on economic and social development, and even shedding of labour for higher productivity. But these policies depress the size of the domestic market, making development with higher employment and participation impossible."

So, "we need to drop jobless growth (high GDP growth by higher productivity growth in the organised/formal sector by labour cost reduction) that we have already experienced. We need to move towards a path of higher productivity that goes with more employment at satisfactory wages".

"This will take care of the hitherto ignored 90 percent of India's working population eking out their livelihoods in the unorganised/informal sector of the economy, mostly covering agriculture, small industries, petty services related to trade, transport and commerce. These working people work without any formal labour contracts and other labour rights."

When wage employment is offered to them at a "legally stipulated minimum wage, two things will happen. First, those who

really need the minimum wage will self-select themselves to work at that wage. This will avoid many bureaucratic problems and corruption in defining who needs the job. Second, it will provide social insurance to the most vulnerable sections of our population. It will be their fallback position in terms of alternative employment opportunity, even if they do not need to take up the offer in normal circumstances.”

“This has to be done mostly at the ‘gram’ and ‘nagar’ panchayats. The expansion in purchasing power will come from public works financed initially through deficits of central and state budgets. The public works can be projects relating to rural communication, warehouse, local water management schemes, watersheds, school buildings, health centres, local forestry work, etc.”

“So long as excess capacity exists, the increase in supply of goods and services will come from better utilisation of capacities in the short run, and additional productive capacity created in the long run through new projects chosen by local people to meet local needs. The panchayats need to have full financial autonomy and responsibility to design and implement projects subject to the crucial conditions of transparency and accountability, which materialize when the participants in a project begin to monitor its progress in their own self-interest.”

“We need transparency through right to information and change of mindsets. When the chosen projects generate local public goods that benefit mostly the workers engaged in building them, the right to employment and dignified income merges with the responsibility and obligation to contribute to social income through work.”

“Many local public goods (like health centre, primary school, warehouse, drinking water supply, sanitation, local forestry work, village common resources work, etc.) can be a supplement to the standard of living of the local workers. In this sense, there will be ‘social wage’ supplementing ‘private wage’. If projects are well executed, standard of living of workers improves even without an increase in minimum wage.”

As regards meaningless work, new management research shows that “meaningfulness is largely something that individuals find for themselves in their work, but meaninglessness is something that

organizations and leaders can actively cause. The challenge to building a satisfied workforce is to avoid the seven deadly sins that drive up levels of meaninglessness – disconnect people from their values; take your employees for granted; give people pointless work to do; treat people unfairly; override people’s better judgement; disconnect people from supportive relationships; and put people at risk of physical and emotional harm” (Bailey and Madden, 2016).

The youth also need to critically examine economic alternatives in terms of unconditional universal basic income vis-à-vis job guarantee and local development (‘vocal for local’ as it now called in India) in conjunction with competition policy measures to break monopoly power of corporations and measures to force the wealthy to pay their fair share in taxes (Goodman, 2022).

According to Standing (2014), many transformative reforms are required as follows. The trend to ever-stronger intellectual property protection must be reversed. The copyright regime also requires tipping the balance away from the rentiers towards the public interest, by shortening protection terms and expanding ‘fair use’, ‘personal use’ and other exceptions. Open access—for instance through creative commons licensing—should be the norm for publicly funded work. All trade investment pacts should be done away with as they are disgracefully biased toward rentier and corporate interests. Subsidies and selective tax breaks for rentiers that are the bane of the modern state must end as they are regressive, distortionary, costly and inconsistent with the free markets the neoliberals claim to support. This is not all. Rentiers and corporates must be prevented from buying politicians and political parties to do their bidding. There should be tougher rules, strictly enforced, on lobbying and revolving doors. The rentiers should not be permitted to shunt much of their wealth into tax havens. All countries should cap election spending and provide state funding for political parties that reach a threshold of support. Besides, parties should only be allowed to raise money from membership subscriptions and individual donations. Companies, institutions and other ‘non-persons’ should be barred from funding parties and politicians. Foreign oligarchs should have no role in a nation’s democratic politics. The labour market should be made into a ‘free market, without labour brokers and with the wage determined by bargaining

and contract, according to the perceived value to the buyer and seller. However, for that to work, the bargaining positions of the parties must be roughly equal. Unfortunately, statutory minimum wages and its higher variant known as the 'living wage' may set decent standards but have scarcely affected the precariat. "Every country should set up a democratic sovereign capital fund, fed, by taxation, from a share of rental income, including at least 10 percent of profits from exploitation of natural resources. And a 'social dividend' system, providing every legal resident with a modest but growing basic income, partly paid out of the fund, must be built up. Universal unconditional basic income can be boosted by needs- based supplements for disability or particular costs of living and private insurance as well as employer benefits. Social reproductive activities like caring for one another, caring for the commons (zones of shared public space) and caring for the community need to be encouraged more. Governance must make a priority of rescuing and preserving public lands and preventing industries like fracking and mining from taking place on them. Those who deplete the commons must be heavily taxed so that corporations can no longer ignore the social costs – including pollution, erosion, habitat destruction, species loss, noise, and opportunity costs – they are imposing. Education needs to be de-commodified. Due process for all must be there. There should be new institutions to give people collective representation in society. Deliberative democracy should be strengthened so that there is a more open, transparent and substantive politics based on public participation in discussion of the issues, rather than on pundits providing shameless lies, crocodile tears, soundbites, manipulations, and post-truth assertions that have no basis in fact."

Global corporates have accepted Kate Raworth's environmental reconstruction policies but whether they will really participate in their implementation is a moot question. Raworth (2017) had put forward Seven Commandments as follows. First, change the goal, from GDP to the "Doughnut, which consists of two concentric rings: a social foundation, to ensure that no one is left falling short on life's essentials, and an ecological ceiling, to ensure that humanity does not collectively overshoot the planetary boundaries that protect Earth's life-supporting systems. Secondly, drop the neoliberal narrative and tell a new story fit for our times. Thirdly, nurture human nature by shifting from rational economic man to socially

adaptable humans. Fourthly, get savvy with systems by moving from mechanical equilibrium to dynamic complexity. Fifthly, design to distribute, by moving away from “growth will even it up again” to distributive by design. Sixthly, create to regenerate by shifting from “growth will clean it up again” to regenerative by design. And seventhly, be agnostic about growth, i.e. be growth agnostic, not growth addicted.”

The central points are that the needs of all will have to be met within the means of the planet. In other words, “we have to ensure that no one falls short on life’s essentials (from food and housing to healthcare and political voice) while ensuring that collectively we do not overshoot our pressure on Earth’s life-supporting systems, on which we fundamentally depend – such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and a protective ozone layer. For this, we need to drop the goal of endless GDP growth. Instead, we need to embed the economy within and dependent upon society and the living world. Human behaviour needs to be nurtured to be cooperative and caring. Systems thinking is required to recognise and understand economy, society and rest of living world as complex interdependent systems. Today’s degenerative economy needs to be made regenerative, and divisive economy needs to be converted into more distributive one.”

The praxis of Raworth’s ecological economics consists of making the business and non-business organisations regenerative and distributive. For this the organisations need to imbibe five key design traits that will shape what they can do in the world, viz. “purpose (living purpose bigger than themselves); networks (relations with customers, members, staff, volunteers, suppliers, neighbours, allies, etc.); governance (who decides and how); ownership (of land, data, knowledge, assets) and finance (whether financing is in relation to generating social and ecological value with or without financial return).”

The youth can go beyond Raworth’s economics and learn, much more deeply, about the “Living Earth” perspective. According to this, ecological health cannot be reduced to carbon metrics. In this regard, the appropriate case study is that of the Andes-Amazon Ecocultural Corridor influenced by a small non-profit called the Andes-Amazon Conservancy which works with the indigenous people as a bridge to funding, mapping technology, and other

necessary resources from the outside world (Eisenstein, 2023). In the Indian context, the youth can appreciate and stand for the green-in-red politics of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha (Krishnan, 2023).

Conclusion

The youth in India, like in many other developing countries, are vulnerable to unemployment, and precarious labour relations in the informal sector. It is a moot question what visions and choices this youth will enthusiastically showcase on the International Youth Day (April 12) in relation to lack of decent work as the employment problem, or other problems like climate change, having joined initiatives, for example, like the *Fridays for Future* inspired by Greta Thunberg.

It may be noted that social sustainability via decent work, according to the International Labour Organisation, upholds labour rights as human rights by way of “freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and a safe and healthy working environment.” Environmental sustainability is “meeting today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

The visions and choices of youth in terms of turning social and environmental unsustainability problems into opportunities and solutions depend on their authentic hope as a function of their critical consciousness.

As Diemer et al. (2016) have pointed out, according to the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, critical consciousness entails “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” on the part of the marginalized youth and communities.

The non-mainstream writings that are relevant for the youth’s present and future concerns which are reviewed here, can enable the youth to seek ‘authentic hope’ about what credible politics and economics for human happiness and planetary health they can take up. As Solnit (2016) had pointed out, “Authentic hope requires

clarity – seeing the troubles in this world – and imagination, seeing what might lie beyond these situations that are perhaps not inevitable and immutable.”

Finally, in order to reinforce authentic hope among the youth to reach their fullest potential in education, work and life, what is badly needed is protection for the protectors of social and environmental sustainability so that the youth sustain their activism for a better future. This requires ensuring that the necessary laws and the ability to enforce them are in place when a person is intimidated, harmed or assassinated. Governments must incorporate human rights into their constitutions and legislation and put them at the centre of their actions. And companies and investors too will have to operate in ways that do not go against human rights (Root, 2021), in terms of the International Bill of Rights, which is made up of five key United Nations' human rights documents: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; First Optional Protocol to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and Second Optional Protocol to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

All in all, the resounding conclusion is what the UN Web TV proclaims thus: “Without human rights, there can be no sustained peace, no stability, no protection from harm. No equality, no democracy, no space to speak up...there’s no way to curb climate change, eradicate poverty, tackle racism, misogyny, homophobia or xenophobia. No way to protect the wellbeing and safety of children, young people, the elderly, disabled persons, refugees, or minorities. There can be no green and habitable future planet, no sustainable development, possibly no human future at all.”

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