

HAPPY LABOUR DAY TO ALL

Labour Day is a time to reflect on the many contributions labour has made towards a better province and country.

We thank all working women and men for their efforts in establishing Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, the weekend and creating healthy and safe work places.

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Printed: Kulwinder Aujla | Prime Printers Ltd.

RADICAL
DESI

*"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."
~ Desmond Tutu*

Time to commemorate Bhaag Singh's martyrdom in a real sense

This fall marks 100 years of the martyrdom of Bhaag Singh, the towering leader of the Sikh community in Canada, who was assassinated on September 5, 1914.

Respectfully known as Bhai Bhaag Singh within the local Sikh community, he headed the Khalsa Deewan Society, the oldest Sikh religious body that was formed by the community elders to resist racism and discriminatory immigration policies. The Vancouver Sikh temple governed by the body also provided space for political activism. Those who assembled there believed in secularism and a just society. The Khalsa Deewan Society never discriminated against non-Sikhs, and leaders belonging to other faith groups received equal respect.

Bhaag Singh was shot inside the temple by Bela Singh, a government spy penetrated into the South Asian community by the establishment to neutralize activism. The shootout also claimed the life of Badan Singh, who tried to stop the assassin. The tragedy happened shortly after the Japanese vessel Komagata Maru, carrying over 300 South Asian passengers, was forced to return under a racist immigration law on July 23, 1914. The episode led to a bloody conflict between the political activists and pro-establishment elements of the South Asian community, and culminated in the murders of Bhaag Singh and

Badan Singh. These killings led to the assassination of William Hopkinson, a controversial immigration inspector, by Mewa Singh, who was hanged in 1915. Hopkinson was widely blamed for the temple shootout by the political activists. Bela Singh was acquitted on the grounds of self-defence, but in 1933 he was killed in India by the same network of revolutionaries associated with Bhaag Singh.

Bhaag Singh openly supported the Ghadar Party, established in 1913 in North America to oppose racism and the British occupation of India. Both India and Canada were British colonies, and people like Bhaag Singh (who had previously served in the British army) migrated to Canada as British subjects. They all believed in the fairness of the British Empire. But they were soon disillusioned when the British Consulates refused to come to their aid in a situation of racial violence. Men like Bhaag Singh realized that the root cause of their sufferings in North America was "slavery" back home. As a result, the Ghadar Party was formed to launch an armed rebellion against the British Empire. Bhaag Singh had already encouraged former Sikh soldiers to burn their medals and certificates to sever loyalties with the Empire. At a bonfire ceremony organized in 1909, he consigned his own uniform and discharge certificate to the flames. This was a very militant act of its time, as

the Sikh clergy in India was largely pro-British. He strongly believed in peoples' unity and often asked the modernist and orthodox Sikhs to bury their internal divisions and work together to fight against the power.

He was in the forefront of the campaign for the right to bring in their families. The Canadian government back then did not let South Asian immigrants bring their families, to discourage them from permanent settlement. To achieve this goal, Indian immigrants were also disfranchised in 1907.

Bhaag Singh also supported the cause of the Komagata Maru passengers. He was arrested in the US for buying weapons for those aboard the vessel, with an idea of engineering an armed revolt in India once they returned. In a nutshell, Bhaag Singh was a targeted man and was assassinated to weaken radical activism in the South Asian community.

100 years later, we need to recognize that the struggle he started for social justice must be kept alive. The rights which all immigrant communities have received over the years must not be taken for granted. Thanks to the radical activism of Bhaag Singh and his comrades, South Asians now have right to vote and electoral representation in legislatures and the House of Commons. What we need to understand is that these rights are under severe attack from a right-wing Conservative government, and political activism is strongly needed to oppose these assaults. Shamefully, the temple leaders and the gatekeepers in the Sikh community who use the name of the Khalsa Deewan Society for their own survival continue to ignore these real issues. Interestingly, both the camps of the modernist and the orthodox Sikhs are generally on the same page, trying to outdo each other in pleasing the establishment and remaining silent over

controversial immigration policies, such as Bill C-24 which empowers the authorities to take away citizenship. Their sharp ideological fight has not only divided the community, but also the prospects of coming together against discriminatory and draconian laws. It is the high time that they come together to challenge white supremacy that still exists in this country. The white supremacists do not discriminate between the modernists or the conservative Sikhs. Nor they care whether you are a Sikh, Hindu or Muslim. For them, all people of colour are the same and don't belong here. Instead of emphasizing separate religious identity following the hate attacks on Sikhs taken as Muslims after 9/11, the community leaders should challenge white supremacy and show solidarity with Muslims who continue to be hounded and targeted by the security agencies.

Bhaag Singh and the Ghadar activists believed in international solidarity and worked together with socialists and revolutionaries from other nations. Today's community leaders must actively participate in campaigns against Israeli aggression in Palestine and the imperial designs of the world powers. The systemic racism against the indigenous peoples in Canada and neo-colonialism on their traditional lands must also be questioned by South Asians. After all, the two communities share a history of colonialism and racism. Instead of indulging in symbolic commemorations of Bhaag Singh's martyrdom, the community gatekeepers should support initiatives such as Idle No More, a grassroots level movement of the indigenous activists. Lastly, on the occasion of Labour Day, South Asian activists should pay a real tribute to Bhai Bhaag Singh by showing support to the labour movement, standing with striking BC teachers and the Save Canada Post campaign.

-Editors

Rebellious Rhymes

Legacy of Paash continues to haunt the power and the reaction even after his assassination

*the most dangerous thing is
to live like a dead man
when you don't feel any thing
when the routine of daily life saps you totally
the fixed life of
home to work
work to home
that is a life without dreams
that is the most dangerous thing*

These verses are powerful enough to shake the fascists to the core. With the victory of the Hindu right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the recent Indian election, this “seditious” poem is likely to come under assault. Armed with their brute majority in parliament, the BJP government has already started the process of “saffronization” of the educational curriculum, sending shock waves to the progressive sections of a pluralist Indian society. As the penetration of the Hindu nationalists in the educational bodies picks up, some worried progressive and secular intellectuals feel that it is only a matter of time until the poetry of Paash – a revolutionary Punjabi writer of his times - will be taken out of the school syllabus. After all, in 2006, the BJP raised a storm in parliament when these verses were prescribed in a Hindi book for Class XI by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Assassinated 26 years ago by the Sikh separatists, and feared by the Hindu fundamentalists in his death, the author of these lines, Paash continues to haunt both the power and the reaction.

Born as Avtar Sandhu in a progressive peasant Sikh family in Punjab on September 9, 1950 he was a gifted writer and passionate reader.

He gradually grew up as a poet, but political circumstances shaped his clear leftist ideology and radical thinking. Paash inherited his interest in literature from his father Sohan Singh Sandhu, who despite being an army officer was a poet at heart. Sandhu subscribed to literary magazines that contributed in shaping Paash's bent of mind, and encouraged his son to write poetry during his early teens. Paash had a personal library that housed books on a range of subjects, including science, philosophy and literature. It was thanks to Maxim Gorky's *Mother* that Avtar Sandhu came to be known as Paash. He loved to identify himself after Pasha, the hero of the classic novel by the same name. This pen name gave him a new identity which remained with him until his death. There were some striking similarities between legendary Pasha and Paash, as both stood for the

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COVER STORY

working class and opposed both the establishment and theocracy.

In the late 1960s he became involved in the youth wing of the Communist Party of India, but slowly he became fed up with its politics and instead joined with supporters of the ultra-leftist Naxalite movement which had its origin in the uprising by the landless tillers of Naxalbari village in West Bengal. Slowly the movement reached as far as Punjab, and poets like Paash became its active supporters. The Naxalites believed in an armed revolution, and waged a class war which still goes on in over 200 districts of India. Termed as the “biggest internal security threat” by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Naxalites in their new avatar are now widely identified as Maoist insurgents.

Though he wrote essays and published Punjabi journals, such as *Haak* and *Anti 47*, as well as a “wall newspaper”, Paash gained much prominence as a poet. He borrowed the idea of publishing a wall newspaper from Chinese revolution.

He was briefly jailed for being a Naxalite in 1970, after being implicated in the murder of a brick kiln owner who was on the hit list of the ultras for mistreating his workers. He was later acquitted for want of evidence. He was arrested on other occasions too, but this did not deter him from writing for the poor and against state repression. Apart from writing, he continued to participate in different political agitations. His essays focussed on serious issues, such as exploitation of farm workers and caste-based discrimination against the so-called untouchables. While grappling with financial hardships, he opened an alternative school where children from the ostracized caste groups were enrolled in spite of stiff opposition from the “upper caste” zealots.

His poems were frequently smuggled out

of prison during his detention and published. His rebellious poetry was widely circulated among the youngsters. Even a section of the police and bureaucracy was influenced by his poetry.

It is not surprising that a very senior BJP leader, Ravi Shankar Prasad, who is presently the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, had opposed the inclusion of Paash's poem “The most dangerous thing” in an NCERT textbook in 2006. He had told the upper house of the parliament that Paash was a Naxalite. Such an objection coming from a right-wing party is not unexpected. Only recently, Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh announced that his government is going to enlarge the scope of the anti-naxal wing that was formed to deal with the Maoist insurgents, and rename it as the anti-left wing extremism division. Many read Singh's statement as a warning to all the left forces active in India.

Prof. Chaman Lal, a retired instructor from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, who is an authority on Paash, believes that the literature produced by the deceased poet is definitely under threat from the BJP government. “They tried to get his poetry removed from the textbooks in the past and now when they have an absolute power, what is going to stop them?” However, he assures that the intellectuals won't sit back quietly and will definitely throw a challenge. He points out that attempts to revive

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history from a narrow Hindu nationalist perspective have already begun.

Ironically, the BJP and Paash were on the same page during the Emergency that was slapped across the country by then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. The press censorship during that period evoked sharp reaction from both the intellectual class and political parties like the BJP. Paash was highly critical of Indira Gandhi and the Emergency. On one occasion he returned a paycheque to a Hindi newspaper that censored lines about Gandhi in his poem as a mark of protest.

The BJP is not the only force which has conveniently ignored this simple fact of Paash's position against Indira Gandhi. The Sikh separatists also overlooked it when they decided to eliminate him. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards for ordering the 1984 army invasion on the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, to flush out militants who had stockpiled weapons inside the place of worship. The army attack left many people dead and buildings inside the shrine destroyed, resulting in angry protests across the world. Following her murder, Gandhi's Congress Party engineered mass murders of Sikhs in different parts of India. Paash wrote a highly provocative poem in protest against this pogrom. In his poem, "Application for disinheritance" he challenged the Indian state to punish him as well for he also hated Indira Gandhi. Yet, the militants seeking Khalistan, a theocratic Sikh homeland, assassinated him in 1988. The day picked for his murder has a historical significance. When leftists across the world were commemorating the hanging of Bhagat Singh, a towering revolutionary who fought against the British occupation of India, Paash was gunned down by supporters of Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) on March 23, 1988.

It was sheer coincidence that his murder

came on a day that commemorated the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and his two comrades, Rajguru and Sukhdev, who were hanged together by the British government. But the political ideology of Paash made him inseparable from them. Much like Bhagat Singh, Paash was opposed to religious fanaticism of every shade and pulled no punches while criticizing both Hindu and Sikh extremists.

Bhagat Singh's nephew Jagmohan Singh, a prominent social justice activist, feels that Paash's legacy cannot be separated from that of his uncle, as they shared the same philosophy of resistance and secularism. Some other commonalities between the two are that both were Sandhus, and were born in the month of September. Jagmohan Singh feels that both these icons will remain relevant while the struggle against oppression goes on in India and elsewhere. "The date of his assassination and other commonalities are not merely symbolic. We need to recognize how Paash and others like him have continued the struggle started by Bhagat Singh and risked their lives."

It was his journal *Anti 47* that provoked the Sikh separatists against Paash. Since he studied a lot, he questioned and denounced their separatist ideology by quoting from Sikh scriptures. He shamed them by arguing that the real Sikhism was all about equality and compassion, and not

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fascism. Being a staunch secularist, he was equally critical of the Hindu extremists in his writings, and even condemned Mahatma Gandhi for publicly indulging in Hinduism.

The title of the journal symbolized a challenge to another attempt to divide India on religious lines like in 1947, when Muslim Pakistan was separated from India.

As a result, he was gunned down by the

extremists in his native village Talwandi Salem. Paash was visiting India back then, and had moved to California for economical reasons. His wife Rajwinder Kaur and daughter Winkle still live in California. There were protests in US following his murder. Years later, the KCF leader Labh Singh regretted killing him in his diary. He acknowledged that Paash was also fighting against the establishment, and by killing men like him the Khalistan supporters made a tactical mistake. However, Labh Singh acknowledged in the same text that they have no regrets for targeting the pro-establishment communist leaders who sided with the state during their struggle. Paash's father had no doubt in his mind that it was *Anti 47* that became a cause of his murder. Sohan Singh Sandhu spent final years of his life in California before he passed away in 2013. He kept all the documents, including the copies of the contents

from Labh Singh's diary that were published in the *Indo Canadian Times*. Two years before his death he showed old news clippings carrying the message from the KCF taking full responsibility for the murder. Sandhu believed that both the BJP and the Khalistan supporters, being “religious zealots”, complement each other and it should not surprise anyone why they both hated his son and his lofty ideas.

As one says that you can kill an individual but not the ideas, the rebellious rhymes of Paash refuse to die and still inspire many, including Bollywood stars like Rahul Bose, who during his Vancouver visit in 2010 acknowledged that he was influenced by his work. Bose is a social activist who believes that the Naxalites are fighting for the basics. “There are strong socio-economic reasons behind their violent actions,” he observed during

his visit. There are rumours that a film on Paash's life will soon be produced by Bollywood. His poetry has been translated in many languages. His narrative has been extensively used in *Red Ant Dream*, a powerful documentary based on the Maoist insurgency in central India. Made by

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independent filmmaker Sanjay Kak, it raises critical socio-economic and political questions behind the Maoist movement. One of the most provocative poems of Paash, read out by author Satnam, goes in the background like this:

*if security of the country is a condition
for life without conscience
for consent to every mandate
under the eyelid obscene
and the mind to prostrate before depravity
then poses a danger to us all
this security of the country...*

His popularity is one thing, but the inconvenient story about his assassination is also problematic for some, especially in this part of the world where the supporters of Khalistan are still active. A section among them continue to deny a hand in his killing, even in the face of what the KCF leader wrote in his diary. In June this year a one man show based on his life was played in Surrey. "Khetan Da Putt" (Son of the soil) was enacted by Rana Ranbir Singh. The script was based on the original writings of Paash, including his poetry and essays. The show was completely sold out and the

auditorium was fully packed, despite the fact that Khalistan supporters have a significant presence in Surrey. The show went well, but not without one small controversy. As Surinder Dhanjal, a leader of the Paash Memorial Trust, was making opening remarks before the play started, he was handed a note on which he was asked not to say a word about Khalistan. The Trust was established shortly after Paash's assassination, and has been publishing books of his work since then. Nevertheless, Dhanjal mentioned the involvement of Khalistanis in the murder, and reminded the gathering how some daring scholars came out in B.C. to denounce his murder back then. Once he concluded, the show began, ending with a standing ovation to the production team.

-RDNB

The most dangerous thing

Paash

The life of a pirate is not so dangerous
nor is a bashup in a police lockup
spying too is not very dangerous

to be woken up in the middle of the night
by the secret police
i admit is nerve wrecking
so is the quiet lonely fear
which follows you
and throttles your chest
when you are locked up in a cell
on a framed up false charge
for a crime you did not commit
all this i admit is bad enough
but all these are still not so dangerous

because the most dangerous thing is
to live like a dead man
when you don't feel any thing
when the routine of daily life saps you totally
the fixed life of
home to work
work to home
that is a life without dreams
that is the most dangerous thing

that is when
the hour is alive and kicking for everyone
excepting for you
that life is the most dangerous thing

because
like the eyes of a dead fish
you stare at everything
but cannot feel anything
about yourself
or about others

that's why
the most dangerous are those people
who have forgotten how to love people
for such people
live and shift aimlessly
in the ordinary humdrum orbit of their lives
in which nothing happens
nothing moves
like a placid cemetery

these people
are like that cold blooded moon
which feels nothing
no pain, love, sympathy or revulsion
when it goes over the courtyards
of the innocent victims
butchered in a slaughter

the most ugly sight is
that of a debauched old man
who is trying to sing a melody
but only succeeds in racking his weak chest

so the most dangerous life is the one
in which our conscience doesn't prick you
because your soul is dead
that's why I say

piracy is not so dangerous
spying is not so dangerous
bashup in a police lockup is not so dangerous
the most dangerous life is...

Translated by Suresh Sethi

Courtesy: <http://sotosay.wordpress.com/>

Ugly memories of Khalra episode refuse to die

The abduction and murder of prominent human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra by the Punjab Police in September 1995 continues to haunt his supporters in Canada.

Khalra had documented cases of police atrocities in Punjab during an armed conflict for a separate homeland for the Sikhs from the 1980s-1990s. The struggle for a theocratic state saw the killings of over 25,000 people, both by the militants and the security forces.

Khalra had gathered information on over 2,500 people who were killed in staged police shootouts and cremated unceremoniously as part of cover ups. He was abducted on September 6, 1995 and later killed in police custody. His corpse was never found. In 2005, six junior police officials were convicted for his abduction and murder, following a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The investigation was a result of the human rights campaign.

His Canadian supporters remember him as a dedicated human rights activist, who visited this country before his murder on the invitation of the World Sikh Organization (WSO) to address the Canadian parliament about his findings. Apprehensive of his safety, his friends suggested to him to stay in Canada and apply for refugee status. However, Khalra was determined to return and pursue his mission, according to WSO President Prem Singh Vinning.

Describing him as a "brave martyr", Vinning

demanded that the senior police officers involved in his murder should be brought to the book.

Khalra was associated with the human rights wing of the Akali Dal, a party that currently rules Punjab in coalition with the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party. Ironically, the Akali Dal-BJP government appointed Sumedh Singh Saini as the Director General of Police. Saini is a controversial police officer, who is frequently accused by numerous groups of being involved in human rights violations during the militancy. He is not convicted in any such case though.

The Akali Dal government in Punjab has failed to bring the Khalra case to its logical end, but the NDP, which is the Official Opposition of Canada,

||| SPECIAL STORY

bestowed upon him the title of human rights defender.

Khalra had another Canadian connection. His grandfather Harnam Singh was aboard the Komagata Maru ship that brought more than 300 Indian passengers to Vancouver in 1914. The Japanese vessel was forced to return under the discriminatory continuous journey law.

Harnam Singh was also a participant of the Ghadar movement launched in 1913 by Indian immigrants on the Pacific coast of North America. The Ghadar Party believed in an armed rebellion against the British occupation of India, and was formed as a result of the systematic racism against South Asians in Canada and the US, with the British Empire remaining a mute spectator to injustices against their East Indian subjects. The

Ghadar activists did not confine their struggle to freedom from foreign occupation, and continued their fight for social justice even after India gained its independence in 1947.

Incidentally, Ghadar activist Bujha Singh had joined the ultra-leftist Naxalite movement after independence, and was killed in a staged shootout in Punjab in 1970 when Akali Dal was in power. Khalra was also previously associated with the Naxalite movement, but later changed his political affiliations.

- RDNB

No regrets for saying no to Narendra Modi

Close to the 40th anniversary of India's state of emergency, the country is going through an undeclared censorship. Ever since the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected to power with brute majority in May, there has been a series of attacks on free expression.

Emergency rule and media censorship was imposed by the Congress government under Indira Gandhi back in 1975 in India, which is known as the world's largest democracy.

Ironically, the BJP had steadfastly opposed it and many of its supporters were detained for defying it. In order to avoid being arrested, Modi himself went underground during that period.

Four decades later, the assault on the free expression has increased under the BJP government. One of the most horrific examples is the recent arrests of 13 students in Kerala. They were held for mocking Modi in their college magazines.

The students of one college were arrested for including him in the list of “negative faces”, such as Adolf Hitler, Osama Bin Laden, and George W. Bush. If this was not enough, a Marxist youth activist was arrested in August for allegedly defaming Modi on Facebook.

A comedy play named after the BJP's election slogan “Ache Din Aane Wale Hain ” (Happy days are coming) was banned in Chandigarh under pressure from BJP supporters. The play mocks the policies of the BJP government. Interestingly, Chandigarh is represented by a film actor turned BJP MP Kiron

Kher—who remained silent on the issue.

Obviously, a sense of fear and intimidation prevails among the members of civil society in India due to these incidents. There is also a feeling that this may spill over to Canada and the U.S., especially in areas with sizable South Asian communities.

As the pro-Modi lobby grows stronger, the muzzling of independent media voices within the South Asian diaspora cannot be ruled out, especially when Modi is planning to visit the U.S. shortly.

Modi was earlier denied entry by the U.S. because of his government's complicity in the anti-Muslim pogrom in the state of Gujarat in 2002. Modi was chief minister of Gujarat when police allowed thousands of Muslims to be murdered by mobs led by Hindu fundamentalist leaders. Following the change of guard in India after the last election, the U.S. is now inviting Modi without caring for concerns raised by human-rights groups.

That the Modi lobby may start exerting its pressure on the local South Asian media became evident on August 5, which was my last day as news broadcaster and talk-show host with Radio India. I was told by my former employer that we should start endorsing Modi's proposed visit to the U.S. instead of giving voice to anyone who opposes it.

The provocation was my live interview with the spokesman of Sikhs For Justice, which has launched a petition asking the U.S. government to cancel Modi's visit.

I was told that Sikhs For Justice supports a theocratic Sikh state and under no circumstances such groups should be given any kind of legitimacy.

I do not agree with the agenda of Sikhs For Justice

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and being a secularist myself, I can never support any kind of theocracy. But being a journalist, I was only trying to give voice to a group that has launched an initiative on a very pressing issue.

I had to explain that Modi's proposed visit is not just being opposed by Sikhs For Justice but other non-Sikh activists too. But all my arguments fell on deaf ears.

I was rather told that if I cannot do this, the nature of my duties can be changed. I therefore adamantly decided to quit rather than continue working there.

I initially thought that this may be an excuse to reprimand me for some internal conflicts and misunderstandings and asked my former employer to terminate me and let me go. But he insisted that he wouldn't fire me and if I want to leave on my own, I could.

Following brief arguments, I announced my decision to quit. Although it was a difficult decision to leave an organization I served for the last 13 years, I have no regrets for saying no to Modi.

After giving much thought to what I have done, I decided to go public and make people aware of the threat of an undeclared censorship in India and its impact overseas.

Because it's not just my story, I decided that people should know. We all need to find what's going on behind the curtains and how big powers continue to exert their pressure on media outlets even outside India, possibly through diplomatic and other non-official channels.

I have no animosity against my former employer, who has always helped me in the past, first by hiring me and allowing me freedom on many occasions. But how he has succumbed to such pressure now can only be explained by him.

For me the bigger issue is a challenge coming from fascist forces that are blatantly attacking free expression under a right-wing government. All we need is a strong initiative against fascism and the

sophisticated ways it can use to muzzle independent voices.

With an idea of starting such an initiative, Radical Desi held an emergency meeting in Surrey on August 9 where representatives from various progressive groups showed up. Those belonging to other media outlets also came.

Among them was Tejinder Kaur, who said that she was fired by a Punjabi radio station under similar circumstances. Harpreet Singh of Radio Red FM came to show his support as well.

I want to thank all of the speakers who not only came to show solidarity with me but promised to strengthen any initiative against fascist attacks on free expression.

Others who spoke were Shahzad Nazir Khan from the Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians, Lakhbir Khun Khun and Harbhajan Cheema from the East Indian Defence Committee, Parminder Swaich from the Progressive Cultural Center, veteran communists Nazir Rizvi and Harjeet Daudhria, Hardev Amritsar from the Fraser Valley Peace Council, Sadhu Binning on behalf of *Watan* Magazine, Avtar Gill from the Indian Rationalist Society, Sukhdev Mann from the Aam Aadmi Party, Jai Birdi from Chetna Association, Bhupinder Malhi from the *South Asian Review*, and one of my former listeners, Devinder Takhar.

Those present on the occasion included Ross Street Sikh temple vice president Major Singh Sidhu, Marxist Communist Party of India (Pasla group) representatives Harmel Sunnar and Jasvir Dosanjh, Aam Aadmi Party activists Lakhi Chahal and Narinder Sandhu, prominent power lifter Sammy Toor, prominent poets Amrit Deewana and Nadeem Parmar, and author Jarnail Singh Sekha.

Gurpreet Singh is a founder of Radical Desi. He's working on a book tentatively titled Canada's 9/11: Lessons from the Air India Bombings. He has a Facebook page called We Are All Untouchables!!!

Sham secularism of Indo Canadian politicians exposed

Indo Canadian politicians who've been known for their strong secularist views will find it hard to explain their presence at a dinner in Surrey hosted by supporters of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party of India.

On the occasion of India's Independence Day on August 15, the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP) held an event at the Bombay Banquet Hall in Surrey where various elected and nonelected officials belonging to different political parties were present.

The venue was completely packed and organizers claim that close to 800 people showed up.

A news release issued by an OFBJP leader Aditya Kumar Tawatia stated that newly elected prime minister of India "Narendra Modi was hailed in Canada." Since the BJP led by Modi won a large majority in the May general election, the mood was understandably upbeat.

Modi was previously chief minister of the

western Indian state of Gujarat that witnessed an anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002. Because of concerns that the Modi government was involved in the massacre, he was denied a U.S. visitor's visa back in 2005.

Modi, like many other BJP leaders, belongs to the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS)—a group of volunteers dedicated to the cause of transforming pluralist Indian society into a Hindu state. The BJP is known for its pro-Hindu nationalism and has been accused of threatening religious minorities in different parts of India.

Besides, the party is mainly pro-business and shares social and fiscal conservative values with other right-wing governments across the world. It is not surprising therefore that supporters of the ruling Conservative party were present at the event. Before the May election when Tawatia organized a meeting in Vancouver, it was attended by prominent Indo Canadian conservatives.

What was interesting about the

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Independence Day dinner was the presence of Indo Canadian politicians with very strong ties with the moderate camp of the local Sikh community. Among them were NDP MP Jinny Sims and former B.C. Liberal MLA Dave Hayer. Hayer is currently fighting for a federal Conservative nomination.

Moderates have been fighting against fundamentalist supporters of Khalistan, an imaginary Sikh homeland in northwestern Indian. Hayer is the son of Tara Singh Hayer—the slain editor of Indo Canadian Times. Tara Singh Hayer, who previously supported the pro-Khalistan movement later, fell out with the extremists and died as a critic of violence.

His son is known as die-hard opponent of terrorism and has the strong backing of moderates in the community.

Sims was helped by a section of the moderates in the last federal election against former Liberal MP Sukh Dhaliwal, who was accused of coming too close to Khalistan supporters. Moderates had heavily criticised another NDP MP, Jasbir Sandhu, for organizing a parliamentary dinner for the World Sikh Organization (WSO). Many moderates view the WSO as a supporter of theocracy.

Surprisingly, a complete silence prevails in the moderate camp that is supposedly secularist over the presence of their allies at an event held by the BJP. In fact, some moderates belonging to the leftist organizations purposely skipped the event,

but nobody has come out with any strong statement against Sims or Hayer.

It appears that for these people it is too easy to criticize the supporters of Khalistan, but not the state power. This can only explain their double standards.

How can you be a secularist in one situation and choose to remain quiet in the other? The politicians too could have avoided going to the BJP dinner as the official and neutral Independence Day celebrations were held at the Indian consulate the same morning. Perhaps, they knew that nobody is going to question them, not even about their selective secularism.

-RDNB

Labour Day 2014: change at the top in the CLC

Change is inevitable in both nature and in human societies – sometimes for the better, though often far too slow and piecemeal for those who are impatient for a better world. A century ago, Vancouver was the scene of racist riots by white workers fearing for their jobs, and the South Asian passengers on the Komagata Maru spent weeks marooned in English Bay, the victims of British and Canadian authorities who sought to “keep Canada white.”

This year, for the first time, Labour Day takes place with the highest profile position in Canada's trade union movement held by a racialized person of colour. Hassan Yussuff is an immigrant from Guyana who began his working life as a mechanic in the auto plants of southern Ontario. Last May, he was elected President of the Canadian Labour Congress, in a razor-thin victory over the longstanding incumbent, Ken Georgetti. Just as interesting, the change in the CLC leadership was triggered by another immigrant. Lebanese-born Hassan Hussein is an Ottawa-based labour activist long associated with militant sections of the labour movement. During the 1990s, he was an organizer of the “Days of Action”, a series of one-day rotating general strikes and community protests against the far-right agenda of the Mike Harris Conservative government

As the CLC convention approached, it appeared that Georgetti would be unopposed for a record sixth consecutive three year term in office, despite growing restlessness over his perceived reluctance to help spearhead wider resistance against the policies of the Harper

Conservatives and the big corporations. But Hussein's entry into the race sparked strong interest at the grassroots level, such as among local Labour Councils which were facing funding cuts and structural changes imposed by the Georgetti leadership. That response set other events in motion behind the scenes, culminating with Yussuff's entry into the race. As a veteran member of the CLC executive, Yussuff argued that he had the necessary experience to become President and to embark in a new direction. In the end, Hussein lacked the backing of major unions to defeat Georgetti, and he strategically dropped off the ballot. But he was able to swing enough votes to help elect Yussuff, in return for a pledge by the new President to support major elements of Hussein's more militant platform.

The longer term result of this change remains to be seen. There are still powerful forces pushing the CLC away from the radical labour traditions represented by Hussein and his supporters, towards the “business unionism” model pursued by more “moderate” leaders. But this episode is highly relevant, since it reflects the changing demographics of the trade union movement in both English-speaking Canada and Quebec.

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Of course, there have always been large numbers of non-European immigrant workers in Canada. Here in British Columbia, these included the Chinese labourers hired to build the Canadian Pacific Railway through the mountains, the South Asians and other migrants who worked in the forestry, logging and agricultural industries, and many more. During the 1930s and '40s, Roy Mah, Darshan Singh and other organizers signed up thousands of immigrant workers into the IWA, which published materials in Punjabi, Chinese and other languages. Similarly, huge numbers of women became active in trade unions in British Columbia during the Second World War, as they were hired into jobs which had been almost exclusively male-dominated. The rapid expansion of the public sector in the post-war era was soon followed by the organization of thousands of women into the Canadian Union of Public Employees and other unions. Many indigenous workers were employed in the resource sector; some were very active in organizations such as the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, led by Homer Stevens, the famed west coast organizer who was of Greek and Cowichan ancestry.

But it was still unusual for women or non-Europeans to be elected to top leadership positions, and union conventions were largely gatherings of white males. Even when the delegates were relatively progressive and radical in their outlooks, this made it difficult and sometimes nearly impossible for the labour movement to become truly inclusive, and to actively promote the concept of leadership from the most oppressed sectors of Canadian society.

Today, over 50% of the membership of Canadian trade unions are women, almost one-third of the country's population (and workforce) are from racialized communities, and many unions have LGBTQ caucuses. Labour conventions have become far more diverse in terms of gender and ethnic composition. Increasingly, the impetus for labour to play a stronger role in building wide opposition to right-wing policies is being driven by activists who have deep experience in struggles

against racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia. The "business union" philosophy - that union leaders will try to cut deals with governments and corporations, occasionally using the strike weapon as a threat to push for slightly better terms - is being challenged by more militant activists who call for labour to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Indigenous peoples fighting destructive resource extraction on their territories, with immigrant workers who are treated as disposable by employers and governments, with women who still earn 30% less than their male counterparts, with environmentalists and others who want an economy that will be truly ecologically sustainable for future generations.

These activists were critical in the CLC election. But a note of caution is necessary. Canada's "House of Labour" is certainly far more democratic than (for example) our Parliament, where Stephen Harper reigns as supreme autocrat despite the fact that only one Canadian in four cast a ballot for his party. However, the CLC is burdened with an unwieldy structure in which major affiliates sometimes place their own narrow interests ahead of the need to build genuine, respectful alliances with indigenous peoples, racialized communities, and the millions of working people who are not represented by a trade union in their workplaces.

One of Hassan Yussuff's first actions as CLC President was to join the picket line of the locked-out IKEA workers in Richmond - most of whom are women from immigrant backgrounds, who have conducted a long and courageous struggle against two-tier wages and other concessions demanded by this greedy transnational. We hope that this is a signal that the leadership of the labour movement will truly move into action to defend the rights of all working people in Canada, especially those who have been historically the targets of most intense oppression by the Canadian state and ruling class.

Kimball Cariou is the Editor of People's Voice, a social justice activist, and a member of the Radical Desi Editorial Team.

Israel's war crimes on the people of Palestine

|| Nonstop. No breaks. A pregnant woman, the child in her belly and her two year old were killed in one of Israeli bombings on a house in Gaza... Also how an elderly woman was killed while she was having her iftar at

Maghreb prayer by bombing her house. She died holding the spoon in her hand, an image that will need a lot of time to leave my head." -- Omar Ghraieb, writing from Gaza

Over the past month Israel has launched air strikes and a military ground operation in Gaza, one of the most densely populated places on the planet. Schools, hospitals, UN shelters, playgrounds, universities, media centers, and vital public utilities have all been targeted. As a result of these indiscriminate assaults, almost over 1700 Palestinians have been killed, of whom at least 400 are children. Children account for 25% of all those killed and 30% of those injured. UNICEF says that 408 children have been killed in the assault, 2,502 children have been wounded, and 373,000 children have had traumatic experiences and need psychosocial support.

In talking to Palestinian activist Khaled Barakat about the current escalation in Gaza, he tells me, "Israel has several motivations: weakening the Palestinian resistance, creating and deepening Palestinian disunity, and gaining internal support and votes for the racist right-wing government. Israel is taking this opportunity to attempt once more to push Palestinians from their land."

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Occupied Palestinian

Territory (OCHA) reports that since the Israeli army began its ground operation in Gaza, it has created a buffer zone three kilometers wide (approximately 1.8 miles) along the entire Gaza Strip. As a result of this and the attacks, the number of displaced persons is at about 570,000 people — roughly one-quarter of Gaza's entire population. The number of displaced Palestinians taking refuge in the 86 UNRWA schools has swelled to 225,178 as of last week.

Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner General for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugee, has called the shelling of a school "a serious violation of international law by Israeli forces... children were killed as they slept next to their parents on the floor of a classroom in a UN-designated shelter in Gaza. Children killed in their sleep; this is an affront to all of us, a source of universal shame. Today the world stands disgraced."

The attack on Gaza occurs as Israel maintains an ongoing siege on the 1.5 million residents of Gaza. Israel's blockade of Gaza means control of airspace, waters and land crossings;

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disallowing residents to leave without permits; and prohibition on imports and exports including fuel and building materials. This means that children in Gaza have lived all or most of their lives under the Israeli siege that has blocked proper food, medicine, building supplies and other necessities of life from coming in to Gaza.

The result has been catastrophic: 34 per cent of Gazans are unemployed and 44 per cent are food insecure. This constitutes collective punishment and condemns Gazans to an open-air prison, leading the UN to call the siege "medieval" and the World Bank to characterize it as "the most comprehensive sanctions regime in modern history." During this time, nearly 2,300 Palestinians have been killed and 7,700 injured by Israeli forces.

The occupation of Palestine

Israel is consistently portrayed in our media as a victim of Palestinian violence. Rarely are we provided with the most fundamental fact: that Israel has been illegally occupying Palestine in contravention of international law.

In May 1948, what Palestinians call Al Nakba Day meaning "Day of the catastrophe" in Arabic, an estimated 700,000-800,000 Palestinian refugees were forcibly expelled from over 418 Palestinian villages to create the state of Israel. Today, there are over 6 million Palestinian refugees whose right of return is denied by the state of Israel.

Palestinians living in Israel are subject to systemic discrimination, while the people of Gaza and the West Bank continue to live under an illegal military occupation.

The illegal occupation of Palestine has been perpetuated by targeted killings, torture, assassinations, humiliations at over 300 checkpoints and roadblocks within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, curfews confining entire populations to their homes, annexation of Palestinian-owned land, demolitions of homes and a systematic policy of economic deprivation.

Simultaneously there are over 400,000 Israelis settlers living in illegal settlements. As lawyer Noura Erakat explains, "Israel continues to deal with Mandate Palestine's non-Jewish indigenous population as a demographic, national and cultural impediment to its settler-colonial project."

Israel has continuously been violating human rights under international law, and the International Court of Justice released an advisory opinion finding the construction of the Apartheid wall, that separates almost 300,000 Palestinians and their homes from their farmland and neighbouring communities, to be illegal and contrary to international law. Israel has been targeted by at least 65 UN resolutions and the Palestinians have been targeted by none.

As South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu has commented, "What do I see and hear in the Holy Land? Some people cannot move freely from one place to another. A wall separates them from their families and from their incomes. They cannot tend to their gardens at home or to their lessons at school. They are arbitrarily demeaned at checkpoints and unnecessarily beleaguered by capricious applications of bureaucratic red tape. I grieve for the damage being done daily to people's souls and bodies. I have to tell the truth: I am reminded of the yoke of oppression that was once our burden in South Africa."

World stands with Palestine, Canada and India amongst few standing with Israel

All around the world, people and governments are standing alongside Palestine. El Salvador, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Ecuador have all recalled their ambassadors to Israel, while Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay and Paraguay have suspended Free Trade Agreement talks with Israel. Millions of people have poured into the streets in every major city in the world to stand with the people of Palestine.

All three Canadian political parties, however, have shamefully lent their support to Israel, parroting the US line about "Israel's right to

defend itself." Even NDP offices were protested as a result of their position in support of Israel. This is not surprising. The structural violence, dispossession from land in order to control resources, sustained occupation and settlement expansion, targeting of women and children, and genocidal policies to displace and impoverish Palestinian people bear a resemblance with what Canada has done to Indigenous nations and peoples here.

Back in 2006, Canada was the first country -- even before Israel -- to boycott and vilify the government of Hamas. Prime Minister Harper pronounced Canada "Israel's best friend" and has vowed to support Israel "whatever the cost." Canada has also strengthened economic ties with Israel; under the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, bilateral trade has more than tripled. This has further entwined Canada in the economic normalization of the Israeli occupation. In addition, the two states have signed the Canada-Israel Public Security Partnership, to supposedly ward off "common threats" to "border security, illegal immigration, and terrorist financing." In the climate of the War on Terror, this is a pretext to intensify torture, racial and religious profiling, incarcerations, deportations and surveillance.

Similarly, India has increasingly adopted a stance in favour of Israel. From 1947 until 1992, India adhered to a policy of support for Palestinians as a sovereign people. The Nehruvian principle of solidarity with anti-colonial causes guided Indian foreign policy towards Palestine and in 1974, India became the first non-Arab state to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the official representative of Palestinians.

Only two decades ago, in 1992, were full diplomatic relations with Israel assumed. This came one year after India opened up its economy to liberalization. Indeed today, bilateral trade between the two countries is valued at over \$9 billion, with India constituting Israel's

single largest arms buyer. However, much like Canada and US support for Israel, India's alignment with Israel is not just economic but also increasingly ideological. For Hindu nationalists, the example of a Jewish homeland is convenient to justify their ethnic and religious supremacy. Furthermore, in the post 9/11 anti-Muslim climate and India's ongoing military occupation of Kashmir, India has banded together with Western powers to "fight terrorism." Sadly, this past month, the Twitter hashtag "#IndiaWithIsrael" trended across the country, with some of the first public rallies ever in India in support of Israel.

Solidarity with Palestine

In 1923 Gandhi wrote, "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French...What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct."

In response to ongoing atrocities by Israel, people of conscience around the world are taking up the call of Palestinian civil society to Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) Israel. One of the most effective tactics for the international solidarity movement to challenge our own government's economic, military and cultural support for Israel, the BDS movement is now calling on people to "intensify pressure on governments to impose a military embargo on Israel and to suspend free trade and bilateral agreements with it."

In Canada and India, activists have taken up BDS work, which has meant challenging cultural institutions and corporations to cut ties to apartheid Israel. Let's join this movement till Palestine is free.

Harsha Walia is a social justice activist who is associated with No One is Illegal. She has also authored a famous book, "Undoing Border Imperialism" and is very articulate on issues like racism and colonialism. She is part of the editorial team of Radical Desi.

South Asians show solidarity with Palestinians

Progressive social justice activists from the South Asian community in Vancouver have shown their solidarity with the Palestinians following the sustained Israeli attacks which have claimed more than 1,900 lives.

Many South Asians, including people of Indian and Pakistani origins, participated in a series of rallies held across Greater Vancouver area over the past weeks.

In particular, the Ghadar Party Centenary Celebrations Committee has come out with a strong statement in support of the Palestinians. Formed last year to commemorate 100 years of the Ghadar Party that was established by the South Asian political activists in North America in 1913 to liberate India from the British rule through armed revolution, the Committee resolved to denounce "Israel's occupation of Palestine and its present attacks on the civilian population of Gaza including its killings of innocent women and children."

In line with the Ghadar ideology that believed in international solidarity and opposed racism and colonialism, the Committee described the Israeli attacks as "war crimes" and Israel as an "apartheid state". The statement also supports the indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination in North America. One of the committee leaders, Lakhbir Khun Khun, also spoke at a rally held outside the Vancouver Art Gallery. His brief speech received applause from the audience. In fact, the South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) was one of the organizers of the event that received massive support from diverse groups, including indigenous

peoples and members of pro-Palestinian Jewish groups. SANSAD leader Chinmoy Banerjee was one of the speakers. In her emotional speech, indigenous activist Carol Martin equated the situation of Palestinians with that of the First Nations, whose traditional lands were occupied by the colonists in Canada.

A vigil held in Surrey under the aegis of the Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians attracted close to 300 people. The group also held a fund raising event for the victims of "Israeli aggression". Significantly, the representatives of progressive Indian groups, such as Taraksheel Sabha and East Indian Defence Committee, were also in attendance at the vigil. Apart from Pakistani Muslims, the members of the Sikh and Hindu communities were seen waving Palestinian flags during the vigil.

In the meantime, a prominent Punjabi poet Jeewan Singh Rampuri has written a protest poem against Israeli attacks, while Sikh Solidarity with Palestine has expressed its support through social media.

-RDNB

BJP celebrates Independence Day, Khalistan supporters observe "black day" in Surrey

An Independence Day celebration organized by the Overseas Friends of the BJP was attended by close to 800 people on Friday, August 15. Held at the Bombay Banquet Hall in Surrey, the event was attended by local BJP supporters with enthusiasm and fanfare, in the wake of their party's victory in the May election in India.

Earlier in the day, an event was held at the Indian Consulate in Vancouver, where the national flag was hoisted. The Counsel General of India in Vancouver, Ravi Shankar Aisola, read out the message from the President of India on the occasion. People from different faith groups and former Indian soldiers showed up at the ceremonies.

While the pro-India lobby was busy holding celebrations across Greater Vancouver, the supporters of Khalistan observed a "black day" in Surrey. A rally was taken out from the Guru Nanak Sikh temple, culminating at the Dashmesh Darbar Gurdwara in the evening. The initiative, which was first of its kind, was supported by eight

gurdwaras. Although Khalistan supporters have been marking August 15 as a black day every year, this was the first time that a rally was organized. More than 100 vehicles joined the rally, with participants carrying Khalistan flags and banners reading "India out of Khalistan".

The speakers at the Dashmesh Darbar Gurdwara denounced Indian freedom and vowed to continue their struggle for a sovereign state. They expressed concern over the growing threat against minorities under the new BJP government.

-RDNB

Issru's niece expresses sympathy with the man who hurled shoe at Badal

The niece of a prominent freedom fighter of India, Karnail Singh Issru, has expressed her sympathy with the man who hurled a shoe at the Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal at Issru village.

A resident of Barnala, Vikram was arrested for throwing a shoe at Badal while he was addressing a function held in the memory of Karnail Singh Issru, a hero of the Goa liberation movement. Issru was killed in a police action on the occupied territory of Goa on August 16, 1955. Despite India's freedom from the British empire in 1947, Goa remained under Portuguese occupation, and Issru and his associates were trying to liberate it.

Parminder Kaur Swaich, who is a famous social justice activist herself, told RDNB that Vikram did not do anything wrong. "All he wanted was to lodge his protest against the system. And if our leaders want respect from the people they should actually listen to their grievances rather than paying tokenistic tributes to the revolutionaries."

Swaich is a Vancouver-based supporter of the Indian Rationalist movement. She recalls that they have been watching state-sponsored events held at Issru village every year since her childhood. "What lacks on part of the government is that it has no concrete program or political will to follow the principles of our national heroes."

Vikram had raised slogans such as "Long live revolution." While he was thrashed by a

security guard, an unmoved Badal continued his address.

Vikram claimed that he was upset with corruption in the state, and had supported the Aam Aadmi Party in the recent parliamentary elections. He also complained about continuous police barbarity against agitating youth. Swaich said that she shares all the concerns raised by Vikram, and believes that instead of being brutal, the authorities should listen to the voices of dissent.

Bhagat Singh: An icon of continuous struggle for radical change

When Hamid Abdul, a Surrey-based photographer of Pakistani origin, offered to distribute free portraits of Bhagat Singh through a radio channel he received a flood of visitors at his studio. People came to pick up the famous black and white portraits of this towering revolutionary donning a hat and sporting moustaches. Likewise, when Indo-Canadian sports activist Jasvir Dosanjh organized a run at Surrey's Bear Creek Park in memory of Bhagat Singh, young and old came out in big numbers wearing T-shirts carrying the picture of their revered hero.

107 years after his birth, the iconic figure of the independence movement of India still remains popular, especially among the young and radical activists who continue to oppose racism, colonialism, occupations and imperialist wars.

Born in the politically charged environment of India exactly 50 years after the first war of independence against the mighty British Empire, Bhagat Singh has grown over the years as an unchallenged symbol of continuous struggle for social justice, not only in his homeland but across the world.

The British colonists who set foot on Indian soil met the first organized resistance by the natives in 1857. Described as Ghadar or "mutiny" by the British rulers, the rebellion brought different faith groups and classes together against the foreign occupation. While the mutiny was affectively suppressed, its aftershocks kept the

British Empire worried.

In 1907, when the British government was on alert and celebrated the golden jubilee of their victory over Ghadar, Bhagat Singh was born on September 28 in Layallpur (now in Pakistan) in an undivided India. His father Kishan Singh was a follower of Arya Samaj, a reformist sect of its time, and a staunch supporter of the freedom movement. The family shared joint heritage of Sikhism and Arya Samaj. Both the Sikh philosophy and the Arya Samaj opposed caste-based discrimination and other social ills. It is a separate matter that the revivalists on both sides were in sharp conflict with each other.

Bhagat Singh's grandfather, Arjun Singh,

also resisted the British policies and stood against oppression by rich and affluent landlords on ordinary village folks.

Bhagat Singh's birth coincided with a farmers' agitation that came to be known as the "Pagri Sambhal Jatta" movement. Launched by his uncle Ajit Singh, it gave an open call to the farmers to revolt against government policies that were strangling the farming class. Fearing revival of the first mutiny, the government started arresting the leaders of the agitation and sending them into exile. Ajit Singh was eventually forced to live in exile for years, until close to 1947 when India gained official independence. Another uncle of Bhagat Singh, Swaran Singh, died in jail in 1910. He was arrested for publishing anti-establishment literature and was subjected to torture leading to his death.

One can say that Bhagat Singh inherited patriotism and progressive values from his family, but his exposure to the outside world and political situation gradually shaped his own revolutionary ideas.

Far away in North America, when a group of South Asian immigrants formed the Ghadar Party, Bhagat Singh soon came under its influence. The group came to be known as Ghadar Party after a

militant newsletter was launched by that name on November 1, 1913. The name Ghadar was deliberately appropriated by these activists to assert the right of the occupied nation to liberate itself and revive the first mutiny. Their idea was to launch an armed rebellion in India once British government was caught in war with Germany, and establish a secular and democratic republic. As soon as World War I was declared in 1914, the supporters of the Ghadar Party began returning to their homeland to engineer an armed struggle. Kartar Singh Sarabha, one of the founders of the Ghadar Party, came in contact with Kishan Singh, who donated money to the militants for their cause. This was how Bhagat Singh first came to know about the Ghadar Party and Sarabha. He always considered Sarabha as his role model. This year, the portrait of Bhagat Singh was installed at the Abbotsford heritage Sikh temple, a place that was once the nerve center of the Ghadar Party activists. After all, Bhagat Singh followed into the footsteps of the Ghadar Party and pursued the path of armed struggle to establish an egalitarian society. The Ghadar Party understood that it was fighting against a system called imperialism, and Bhagat Singh strengthened this understanding by adopting a slogan, "Down with imperialism, Long live

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revolution!!!”

The first major shock that provoked young people including Bhagat Singh against the British rulers was the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. The British army fired indiscriminately at a peaceful gathering of the supporters of passive resistance movement at a public park in Amritsar. The people who became victims of the barbarity had assembled in protest against the arrest of a few prominent leaders of the non-violent freedom movement. This was a deliberate attempt to break people's unity as those gathered at the park belonged to different faith groups, including Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The Hindus and Muslims had celebrated their religious festivals together close to this incident. Obviously, this was not in the interest of the British government which believed in the divide and rule policy. The bloodshed became a turning point in the history of the liberation struggle and added fuel to the fire. Bhagat Singh visited the site of the massacre and collected the blood-soaked soil that always reminded him of the repression.

In 1921, another bloody episode jolted Bhagat Singh. Sikh activists were seeking liberation of their historical gurdwaras from the corrupt priests who were patronized by the British administrators. The struggle became a question of national pride. In February that year the Sikh activists were slaughtered at the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh religion, when they went there to liberate

it peacefully. The corrupt priest of the temple had hired ruffians to get the activists murdered. Bhagat Singh visited the place and wore a black turban as a mark of protest against this mass murder.

Bhagat Singh later supported the non-cooperation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the pacifist camp. However, Gandhi called off the movement, fearing violent upheaval. This had disillusioned many young people, including Bhagat Singh who started looking for more radical alternatives to free India from foreign occupation. The year 1922 became a major milestone in his life. Like many other

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patriotic youngsters he joined the Lahore National College, an initiative of supporters of freedom movement. The college became a nursery of revolutionaries where Bhagat Singh and his close friend Sukhdev came in contact with Bhagwati Charan Vohra, who was well informed about Russian revolution. Vohra's company enlightened him politically. Through a teacher at the college he established links with the Hindustan Republican Association, a revolutionary party active in Kanpur, and became close to a prominent leader of the group, Chandershekhar Azad, and another comrade B.K. Dutt.

In 1924 Bhagat Singh defied a ban on serving meals to the participants of another Sikh movement launched for the liberation of gurdwara in Jaito. He also made a fiery speech in support of the movement, following which an arrest warrant was issued against him. He remained underground for some time and used this period to study and enhance his intellectual capabilities. He soon became an ardent reader of revolutionary literature and a writer. He wrote against social ills such as untouchability and religious fundamentalism, and emphasised peoples' unity. He gradually adopted leftist ideology. Although he slowly became an atheist he remained respectful toward revolutionaries who had strong religious beliefs. He was instrumental in renaming the party as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

In 1926, Naujawan Bharat Sabha or Young India League was formed. Its aim was to propagate

communal harmony and socialist ideas. Bhagat Singh and his comrades kept trying to organize students and youngsters through various initiatives such as public meetings and lamp shows.

He was first arrested in 1927 but due to lack of evidence was freed on bail.

In 1928 a prominent nationalist leader Lajpat Rai was badly injured in a police action on peaceful demonstrators. He died later. Bhagat Singh disagreed with the deceased leader on many issues, like his departure from the broader nationalist interest to communal tendencies, yet he and his associates decided to avenge Rai. The reason for such political action was that his death caused depression among the masses, and a need was felt to do something to raise public confidence and demoralise the repressive colonial police force. A police officer was assassinated by the group right outside his office. Bhagat Singh had to leave Lahore. Vohra's wife Durga helped in his great escape to Calcutta by disguising herself as his wife.

While in Calcutta, Bhagat Singh followed the activities in the pacifist camp of the Congress party which had not asked for complete independence. He noted that Subhash Chander Bose, who represented the left wing within the Congress, had moved a resolution in support of complete independence in the party assembly, but it was scuttled by the right wing under Mahatma Gandhi who believed in dominion status. They later went to Dutt's village and spent some time to chalk out a future course of action. A revolutionary center was established in Agra around this time.

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In 1929 when the British government brought repressive anti-people bills, Bhagat Singh decided to go into the parliament and throw bombs in the assembly. He and B.K. Dutt managed to get in the assembly, and after throwing smoke bombs rained leaflets carrying their message. All they wanted was to make the deaf government hear and not kill anyone. Instead of running away they both courted arrests. While in jail, Bhagat Singh spent a lot of time writing and reading. He also resorted to hunger strikes against the discriminatory attitude of the jail staff toward Indian prisoners and other excesses of the administration. All they sought was the rights of political prisoners at par with the European prisoners. These hunger strikes helped in educating the Indian masses about their cause and created a strong bonding between them and the people. One of their comrades, Jatinder Nath Dass, died during the hunger strike. It influenced national events to an extent that Mahatma Gandhi had to leave his presidency of the Congress party. The party command was given into the hands of a young leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, who became the first prime minister of independent India. On January 26, 1930 the Congress was forced to adopt a resolution in support of complete independence.

In the meantime, Bhagat Singh and others were charged with waging war against the King. During the trial they used the court as a political platform to reach the public. They spoke with courage and made it clear to those in the court that they wanted revolution

which will go on until the exploitation of the human race ends. On the directions of the British government, a special tribunal with the powers of a high court was established on May 1, 1930. It too was replaced within twenty days, by the judges who passed judgment in the absence of representatives of the suspects.

The court sentenced Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru to death. Their associates kept trying to rescue these men but could not succeed. Vohra died while testing an explosive that was to be used to free these men from the jail.

Even in the face of death Bhagat Singh remained committed to his cause. A year before his hanging he wrote a thought provoking essay, "Why I am an atheist?" in which he explained why it is important to have rational and scientific thinking. He was so determined to die like a hero that in correspondence with his family he used very harsh words for his father, who tried to get amnesty for him. He wrote that if he had to choose between his life and his principles, he would choose the latter. On March 23, 1931 the three men were hanged to death.

Bhagat Singh's struggle was not confined to the liberation of India from foreign rule. He was determined to carry on the fight to bring social equality and build a secular society. He took upon himself the unfinished task of the Ghadar Party. Much like he chose Sarabha as his role model, Bhagat Singh became a source of inspiration for Udham Singh, who assassinated the former Lieutenant Governor of Punjab Michael O'Dwyer in

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London in 1940. O'Dwyer was responsible for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and mass executions of Ghadar party activists. Udham Singh had declared that he be identified as Mohammad Singh Azad, in accordance with the secular values preached and practiced by the Ghadar Party and Bhagat Singh.

That Bhagat Singh and his legacy are still relevant can be gauged from the fact that there was a lot of enthusiasm in Greater Vancouver when his birth centenary was celebrated in 2007. Burnaby City Hall issued a proclamation, and Bhagat Singh's portrait was installed next to Che Guevara's at a bus drivers' union office by Harbhajan Atwal. The portrait was later removed from there and installed at the Abbotsford heritage Sikh temple. These symbolic gestures aside, the supporters of Radical Desi networks organized a big public event that year at a

community hall in Burnaby where speakers from various grassroots level movements, such as No One Is Illegal, vowed to keep the struggle of Bhagat Singh alive. Indeed, Bhagat Singh's mission remains incomplete until there is a complete social equality both in India and Canada, until the occupation and colonization in the lives of the indigenous peoples end, until discrimination in the name of race, religion, caste, language or sex stops, and until real political alternatives for an even development and growth are adopted by our leaders.

-RDNB with inputs from Bhagat Singh's nephew and well known social justice activist Prof. Jagmohan Singh.

A South Asian hero who was known as Canadian

While the Canadian establishment talks tough against terrorism in the post 9/11 period, little has been done to recognize a hero named Canadian who died fighting war against terrorism 28 years ago in India.

Darshan Singh Canadian was assassinated for opposing religious extremism in Punjab on September 25, 1986. This came after he challenged the ideology of those seeking a theocratic homeland for the Sikhs.

His real name was Darshan Singh Sangha, but he was affectionately called Canadian after spending 10 years in Canada. Here, he worked in sawmills and attended the University of British Columbia.

He arrived here in 1937 like any other "East Indian" immigrant for a prosperous future, but eventually became a political activist. He was also drafted in the army during the Second World War and received military training.

As a student, he came in contact with progressive Canadians and joined the Young Communist League. He also encouraged his Indian compatriots to join the B.C. labour movement.

While in Canada, he not only supported the freedom struggle back home to drive Britons out of India, but also participated in the campaign for Indians' right to vote in this country. They had been disfranchised in 1907 and got back the right to vote in 1947, the year India got its independence.

Though Canadian could have stayed here for the rest of his life, he chose to return to his

home country and joined the Communist Party of India. He also worked for the peasant movement. Eventually, he became a member of the state legislative assembly in Punjab.

During 1980s when Sikh militancy was at its peak in Punjab, he vehemently criticized religious fanaticism through his writings and his public speeches, travelling across Punjab to spread his message. Canadian did not buckle under pressure despite the potential threat to his life—and was gunned down right near his village by Sikh separatists.

He was among 300 Communists who were systematically murdered by the religious extremists who enjoyed the support of the Pakistani spy agency ISI. This was before terrorism entered the consciousness of North Americans.

Canadian's daughter Amardeep Kaur lives in Vancouver. She remembers how he faced threats to his life during those days, yet he did not take security cover from the government. He was visiting Vancouver in 1984 when the then-Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, was shot to death by her Sikh bodyguards. Kaur recalls that he was very disturbed with the bloody events in Punjab.

At a personal level he was known for his honesty and integrity, and he lived modestly. He also taught his lesser educated wife, Harbans Kaur, who lives in Punjab and takes care of the family's farmland.

-RDNB

Credibility? Past, present and future To pride flag or not to pride flag?

In an historic first, Toronto just hosted the first ever World Pride held in North America. The scenes of Canada's largest city embracing millions of people proud of who they are, was amazing. The economic impact of the willingness to fly the Pride flag on municipal flag poles has served many many Canadian cities well. From Halifax to Victoria, from Prince George to New Westminster, the Pride Flag flies on municipal buildings for at least one day during the pride season. Some embrace the GLBT community even further, by flying the flag for the whole week surrounding their Prides. Vancouver goes so far as painting crosswalks in rainbow colors in the West End "village", and installing rainbow banners to adorn light posts.

Just think of the positive economic impact to Surrey if city hall was to fully embrace Pride. Who knows, one day we might even seek to hold the World Gay Games, World Pride (which has a human rights convention attached to the celebration) or an international GLBT conference. Vancouver had Pride House (the first) during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, when Surrey flew the Olympic flag on municipal poles as a cultural co-host city. We hold the annual Pride Festival in Holland Park - the Olympic Park. What a powerful a message raising the Pride Flag in Surrey on July 6 (even for a few hours) could have sent. The city that claims "the future lives here" and claims to be the beacon of diversity has unfortunately a long way to go. The Surrey Pride Society did manage to display the largest Pride Flag in Western Canada at Holland Park, again as Linda Hepner and city hall reneged on their offer to "fly banners as high as

the birds in the atrium".

The GLBT Alliance sent a delegation to city hall on June 9 (this after a refusal to acknowledge that an official request was made to fly the flag in February, during the Winter Olympics in Sochi, in support of the GLBT athletes competing there under the anti-gay laws enacted by the Putin Government). At that meeting we were instantly granted one of our three requests (thank you, Council): an Exhibit of GLBT History of Surrey that includes a Pride Flag in the atrium of the new city hall. At the same meeting, Councillor Rasode asked that the clerk come back with a report explaining how local municipalities were flying the flag. This gave us hope that Surrey City Council would in fact research and come back with a positive report. The request in Surrey was in response to some 43 other Canadian municipalities already flying the Pride Flag, even our sister city of New Westminster, and including the provincial and federal governments.

Move to June 23 and the response of Surrey City Hall. Epic fail to deliver by Surrey First mayoral candidate Linda Hepner. First it was Mayor Dianne Watts who had ownership of the issue (February 2014). Madam Mayor, it is 2014 and I for one had ensured that you and all members of Council received an email that included a very specific request: to join the other cities across Canada in supporting the GLBT Athletes in Sochi, following Putin's installation of some of the world's recent most aggressive anti-GLBT laws.

The agenda for the June 23 meeting was released, and we discovered that the flag policy would be under the corporate report, which does not allow for any public discussion. Also, the

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corporate report gave the impression that a brand new (they warbled about the fact that there ever was official flag policy) flag policy was proposed that would only allow the federal, provincial and municipal flags to fly on all municipal flag poles. (In 2010 the Olympic Flag flew under the municipal flag, so a no cost solution????). There was no report provided in response to Councillor Rasode's request. Rather a "new" flag protocol was pushed through Council. There apparently will be no further discussion on that issue, until perhaps we have a new Mayor and Council elected in November 2014.

(The relevant video clips of the delegation and response are on the "Encourage Surrey BC City Hall to fly the Pride Flag" Facebook page.)

Mayor Watts (acting like the lame duck Mayor she is) excused herself from both Council meetings that engaged in this dialogue. What calls Ms. Hepner's credibility into question was how she related the decision of Council, and then her "offer" to allow effectively any size banner or flag, "that could be as high as the birds flying from the ceiling of the atrium".

After the exhibit was built, with the awesome assistance of city staff, and the Pride Flag standing on the flag pole at its side, Surrey Pride representatives arrived with a 20' x 40' Rainbow Flag, to the consternation of staff at city hall. Ms. Hepner was unavailable to assist staff and confirm or deny that she had given the direction that this was all OK. The staff, one of whom was at the Council meeting, refused to listen to, and/or watch the video clip. If the offer was not a bona fide offer, then fine, but Ms. Hepner was unable for comment on a Thursday afternoon to take responsibility for her words and promises. At the time of writing, there has been no written response from Ms. Hepner, her staff or city hall as to the reason that the 20' x 40' piece of coloured fabric cannot be hung inside the atrium.

Lame duck Mayor Watts took to the airwaves promoting a community flag pole ... awesome. At a cost of \$200,000. Expensive for a flag pole? Why not have been proactive and install the 4th flagpole while building the new city hall? This was not the first time that the Pride Flag had been discussed with Dianne Watts. The kicker: the community has to raise the \$200,000. (Next question - what policy determines who gets to use that pole and what causes or celebrations will be endorsed usages of the pole?)

The taxpayers (who include the GLBT community) of this city have paid more than their fair share. The diversity that this administration has espoused throughout this term needs to be defined. Perhaps the discussion needs to be the definition of diversity, and how the second largest city in the province can have an open and honest dialogue on all the issues affecting this great city. Perhaps it is time for community associations to embrace this dialogue, and also to embrace the community Hub concept of Councillor Rasode, to make it a reality in all the town centres of our city, and to hear what the citizens (the electorate) really have to say.

The latest off the record remark is that a 4th pole would not cost anywhere near the \$200K mark, and that a 4th flag pole will be installed by the city in time for Pride 2015. How do we hold them accountable? As the election ramps up, the mayoral race has now become more about revenge than the successful now and future of our city. The social issues will once again be discussed for being reactive rather than proactive, and again one asks where is the credibility and accountability that all these politicians espouse. Perhaps it is time for the voters of this wonderful city to look towards the local community advocates that know what it is to live in the hubs.

Martin Rooney, Community Advocate, Surrey (Whalley) BC Canada.

When is it ok to discriminate?

As most of you will have heard, Trinity Western University in the Fraser Valley plans to open a law school. Trinity is a Christian school, which is not an issue per se but a section of their Community Covenant Agreement has raised some

eyebrows in the legal community. The Covenant is a document that all students and faculty must sign in order to be admitted to, or work at, the university. The specific section in question says that students will refrain from: "sexual intimacy that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman".

On Trinity's web site they break the Covenant down giving Biblical references to the various sections. On the section in question several Biblical verses are cited, among them: Proverbs 6:24 Romans 1:26-27 Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20:14,17; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4; Proverbs 5:15-19; Matthew 19:4-6. You can look those up for yourself but what is interesting is what is missing, Leviticus 18:22. This is the verse where homosexuality is variously described as "an abomination" and the penalty is death. Interesting that they would shy away from the most famous verse, the one that is most hateful and violent. Many of the other verses are, at best, misogynist as they refer to women as chattel or the temptress or are not even mentioned, as if women's sexuality is non-existent. Ricky Gervais said it best, "It's almost as if the Bible was written by a bunch of racist, sexist, homophobic, violent sexually frustrated men, instead of a God. Weird." Or perhaps, not so weird.

Discrimination against identifiable groups,

including those in the LGBTQ community is not allowed under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And yet Trinity clearly discriminates against that group. It makes one wonder how a law school that is supposed to teach students about our governing documents can instruct students that discrimination is not allowed under Canadian law and then ask its students and faculty to break that section of The Charter. If you teach a section of our law and ask your students to sign a document that opposes that law, how are we to trust anyone graduating from that institution? Some have suggested that people could sign the agreement anyway and deny their very nature. To those I would refer you back to the Bible, Exodus 20:16, that is the verse about "bearing false witness".

I want to be clear; it is Trinity's right to discriminate in this way. According to the laws of our land, religious institutions can discriminate if it is based on a sincerely held religious view. I am a strong supporter of all rights including those of the religious community although why this special exemption is there has never been properly explained, at least to the secularists. While Trinity does receive some public funds, so do other religious schools that promote the same, and in some cases, more egregious discrimination. So while we secularists are not happy about the law in this case, it is the law.

But with this religious right to discriminate comes consequences. And here I believe is the crux of the matter. To use an analogy, it is my right to stand up and say all manner of vile things about any race, religion or cultural group. I can use the "N" word to describe black people; I can use other similarly nasty words to describe various visible minorities. It is my right to do so, but with rights come responsibilities so I have to understand that

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exercising this right, in this manner, will result in my being rightfully ostracized from society; I could even lose my job. I may have exercised my constitutional rights, but I cannot escape the consequences of those actions.

So it is with Trinity Western. They have chosen to hide behind the religious exemption to discriminate so they must face the consequences. The school, of course, in a delicious case of irony says they are being discriminated against. This can be answered in simple, schoolyard parlance. You stated it. Although a slightly more nuanced approach would be to say that giving the right you have to an other group is not denying your rights.

In another section the Covenant, titled "Areas for Careful Discernment and Sensitivity", is this: "True freedom is not the freedom to do as one pleases, but rather empowerment to do what is best." Really? I was under the impression that freedom means exactly that, to do as one pleases, within the law of course. Trinity has chosen to do what they believe is right, albeit technically outside the law. With their strange view of what freedom is and their insistence on claiming religious exemption to discriminate and it makes one wonder what kind of lawyers this school would produce. While the section on "Discernment and Sensitivity" is not one germane to the certification of their law school it should raise flags about how students are instructed in "discernment".

How is this "discernment" manifested? "Best" in the quote above, of course is not described, instead, students are told to rely on what the Bible says. But how is one to interpret (or discern) what the Bible thinks is "best"? The Trinity site answers this in several places by saying that: "...the University seeks to prayerfully and objectively assess". In other words, if you are uncertain or need clarification, you pray about it. I don't know about you but most people I know who pray for an answer find their prayers are answered in direct accordance to their already

firmly held beliefs. The legal system would laugh at such a method of truth finding, as should any critical thinker.

Getting back to the issue of why Trinity is being denied their law school we find another practical matter. There are a limited number of law school positions in any given province in any given year. Declaring an entire group of individuals ineligible for these spots not only waters down the pool of possible candidates for law school, it also, by default, makes those in the LGBTQ community harder to become lawyers as a certain number of spots are denied to them.

So where are the law societies on this?

Law societies in BC and Ontario have said they would not recognize a law degree from Trinity and the Nova Scotia Law Society said it would recognize the school if students were given the option of opting out of the covenant. That is something the university has said they will not do. Law societies in Alberta, Saskatchewan, P.E.I., Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut have decided to accept Trinity Western's graduates. So as of this writing, a Trinity Western University law graduate can in fact practice law, just not in B.C. Ontario or Nova Scotia. Does this sound like those graduates are being denied the right to practice where they want? The right to practice law is not protected by our Charter; the rights of gays and lesbians are protected.

The issue boils down to this: should a school that promotes contravention the Charter (one of the foundational documents of our legal system), be allowed to teach the law? And should a given number of positions at law schools be denied because of sexual orientation.

The irony of course is that this will ultimately be resolved in a court of law. I look forward to that legal battle.

Pat O' Brien is the leader of Center for Inquiry in Vancouver and a regular columnist of Radical Desi.

BJP's double-speak on "Bahu" politics

The Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party's criticism of Sania Mirza being chosen as brand ambassador of the newly formed Telangana state of India has exposed its double-speak on "Bahu" politics.

Well-respected tennis player Sania Mirza was appointed brand ambassador of the fledgling South Indian state in July. The BJP questioned her credentials to be the brand ambassador on the grounds that she is married to a Pakistani cricketer, Shoib Malik. Describing her as a "Bahu" (Daughter-in-law) of Pakistan, the BJP condemned the decision of the state government. Another argument was that she does not originally hail from Telangana state.

Interestingly, the same BJP had opposed Sonia Gandhi becoming the Indian Prime Minister in 2004. Gandhi, a Congress party leader, is of Italian origin and was married to the late Rajeev Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India. She gradually got involved in politics, and the Congress party under her command got the largest number of seats in the 2004 elections. Yet, the BJP was not willing to let her become the Prime Minister, citing her foreign origin. The current Indian foreign affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, threatened to shave her head if Sonia Gandhi was allowed to become the PM. As a result Sonia Gandhi appointed Manmohan Singh as

the Prime Minister. Singh was the first Sikh to be the PM of a Hindu majority nation.

The BJP back then did not let a Indian "Bahu" become the PM, and this time took a contradictory position when it came to honour an Indian woman for being a Pakistani "Bahu". If Mirza does not deserve such an appointment, what was wrong having Gandhi as PM being a dedicated Indian "Bahu"?

As far as Mirza's regional heritage is concerned, as somebody from outside Telangana, how does the BJP explain the appointment of Amitabh Bachchan as the brand ambassador of Gujarat state tourism? Bachchan, a top movie star, does not belong to the Gujarat that is under BJP rule. By bad-mouthing against Mirza, the BJP has actually shown its real colours. One thing that

binds the two prominent "Bahus" is that both are from religious minority groups: Mirza is a Muslim, Gandhi is a Christian. And the BJP does not have a clean record when it comes to the treatment of minorities in India. Both these minority groups have been targeted by the BJP and its Hindu nationalist allies at different times in Gujarat and elsewhere. The BJP needs to treat all "Bahus" equally and respectfully instead of having double standards. **-RDNB**

Thinking of the continued legacy of Komagata Maru

A report on the Desi Dialogues at Cafe Kathmandu, Vancouver on July 20, 2014

At this cafe, moderated by Summer Pervez, a group of 12 people held a vigorous discussion on the significance of the centenary of Komagata Maru. The discussion was positioned within the various events concerning the centenary in the Vancouver area. It was remembered that these events were in marked contrast to the situation 25 years ago, when only a few people in the South Asian community were concerned with Komagata Maru and the general public not at all.

The Premier of the province at the time, Bill Vander Zalm had even silenced an attempt to raise the issue in the legislature with a mocking comment. Today there were commemorative events in many places including public institutions, and the mainstream media were also reporting on the incident.

But very little had changed at a deeper level in regard to the policy of the Canadian government toward immigrants of color from the global South. A meeting in Edmonton had pointed out that if Komagata Maru had come to Vancouver today the passengers would not just have been kept from disembarking but would have been put into prisons, many of them charged as criminals.

Gurdit Singh would have been imprisoned as a "human smuggler." Any tendency to be smug about the positive changes in the status of our community should be tempered by the knowledge that those who come to these shores on boats today, as people from China and Sri Lanka recently have done, are not only treated as criminals by the government but face the same

racist, exclusionary rhetoric from the media that the passengers of Komagata Maru did. The media and the government construct such immigrants and refugee seekers as illegal aliens, criminals and terrorists. And the public, even the South Asians who have now found their comfortable place as citizens, endorse these views just as the public did in the time of Komagata Maru. Nor should we forget that there is a class as well as a racial basis to this exclusionary attitude. Those who come by boats such as Komagata Maru are vilified, imprisoned, or turned away. But the many more who come by planes generate no such assault of public outrage and are processed in the usual way. We should also note that despite the apologies to the Chinese, the Japanese, and South Asian communities for past acts of conspicuous discrimination, the present government has pushed through an extremely discriminatory immigration act, Bill C-24, that has been severely criticized by immigrant justice activists and the legal community. This act makes family reunion more difficult and creates two tiers of citizenship, in which naturalized citizens only enjoy a conditional citizenship.

More blatantly than ever the government has placed immigration in service of capitalism, While citizenship is made more difficult the government serves the interest of business by increasing the number of temporary foreign workers who can be treated as indentured labour, without effective rights and always under the threat of deportation and blacklisting. It was reported to the group that at one of the most important commemoration events held on Musqueam territory, the chief welcomed the South Asian guests saying that if Komagata Maru had arrived in pre-colonial Musqueam land the

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passengers would have been welcomed as the Europeans were when they first came on their ships. Just as imagining the arrival of Komagata Maru in our time revealed the continuity of the discriminatory racist-nationalist policies of the Canadian government the imagining of Komagata Maru in the past of pre-colonial Coast Salish territory uncovered the foundation of these policies in colonialism.

Yet there was another lesson in this event, in which the food served was Indian. It had seemed to the person who reported this event that the First Nations were serving their usual ceremonial function in Canada today while South Asians were affirming their privilege of citizenship, of belonging in Canada. We need to remember that we live on unceded and treaty lands taken from the First Nations while the First Nations live as the most oppressed people on their ancestral territories.

Komagata Maru is a foundational event in the history of the South Asian community in Canada and remembering it is to place it in the consciousness of our youth to ground them in the past struggles of the community. Memory is an anchor of identity. But we must resist the attempt by some to claim it as the property of a particular group and use it as social and political capital, which serves the interests of political parties and governments. We must also resist the attempt to

confine this story as a South Asian story and affirm it as a Canadian story, as a part of Canadian history. Its legacy is a lesson in historical injustice that should guide us toward the creation of a just society in Canada. We should go even further and remember Komagata Maru as a part of the global history of migration, displacement, and quest for refuge on the one hand and the increasingly restrictive and punitive practices on the borders of nation states on the other. There are 50 million refugees in the world today. Countless millions are internally displaced and innumerable people will face displacement as a consequence of climate change. In response to this the nation states that have been our reality for the last 400 years have increasingly fortified their borders with physical barriers, laws, violence, and prisons. Remembering Komagata Maru should also make us reflect on citizenship in such a world, a world in which the rights and privileges of citizenship that we greatly desire also depend on the continued oppression of aboriginal people and the exclusion of those who want to cross our national borders.

Desi Dialogues is an open discussion group that usually meets on the first Sunday of the month to discuss issues of urgent concern to the South Asian diaspora in the Vancouver area. The topics are chosen by the moderator, Summer Pervez, with input from those who wish to participate. They are announced on Facebook and through email.

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