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Violence as a Tactic of Social Protest in Postcolonial India

From the Railway Workers' Strike to the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy, 1974-1976

Abstract

In March 1974, trade union leader and Chairman of the Socialist Party of India, George Fernandes, formed a new independent trade union of railway workers and then led a massive nation-wide strike lasting about a month. Two years later—March 1976—Fernandes was arrested as the principal accused in the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case, a plot to bomb strategic targets in New Delhi in resistance to Indira Gandhi's authoritarian rule. How did George Fernandes' political work change over these two years—from engaging in traditional trade union movement tactics during the Railway Workers' Strike in 1974 to being the ringleader of a plan to bomb strategic targets in resistance to the postcolonial state? Why would an activist who advocated non-violent social movement tactics change strategies and end up leading a movement that primarily uses violent tactics? I argue that in its violent repression of the Railway Workers' Strike and its illegal imprisonment of the strike's leaders, Indira Gandhi's administration demonstrated to Fernandes and other opposition party leaders that there was no room for a peaceful solution to the ever increasing social conflict of early 1970s India. Therefore, when Gandhi instated herself as dictator, longstanding advocates of *satyagraha* believed that symbolic violence against the state was the tactic most likely to lead to the restoration of democracy in India.

Keywords: Labour Movements; Authoritarianism; Violence; Historical Sociology; States of Emergency.

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"Set the Ganga on fire"
— George Fernandes, 1975[1]

Introduction

On June 12, 1975, the Allahabad High Court found Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi guilty of corrupt election practices and barred her from holding office for six years [Chandra, 2003: 64; Dhar 2000: 258; Henderson 1997: 1; Nayar 1977: 4]. Instead of conceding, however, Gandhi declared a state of emergency, thereby installing a dictatorship in India [Devasahayam 2012: 3; Dhar 2000: 250; Drieberg and Mohan 1975: 1; Frank 1977: 465; Henderson 1997: 2]. During the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case trial, George Fernandes described "what Mrs. Gandhi's dictatorship has meant to the country. A bridled judiciary; a muzzled press; sterilized people; hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens imprisoned; the brutal torture, killings, shootings in the jails and outside; the campaign of lies and slander against Jayaprakash Narayan and others; concessions to monopolies; the workers denied their rights; the false claims of the so-called gains of Emergency—we have witnessed all this and more in these 19 months of dictatorship" [Fernandes 1991: 91]. During the Emergency, political meetings, rallies and agitations were banned, state agents arrested and detained without trial; both academic freedom and the free press were eliminated [Chandra 2003: 160; Dhar 2000: 223; Frank 1977: 465; Henderson 1997: 80; Kalhan 1997: 9; Mavalankar 1979: 86; Tarlo 2003: 36]. Students, intellectuals, and journalists were subject to surveillance (and condemned without trial) for dissenting views [Chandra 2003: 156; Devasahayam 2012: 35; Dhar 2000: 223; Kalhan 1997: 11; Henderson 1997: 16; Nayar 1977: 72; Sinha 1977: 58; Tarlo 2003: 35]. Police shot and killed protesters without repercussion [Henderson 1997: 62]. Peasants were rounded up and taken to "family planning camps" where they were forcibly sterilized [Chandra 2003: 203; Henderson 1997: 69; Kalhan 1997: 12; Tarlo 2003: 37], while in cities, entire slums were bulldozed, leaving the most vulnerable urbanites without food, sanitation, water, shelter, or access to health care [Chandra, 207; Henderson, 63; Nayar, 128; Sinha 1977 60]. These measures that disproportionately targeted Muslims and Dalits were carried out under the explicit rubrics

[1] Quoted from an underground communique penned by Fernandes during the Emergency in which he makes a case for the violent overthrow of the state.

of "development" and "progress" [Gandhi 1984: 374, 440-1; File no. 1 (3)1973 (LAW), Delhi Archives; 19/25/73-IA, NAI; PN Haksar Files, Instalment I & II, Subfile no. 57, NMML].

Indira Gandhi claimed that the Emergency (1975-1977) was necessary because "a climate of violence and hatred" [Gandhi 1984: 178] "had come in the way of economic development" in India [*ibid.* 179]. Therefore, as Gandhi declared in 1975, "a time for unity and discipline," [*ibid.*: 179] including the suspension of the constitution, was necessary in order to quell "false allegations" [*ibid.*: 177], along with the "*bandhs*, *gheraos*, agitations, disruption and incitement" which aimed "to wholly paralyse the government" [*ibid.*: 178]. While Gandhi acknowledged that the wave of social protest that spread across India in the early 1970s was a response to "economic difficulties" including, "inflation, increased unemployment and scarcity of essential commodities" [*ibid.*: 198], in her view, social protest only made economic conditions worse. Therefore, she claimed, authoritarian rule was warranted to stop this wave of social protest. Gandhi instated herself as dictator in order to quell postcolonial society's claims for the radical social change promised by national independence in 1947 but not yet realized by the 1970s.

In 1974, economic downturn coupled with social protest led railway workers across India to form independent trade unions and then launch a wildcat strike. The independent trade unions were led by the Socialist parties. While committed to Gandhian non-violence, through their experiences during the Railway Workers' Strike of 1974, Indian socialist leaders came to the conclusion that only violent means could achieve the true objectives of national liberation in postcolonial India.[2] How and why did Indian socialists come to abandon Gandhian non-violence and instead conclude that a plot to bomb strategic targets and overthrow the state was a preferable strategy?

Typically, activists who are committed to non-violent civil resistance and those committed to the use of more violent tactics are distinct groups with little to no overlap. Therefore, this unique case in which committed practitioners of Gandhian non-violence explicitly and thoughtfully adopted violent tactics provides an opportunity to further assess theories of violence and non-violence. This debate is of central

[2] Jayaprakash Narayan, leader of the Bihar Movement, held nuanced views on the role of violence in social protest. While he believed that non-violence as practiced by Mohandas Gandhi was perhaps the ideal form of social protest, in a 1934 letter written to Jawaharlal Nehru, Narayan claimed that he did "not fully understand non-violence" particularly in its "spiritual and religious" dimensions (Krüger Files, Box 45, File 340-1, ZMO). During the Bihar Movement, Narayan called for violent social protest against the state as a last resort.

importance to theorists of social movements and revolutions, particularly in the postcolonial context where several theorists have made convincing arguments for the use of violence against the colonial state [Césaire 2000; Fanon 2002; Minh 2007; Singh 2007]. In the subcontinent, this debate is especially lively. While Mohandas Gandhi famously claimed that "*satyagraha* is always superior to armed resistance," [Gandhi 1964: 29], one of Gandhi's younger contemporaries, Bhagat Singh, theorised that in a context such as the Punjab, or anywhere else where there are indiscriminate killings of unarmed colonial subjects, violent tactics are the only means by which to successfully overthrow the state [Singh 2007; see also Minh 2007]. The key theoretical question, therefore, that emerges from this debate between theorists of Gandhian non-violence and theorists of revolutionary violence like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Ho Chi Minh, and Bhagat Singh, is when, in which cases, and how does violence become a necessary tactic against the postcolonial state?

In this essay, I contend that the Railway Workers' Strike revealed that Indira Gandhi and her cabinet's violent suppression of workers' peaceful dissent necessitated a shift to more violent tactics in order to enact the radical social change promised by colonial independence but never delivered. In detailing the trajectory of this group of activists from a non-violent trade union movement to the bombing of strategic targets in New Delhi, I will examine the theoretical implications for how and when violence becomes a necessary tactic against the postcolonial state.

Theories of violence and the postcolonial

While in 1970s India, social movement strategies of groups such as the Dalit Panthers and Naxalites often led to violence, it was not globally unique for this conjuncture. During the global 1970s, struggles against imperialism adopted violent tactics as part of their social protest repertoire [Slobodian 2012; Varon 2004]. Examples of anti-imperialist and postcolonial movements that used violence as a tactic included the Weather Underground, Black Panther Party, and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the United States, the Brigate Rosse in Italy, Tupamaros in Uruguay, and the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in Germany, to name a few. Ulrike Meinhoff, the intellectual strategist of the RAF, wrote:

> The law that gets broken when department stores are set on fire is not a law that protects people. It is a law that protects property. The law says that another

> person's property must not be destroyed, endangered, damaged, or set on fire… It protects those whom the law in a capitalist state assigns the right to amass wealth. The law is meant to separate the workers who create the products from the very products they produce. And however desperate an act it is to set fire to a department store… this breaking of the law, this criminal act, is what is progressive about setting fire to a department store. [Meinhoff, 2008: 246-247]

While Meinhoff and her contemporaries explicitly theorised the use of violence as social movement strategy, sociology failed to incorporate the academic study of these types of social movements into the literature, even though the sociology of social movements was never more vibrant than it was in the 1970s.

In the academic literature in sociology, therefore, violence as a social movement tactic and strategy has largely evaded serious scholarly consideration. The sociological study of social movement tactics largely focuses on non-violent forms of protest as the only legitimate social movement strategies [see for example: Alinsky 2003; Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1990; McAdam 1982; Morris 2003; Olson 1965; Piven and Cloward 1977; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2004; Scott 1985]. While Charles Tilly's *The Politics of Collective Violence* [2003] is among the few mainstream sociological studies of violent social movements to take violence seriously as a valid form of politics, it is biased in the value it places on this form of political expression. Tilly's stated goal is to, "identify the best ways to mitigate violence and create democracies with a minimum of damage to persons and property" [Tilly 2003]. In other words, Tilly would have us take violence seriously only so that the movements using this tactic can be silenced by state policies. The omission of violence as part of a valid toolbox of tactics for social movements necessitates further value-neutral analysis of the role of violence in social movements.

Many scholars have convincingly demonstrated that this occlusion reflects the Eurocentrism of the social movements literature [Bayat 2016; Chatterjee 2004; Fadaee 2017; Omvedt 1993]. Simin Fadaee's proposed solution is to "recognis[e] the prevalent characteristics of Southern social movements [as] a prerequisite for a more radical break with the Northern-centric nature of social movement studies" [Fadaee 2017: 46-47]. The scholarly examination of violence as social movement tactic, then, can be seen as part of this project to create a non-Eurocentric social movement theory. In the postcolonial context, violence is a more common strategy and tactic for social movements [Fanon 2002; Césaire 2000]. By neglecting the study of violence as social movement strategy, we fail to recognise postcolonial social movements as such and, therefore,

unduly bias general theories of social movements. A scholarly analysis of violent forms of resistance against the postcolonial state is needed to correct this oversight in the sociological literature on social movement tactics and strategies, particularly in creating social movement theory that is well suited to the context of the Global South.

Frantz Fanon's essay, "On Violence," provides a strong grounding for a scholarly analysis of violence as a postcolonial social movement tactic [Wallerstein 1970: 229; 2009: 120]. In the postcolonial context, violence is especially salient [Césaire 2000: 42]. After national independence, the anti-colonial movements that promise radical social change largely fail to deliver and, therefore, groups who participated in national liberation because of its promise of radical, often anti-capitalist, social change continue to push for change in the postcolonial period [Arrighi 1990: 52-53; Silver and Arrighi 2000: 55; Silver 2003: 148]. National independence, as seen through these radical protests for social change, "is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" [Fanon 2002: 35] or as Walter Rodney contends, post-independence political leaders, "were frankly capitalist, and shared fully the ideology of their bourgeois masters" [Rodney 1972: 279]. While the postcolonial state may be comprised of locals, they nonetheless uphold the same hierarchies of power that radical anti-colonialists sought to dismantle. True national liberation is the historical process of reversing the social hierarchies of colonialism through "the movements which give it historical form and content" [Fanon 2002: 36]. These movements, writes Frantz Fanon, "can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence" [*ibid*.]. "Decolonization," Fanon contends, "is always a violent phenomenon" [*ibid*.: 35]. But "the atmosphere of violence, after having colored all the colonial phase, continues to dominate national life" across the post-colonial world, and postcolonial rulers adopt the same "aggressiveness" and the same social hierarchies of the colonizer [Fanon 2002: 76-77, 81]. As Ho Chi Minh wrote, "colonization is in itself an act of violence of the stronger against the weaker" [Minh 2007: 10]. In the struggle for national liberation, "the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" [Fanon 2002: 86] and in the postcolonial period, "The struggle they say, goes on. The people realize that life is an unending contest" [*ibid*.: 94]. Violent resistance against the postcolonial state is a continuation of the struggle to enact the radical aims of national liberation that have failed to take root in the postcolonial period.

In the South Asian context, the use of violence as a social movement tactic is fraught. Perhaps the best known social movement theorist from

the subcontinent is Mohandas Gandhi and his concepts of *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *satyagraha* (non-violent civil resistance). *Ahimsa*, a religious term with origins in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, is, for Gandhi, almost a synonym of *satyagraha*. Both concepts have an "active nature" and are distinct from how western liberal thinkers conceptualise civil disobedience [Skaria 2016: 4]. Gandhi, "treats *satyagraha* as an opening onto another swaraj [self-rule]—another freedom and equality" distinct from the freedoms enshrined in a liberal democracy.

Satyagraha, in contrast to democratic rule, is the freedom underlying religion and ethics, as it necessitates a surrendering of the self; a relinquishment of sovereignty [Skaria 2016: 5]. "In Gandhi's writing", claims Ajay Skaria, "*satyagraha* is the struggle of being to emerge from its obscuring in formal or theological religions, to open instead onto a freedom, equality, and universality organized around what he calls 'pure means'" [*ibid*.: 6]. Sovereignty is an important component of *satyagraha* and registers in several different ways. For Gandhi, sovereign power does not lie only in the state [Skaria 2016: 8], but is also found in the self. Autonomy is a sovereign power institutionalised in liberal democracy but, in the case of the colonised, autonomy is only granted to some "selves" who are purported by the colonial state to possess the ability to reason. Thereby, liberal democracy dominates those who are excluded. However, domination is also something that beings inflict on themselves, by self-regulating feelings, thoughts, actions, and so on. Gandhi therefore claims that in surrendering autonomy through *satyagraha*, one exposes both the violence of liberal democracy and of the self. Or as Skaria writes, "the subaltern can refuse subordination only by participating in domination. What is lost is the possibility of an exit from subalternity that does not participate in domination" [*ibid*.: 9].

While Gandhian protest intends to expose the violence of liberal democracy through non-violent civil resistance, Gandhian thought has been accused by critics on the Hindu right for failing to prioritise Hindus and Hinduism over other religions and religious groups in South Asia, and of casteism, elitism, and racism by critics on the Indian left. But Ho Chi Minh, for example, went further in his critique of Gandhi, claiming that *satyagraha* would have been an inadequate tactic against French colonial rule in Indochina, writing that,

> [t]he Gandhis and the de Valeras would have long since entered heaven had they been born in one of the French colonies. Surrounded by all the refinements of courts martial and special courts, a native militant cannot educate his oppressed and ignorant brothers without the risk of falling into the clutches of his civilizers. [Minh 2007: 9]

As Minh elucidates, *satyagraha* has limited efficacy when colonial agents care little for the sanctity of human life.

Punjabi political theorist, Bhagat Singh, joined the Gandhian nationalist movement as a high school student. However, after the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the Gurudwara Nakana Sahib killings, and the Chauri Chaura Incident, Singh became disillusioned with *satyagraha* as a strategy for colonial independence. The British Raj, in killing unarmed protestors, Singh observed, showed no regard for human life in the Punjab. Given the violence and brutality of the British Raj in the Punjab, Singh contended that *satyagraha* would be ineffective, and that violent revolution was necessary. Wrote Singh, "[w]hen and where did the ruling class ever yield power and property on the order of a peaceful vote— and especially such a class as the British bourgeoisie, which has behind it centuries of world rapacity?" [Singh 2007: 66]. Singh believed that British rule, because it operated by the joint logics of capitalism and colonialism, would not be overthrown without violence. Furthermore, this violent resistance would have to take the form of a class struggle, he theorised, given that the ultimate goal of the British colonial state was to further Britain's economic interests. Wrote Singh,

> [...] it would seem that once we stand for the annihilation of a privileged class which has no desire but to pass from the scene, we have therein the basic content of the class struggle. But no, [British Prime Minister] MacDonald desires to evoke the consciousness of social solidarity. With whom? The solidarity of the working class is the expression of its internal welding in the struggle with the bourgeoisie. The social solidarity that MacDonald preaches, is the solidarity of the exploited with the exploiters, in other words, it is the maintenance of exploitation. [Singh 2007: 65]

Singh argued that cooperation with the British Raj was akin to collaborating with the global capitalist class, as the British Raj was a representative of the interests of global capital. Therefore, claimed Singh, to create a more just and equal Punjab it was not sufficient to achieve political independence from Britain.

> We want a socialist revolution, the indispensable preliminary to which is the political revolution. That is what we want. The political revolution does not mean transfer of state (or more crudely, the power) from the hands of the British to the Indians, but to those Indians who are at one with us as to the final goal, to be more precise, the power to be transferred to the revolutionary party through popular support. [Singh 2007: 161-162]

Singh believed that only a socialist revolution in which power was transferred from the bourgeoisie to the masses would transform colonial society [see also Habib 2007]. "After that", Singh argued, "to proceed in right earnest is to organise the reconstruction of the whole society on

the socialist basis, if you do not mean this revolution, then please have mercy, stop shouting, '*Inquilab Zindabad*' [Long Live Revolution]" [Singh 2007: 161-162]. For Singh, the national independence movement was just one step towards true national liberation.

Singh, like Fanon, was influenced by Marxism, but rethought it for the postcolonial context. Also like Fanon, Singh saw the violence that colonial rule inflicted, and concluded that (1) non-violent resistance would be ineffective in the face of the indiscriminate killing of unarmed colonial subjects, and (2) that the true spirit of national liberation lies not in winning political independence from colonial rule but in the reorganisation of society in such a way as to dismantle colonial hierarchies. One theoretical question that emerges from this juxtaposition of Gandhian *satyagraha* with theorists like Fanon, Césaire, Minh, and Singh, who advocate the violent overthrow of colonial rule, is: when, in which cases, and how does violence become a necessary tactic against the postcolonial state?

While the men who led the Railway Workers' Strike of 1974 and the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy were one and the same, the tactics used by these two movements were markedly distinct. In the two years following the Railway Workers' Strike, the very same activists abandoned *satyagraha* and instead adopted violent tactics. This case is, therefore, well suited to test these theories of violent postcolonial social movements because it allows us to ask how and why one particular group of activists changed its thinking about social movement strategy and the postcolonial state based on the state's response to a strike organised under the principles of Gandhian non-violence.

Methods

In order to answer these questions, I constructed an original database based on archival sources and oral history interviews (see Methodological Appendix). I spent two years in India undertaking archival research and oral history interviews, three months in London and less than one year in Berlin undertaking archival research. In London, I utilized the India Office Library at the British Library to detail the colonial origins of the Indian Coffee House, along with the global politico-economic context in which it was created. In Berlin, I looked to the archives at the Zentrum Moderner Orient. In India, I have worked in various archives across the country in order to research

India's anticolonial labor movement, of which the Indian Coffee House workers were a part, along with the political economy of postcolonial India from 1947-1977. I spent considerable time at the larger archives including the National Archives of India and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, but have also made use of smaller and regional archives. In New Delhi, these include the VV Giri Archives on Indian Labor, the PC Joshi Archives on Contemporary History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, the Central Secretariat Library, and the Delhi Archives. I have also conducted archival research outside of Delhi, including in the Punjab State Archives in Chandigarh, the Haryana State Archives in Panchkula, the KN Raj Memorial Library, and the Kerala State Archives, both in Thiruvananthapuram.

Archival records of the Emergency remain classified, and newspapers were censored at the time. Newspapers therefore are not reliable and archives are not available sources on the Emergency. I have made use of newspaper sources however, but only in the period before censorship of the press. To learn more about the Emergency and the resistance to it, I conducted oral history interviews with the men who led the movement for democratization in India. I interviewed 11 activists, all male and high-caste; 10 Hindus and one Jain. They ranged in age from 60 to in their 80s. They include one trade unionist who is a professional activist from Bengal; two Communist sympathisers: one, a physics professor and Indian classical musician from Bengal, and another, a journalist for *The Hindu* from Uttar Pradesh; eight Socialists: a journalist for *The Hindustan Times* from Bihar, a Poet from Bihar, an administrator at Max Müller Bhavan and later Heidelberg University from Bihar, a businessman from the Punjab, an Art History professor from Uttar Pradesh, a professor of Hindi literature from Delhi, a Law professor from Delhi, and a Gandhian peace studies professor from Bihar. I was put in touch with these men through my contacts in student politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University. I enlisted the help of contacts in both Communist and Socialist student groups. My Communist contacts told me that CPI(M) Headquarters at AK Gopalan Bhavan believed that I was a CIA agent and therefore refused to facilitate any interviews. In contrast, my Socialist contacts helped to arrange interviews. (I myself was not active in Socialist or Communist groups during my time as a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University.) The interviews were conducted in the homes and workplaces of the activists in question, or at the Indian Coffee House at Mohan Singh Place in New Delhi. I logged a total of 33 hours of interview time: the shortest interview lasted one hour and the longest 8 hours.

As state archives across the Global South continue to "reflect the old regimes," [Ritchie 2015: xii], and fail to preserve documents on anti-state protest, oral histories have become an increasingly popular approach in such work. For decades, oral history methods have been used by historians and historical social scientists to recover narratives—mainly of leftists and feminists—whose voices have been disproportionately silenced in historical documents [Abrams 2010: 153; Yow 2005: 3]. As Alessandro Portelli describes, "[e]ver since the Federal Writers' Project interviews with former slaves in the 1930s, oral history has been about the fact that there's more to history than presidents and generals" [Portelli 1991: viii]. However, oral history in the Global South often necessitates a set of different research and interview techniques in order to make the dialogue between interviewer and narrator more compatible with indigenous norms of communication [Thompson 1998: 582-583]. In addition, as with archival sources and survey research responses, it is important to remember that oral histories can and do contain gaps, embellishments, lies, and otherwise exhibit patterned deviations from what is already an elusive historical truth [Portelli 1991: viii-ix].

The oral history evidence presented here is treated as cautiously as any other historical evidence. Just as is the case with archival documents, oral histories can be "incomplete, in error, or created to mislead" [Ritchie 2015: 110]. Historical statements "are not necessarily truer if written down at the time, written later in memoirs, or recalled in testimony" [*ibid*.: 111]. So oral history evidence must be treated just as critically as any other historical document or artefact when used as historical evidence in a scholarly context. When properly done, however, oral histories can capture evidence that eludes the written archive. As Donald Ritchie explains, "oral history helps interpret and define written records and makes sense of the most obscure decisions and events" [*ibid*.: 112]. When used as part of my strategy of triangulation with archives, newspapers, memoirs, and other evidence, the oral histories I present in this essay capture a sense of what the political atmosphere felt like during the Emergency, in the memories of those who resisted it. As such, they are a unique historical record.

In order to complement and triangulate my oral sources wherever possible, I have sought verification in the few memoirs, government documents, and secondary sources available on the Emergency, a common practice for evaluating oral history interviews in academic research [Abrams 2010: 7; Ritchie 2015: 103]. In so doing, I am able to adjudicate among contradictory materials, signalled below, and

evaluate various sources in order to draw my own conclusions about the events of the Emergency. In some instances, however, neither historical documents nor secondary sources are available in order to evaluate the interview data. In instances where written historical sources are unavailable, I have asked narrators to comment on what other narrators have said, thereby providing a widely accepted check on the interviews I conducted. In cases where narrators gave answers that differed from evidence I found in archives or secondary sources, I first allowed the narrator to tell his story, allowing him to challenge my preconceptions about the historical events in question; then, later in the interview, I would challenge his version of the facts in order to foreground and wrestle with inconsistencies among interviews or between interviews and written sources [see Ritchie 2015: 114-116].

I also employed a research assistant, a well-known Indian Socialist with an activist legacy. He helped to put the narrators at ease by his presence at the interview, by his support of the project, and by his conviction that the finished project would do justice to their views. While he attended each interview, I led the interview and asked all questions.

Oral historians strive to provide an environment of mutuality and equality in the interview setting in order to foster open communication [Portelli 1991: 31]. Nevertheless, race and gender hierarchies along with cultural norms of gendered interaction (a particularly salient concern in the South Asian context) have been shown to influence the reliability of oral history interviews [Yow 2005: 170-172]. Given the fact that I am a white woman, my race and gender potentially hindered my non-white, male narrators from feeling comfortable in sharing details of their lives with me. My gender could (and in my view, very likely did in some instances) cause narrators to "talk down" to me, simplifying their answers based on the assumption that, as a woman, I lacked knowledge of the topics under discussion. Nevertheless the latter dynamic may actually have been an advantage, encouraging more in-depth answers to my questions. In addition, I attempted to compensate for racial and gender differences not only through the presence of my research assistant at the interviews [Thompson 1998: 583], but also by showing, through my professional credentials and through conversations with the narrators, that I was capable of having informed discussions about politics [Yow 2005: 172]. As a non-white man whose family is known to the narrators, my research assistant also afforded narrators the opportunity (which several took up) to make asides or give responses to him in Hindi, which many narrators assumed I did not understand or speak.

Nevertheless, my research assistant made clear to the narrators at the beginning of the interview that Hindi responses or comments would be translated and included in the records of the project.

Although I strove for neutrality in my interviews, many times narrators would ask me about my personal views on politics and about whether or not I was sympathetic to their political views—a common question many oral historians face [Ritchie 2015: 118]. I responded honestly to narrators who asked about my political views, expressing to them that while I am a leftist (as were the majority of social, labor, and feminist historians who first developed oral history methodologies in the early 20th century [Abrams 2010: 5]), I would not characterize my political views as socialist or communist. While I was friendly, empathetic, and tactful, I also voiced scholarly scepticism where appropriate. Researchers are taught that they are not supposed to intrude their own beliefs and identity into the interview. However, narrators pick up on the class, manner, speech, and other characteristics of the oral historian and may self-censor or tell a sanitized version of events based on the narrator's assumption of the oral historian's political views [Portelli 1991: 30-31]. By having this conversation with the narrator about politics, especially when conducting interviews about leftist politics, the oral historian is more likely to obtain accurate material.

Railway workers' strike

The Railway Workers' Strike of 1974, I argue, was a defeat because it was non-violent. Workers and trade union leaders were ultimately unprepared for the violent repression that Indira Gandhi and her cabinet meted out to workers and their allies. In the following section, I will detail how the state used increasingly violent means of combatting and, ultimately, breaking the strike.

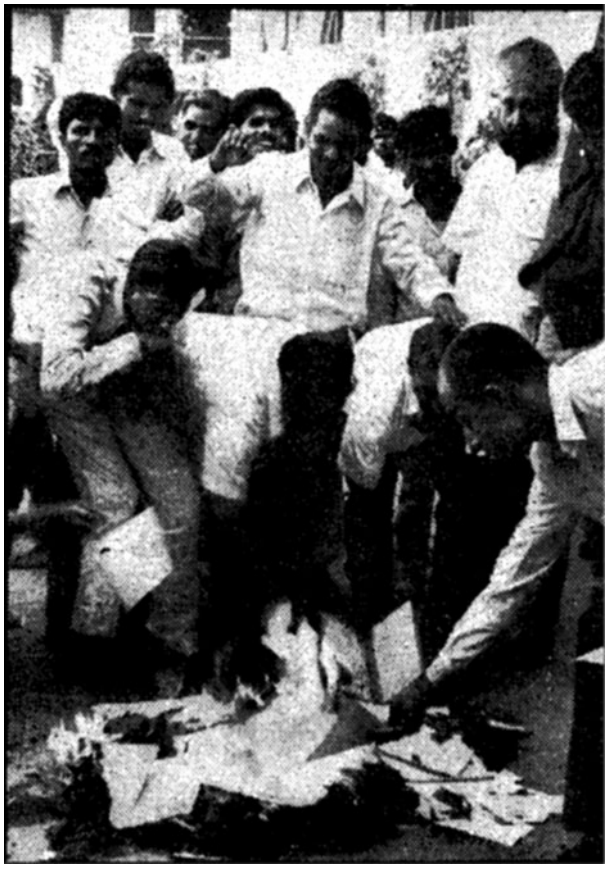
The 1974 Railway Workers' Strike was a response to deteriorating economic conditions in 1973 [Ananth 2016: 17], but it was also rooted in decades of grievances—including the absolute and relative decline in incomes in the decades leading up to the strike [Sherlock 2001: 294]. Drought, along with increased oil price, led to 70% inflation from 1968-1974, and 30% inflation in the 1973-1974 period alone [*ibid*.: 298]. Railway workers had not seen an increase in wages since 1959 [*ibid*.: 299], which meant that their real wages had significantly declined since independence.

Southern railways workers went on a wildcat strike in the evening of March 12th, 1974 over failed negotiations regarding wage theft ("Madras rail" 1974). The photo above (figure 1) shows striking rail workers in Madras burning copies of railway operating manuals [*ibid*.]. Trade union leader George Fernandes called for an increase in wage and benefits or else workers would begin a legal strike starting April 10th [*ibid*.]. That same day, workers formed a new trade union federation, the Indian Railway Workers' Federation, with 225,000 members and affiliated with the AITUC ("New federation" 1974). Union leader SA Dange stated that the new unions would prevent workers from falling prey to, "undemocratic and bureaucratic" attitudes among railway workers' trade union leadership [*ibid*.]. Railways Minister LN Mishra dismissed railway workers' unrest as "reactionary forces trying to disrupt the economy" ("Don't go" 1974; "Mishra's plea" 1974).

Although the April 10th strike was avoided, on April 24th, 1974, over 100 railway workers' unions gave notice that they would begin an indefinite strike on May 8th ("Over 100" 1974). LN Mishra expressed concern that a railway workers' strike would negatively impact India's already faltering economy ("Mishra's plea" 1974). The pre-emptive arrest of railway workers across the country strained negotiations between the union and the Railways Ministry ("Over 100" 1974), but Fernandes preferred to settle the dispute through negotiations ("Railwaymen want" 1974). Even though negotiations had barely begun, the state was already primed to break the strike with violence. A socialist MP told reporters that he had seen a secret circular that had been issued by the Superintendent of Railways to authorize the purchase of materials that would facilitate the deployment of military personnel in the event of a railway workers' strike [*ibid*.: 4]. He said that the government was "itching for a fight" by spending Rs. 30 million to break a strike that had not yet occurred [*ibid*.].

By the end of April, the Railways Ministry conceded to one of the railway workers' demands—to limit the number of hours of work in a single shift ("Railwaymen win" 1974). However, as George Fernandes told reporters, this concession covered only some categories of workers; it did not allow breaks during shifts, failed to guarantee an eight hour day, and calculated overtime pay on the basis of a fortnightly average instead of the actual number of hours worked [*ibid*.]. Talks between the Deputy Railways Minister, M Shafi Qureshi, and George Fernandes ended in deadlock after Qureshi refused to concede demands for a bonus and for wage parity with other public sector workers ("Rail strike" 1974).

FIGURE 1
Railway workers burning operation manuals (© Times of India).



George Fernandes did not attend future negotiations because he, along with other union leaders, was arrested ("Leaders blame" 1974) and charged with "breach of faith" for refusing to sign the contract proposed by the Railways Ministry ("Impending Railway Strike" 1974). Fernandes was surprised by the arrest, recounting that,

> [...] from inside the jail I wrote immediately to the Prime Minister and the Railway Minister, protesting against what they had done and suggesting that we wanted a settlement of our dispute, and that there was no provocation. In fact,

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> we were on the verge of a settlement, and I did not see why they had to do this kind of thing. [Fernandes 1991: 19]

After Fernandes' arrest, Mishra rejected workers' demands, claiming that the two sides had reached a "final outcome" ("Mishra rejects" 1974). During an interrogation related to the negotiations, Ventkatesh R. Malgi, General Secretary of the Railway Mazdoor Union, died while in Bombay Police custody ("Union leader" 1974). While the exact cause of his death remains unknown, workers protested, calling for the release of all Railway Workers' union leaders. Mishra retorted that union leaders would only be released from jail if workers called off their strike ("Talks if" 1974).

On May 2nd, railway workers began a wildcat strike. Workers staged walk-outs, set railway cars ablaze[3] and, in Pattabiram, attacked a station master [Samaddar 2015: 583]. Rank and file members played a prominent role in the wildcat strike, as official union leadership soon withdrew. In Bombay, other trade unions joined the wildcat strike, including the seamen's union and the port and dock workers' unions, along with Maharashtra State Transportation employees ("Bandh paralyses" 1974; "ST workers" 1974). In Madras, workers set fire to trains ("Bandh paralyses" 1974). Police countered with teargas and workers retaliated by throwing stones. In Delhi, workers occupied the headquarters of the Northern Railway, displaying posters in order to gain public support [*ibid*.]. Across India, more than 1,000 railway workers along with their trade union leaders were arrested in connection with the wildcat strike ("More than" 1974).

80% of railway workers, a total of 1,800 workers, joined the wildcat strike at the Amritsar station ("Only 3" 1974). 376 people were arrested in the Punjab and Haryana in connection with the strike ("More rail" 1974). Among them were Socialist leader, Mani Ram Bagri, and the General Secretary of the SSP, Nand Kishore Soni, who were arrested after giving a speech to workers [*ibid*.]. In Ajmer, Paras Ram Sharma, the Vice-President of the Western Railways Labor Union, was arrested, bringing the total of railway workers' strike-related arrests in the state of Rajasthan to 223 [*ibid*.]. 62 of these arrests were made in Kota. In Haryana, armed guards assisted by villagers and gangmen were placed along the railway tracks. In the Punjab, armed guards were deployed

[3] Violence as a tactic during railway strikes dates back to the early days of the Indian Railways. Nitin Sinha contends that violence, intimidation, and threat, including train burning and uprooting of railway tracks, has been a common feature of railway workers' strikes in India, and is explicitly employed by trade union members in order to unite the workers against the Railways Ministry [SINHA 2008: 1023; 2009: 283-284].

("Tracks being" 1974). Similar orders to deploy military personnel were given in Rajasthan, particularly in Kota and its environs, where a police constable was beaten by striking workers [*ibid*.]. In Orissa, 70 arrests were made, including Socialist leader Prof. Dayanath Singh [*ibid*.]. In Madhya Pradesh, 277 were arrested, in Gujarat, 628, and in Andhra Pradesh 164 arrests were made in connection with the wildcat strike, including two Marxist leaders, I. Balagandadhara Rao, and P. Nageshwar Rao, and a Maoist leader, V. Subba Rao on charges of inciting workers to strike ("More rail" 1974). This evidence demonstrates that, from the beginning, the state used violent tactics to suppress the Railway Workers' strike.

LN Mishra warned workers that the wildcat strike was illegal, and that they would therefore face dismissal for participating ("Mishra dubs" 1974; "Strikers may" 1974). He offered incentives and benefits to workers who served as strike breakers ("Mishra dubs" 1974; "Strikers may" 1974). He blamed Fernandes, stating (not so eloquently) that the state, "will not allow the adventurism of some adventurist gentleman" ("Strikers may" 1974). Mishra claimed that the strike was a political threat to the state in the context of India's economic downturn, and that there was therefore no option but to arrest Fernandes ("Strikers may" 1974; "Trains will" 1974). Mishra told *The Times of India* that he would resume talks only if workers immediately withdraw their strike notice ("Mishra dubs" 1974).

But even though he had been arrested, and railway workers across India faced mass arrest along with state violence for their participation in the strike, Fernandes remained optimistic that non-violent tactics would prevail. In a letter penned from Tihar Jail, Fernandes urged PM Indira Gandhi to support the "very legitimate demands" of the railway workers ("Fernandes urges" 1974). Wrote Fernandes,

> [e]ven now I want to reiterate, with all the emphasis at my command, that we do not want a strike. We are fully aware of the implications and consequences of a railway strike. But what are we to do when our most reasonable and legitimate demands are rejected?. [*ibid*.]

Opposition parties rallied around Fernandes, claiming that there was no political motivation for the strike beyond "normal trade union practice" ("Plea to" 1974). *The Times of India* detailed "uproarious" debates in Parliament between Congress Party MPs and opposition MPs over the arrest of trade union leaders ("MPs demand" 1974). CPI(M) MP, AK Gopalan, told reporters that, "the railway strike is not a mere fight for a bonus but a struggle to safeguard civil liberties

and the freedom of workers" ("P&T staff" 1974). Jan Sangh President, LK Advani, spoke out against the arrest of George Fernandes, stating that his arrest was "an act of treachery which had no parallel in the history of trade unions" ("Talk with" 1974). Opposition MPs both left and right supported Fernandes and his non-violent tactics.

On May 8th, 1974 the official strike began [Samaddar 2015: 582; Sherlock 2001: 416]. From jail, Fernandes announced that, "the time for action had come. Railwaymen should remain united and beat the government's attempt to break the struggle" ("Do or die" 1974). AITUC General Secretary, SA Dange, stated that withdrawal of the strike was out of the question as long as George Fernandes remained in jail [*ibid*.]. While workers, now officially, went on strike, their arrested leaders began a hunger strike in jail at 6 a.m. on May 8th, 1974 ("Jailed leaders" 1974). In the Rajya Sabha, Jan Sangh, CPI(M), and SSP politicians walked out in protest against the government's failure to negotiate ("Lok Sabha" 1974).

In Bombay, "highest-ever" security measures went into effect hours before the official strike commenced ("Police chief" 1974). Forces deployed included the Border Security Force, the Home Guards, the Special Reserve Police, and the Railway Protector Force [*ibid*.]. Railway stations were heavily policed, and placed, for the first time in Bombay history, under the protection of the Commissioner of Police [*ibid*.]. Officials expected that the Northern Railways' workers would be particularly militant based on the events in the days preceding the strike, but no major incidents were recorded. 800 Northern Railways workers were, however, arrested, and 60 were dismissed on charges of intimidation ("60 employees" 1974). On the Southern Railways, several hundred strikers were arrested, and 48 discharged for incitement, threat of violence, and refusal to carry out normal work ("Workshops worst" 1974). In several places along the tracks, workers blocked or damaged rails to prevent trains from running. At ten stations in the Madurai division workers staged a lockout [*ibid*.]. At Madras Central Station, workers threatened strike breakers with knives and bicycle chains ("Many drivers" 1974). The strike was less successful among the South-Central Railways. *The Times of India* reported that, except for hotspots of strike activity in Secunderabad and Sholapur, the South-Central Railways experienced few delays ("South-central" 1974) as retired workers were brought in as strike breakers ("Many drivers" 1974). In total, one-third of all scheduled trains failed to run on the first official day of the strike ("Rail services" 1974).

On May 9th, Indira Gandhi addressed the Lok Sabha, claiming that in the midst of economic downturn it was not possible to increase wages for railway workers ("Indira's no" 1974). Said Gandhi, "the government is not against strikes if they are for legitimate purposes. But this strike is an unfortunate one. It will not only affect the economy but also the families of the railwaymen themselves" ("Indira's no" 1974). Gandhi claimed that the opposition parties who supported the railway workers did so, not because they were pro-labour but, on the contrary, because they were trying to provoke the Congress-led state [*ibid*.]. Said Gandhi, it is not the workers who are being threatened by the state, "we are being threatened.[4] In such a situation, the government needs to take some defensive steps. We do not want to use the military or the BSF to break strikes." [*ibid*.]. But Gandhi justified the deployment of military personnel as being in "the interests of the people at large" [*ibid*.]. When asked by opposition MPs to comment on George Fernandes' arrest, Gandhi replied, "the arrest came at a very late stage. The government was no doubt interested in the welfare of the railwaymen. But it also had to look after the larger interests of the country" [*ibid*.].

By May 10th, the Confederation of Government Employees announced that it would join the railway workers in indefinite strike ("Union staff" 1974). Other trade unions, including the AITUC, CITU, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha, and the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat called for a nationwide general strike on May 15th in solidarity with railway workers ("Bharat bandh" 1974; "Unions set" 1974). The general strike was successful in metropolitan areas, particularly in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras where dock workers joined in, and in Delhi, where taxis, scooters, and rickshaw operators participated and all markets were closed ("Only partial" 1974). In Bombay, the solidarity strike forged unlikely alliances. Both the Dalit Panthers and Shiv Sena were active participants ("Bombay set" 1974). And this general strike was largely a success: all transportation options around the city of Bombay were stopped including buses, trains, ferries, and taxis ("Bandh total" 1974). However, INTUC's president, B. Bhagavati, called for all affiliated trade unions to ignore the general strike on May 15th. Said Bhagavati, "the *bandh* is politically motivated and against the wider interests of the common man and the country" ("INTUC call" 1974).

[4] Indira Gandhi continued to feel under threat even after the strike had ended. According to an interview she gave in *Le Figaro*, Gandhi claimed that, ever since the Railway Workers' Strike, she had felt that she was at risk of assassination (Krüger Files, Box 65, File 449-3, ZMO).

According to *The Times of India*, by May 12th, the total number of arrests related to the strike was "well over 10,000 according to informed sources" and the number of dismissals had reached over 800 ("Railmen seek" 1974). However, LN Mishra estimated that only 6,000 arrests were made, while opposition MPs alleged that over 25,000 had been arrested ("Opposition seeks" 1974). In Rajasthan, the threat of arrest did little to quell the strike. Even though authorities arrested 40,000 workers in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Ajmer, and Bikaner, only 5,000 returned to work ("Sack threat" 1974). 95% of workers in Jodhpur and 80% of workers in Bikaner remained on strike as of May 18th, 1974 [*ibid*.]. In Delhi, army technicians were brought in to operate trains from the Mughalsarai and Tughlakhabad marshalling yards ("Shunting workers" 1974). A spokesman for the NCCRS said that, despite the arrests, "morale is high" and workers were in "no hurry to get back to work" ("Fresh notice" 1974).

Marxist MP, Jyotirmoy Bosu, told reporters that "Police were committing untold atrocities on railway personnel in Delhi" which included an attack on the strikers and their families by hired thugs ("Railmen will" 1974). Patients from the railway hospitals were evicted in retaliation for the strike, and strikers were barred from purchasing food grains from railway ration shops [*ibid*.]. President of the Railway Mazdoor Union, PR Menon, called these actions "terror tactics of the government" ("Dent in" 1974). Menon claimed that, in the Bombay suburb of Kurla, railway workers were handcuffed and paraded on the railway platform in order to humiliate them and thereby break the strike [*ibid*.].

As the strike wore on, political alliances changed. By mid-May, it was no longer the case that the left and right supported the workers and the centre opposed the strike. Within the left, the CPI and Socialists began to have conflicting views over the desired outcome of the strike which threatened to exacerbate existing tensions between the two parties.[5] While Socialists wanted to build independent trade unions to represent the interests of all railway workers regardless of their rank or pay grade, the CPI wanted to work through established

[5] These tensions would continue through the Emergency: the CPI and eventually the CPI(M) would refuse to officially support resistance against the Emergency because Jayaprakash Narayan enlisted the support of the Hindu right-wing party, Jan Sangh, in resisting the Emergency (Krüger Files, Box 65, File 449-3, ZMO). However, individual members of the CPI(M), such as EMS Namboodiripad, supported Jayaprakash Narayan and other Socialists' efforts in opposing the Emergency (Krüger Files, Box 65, File 449-2, ZMO).

CPI-affiliated unions to support certain higher-grade sections of the workforce ("After the Rail Strike" 1974).

In addition to these tensions, workers soon faced another setback when George Fernandes wrote a letter to Jayaprakash Narayan, enlisting his help ("Services better" 1974). Fernandes told Narayan that because of the lengthy duration of his stay in jail, he was isolated from the rank and file, and therefore, unable to assess the situation and make decisions about the future of the strike [*ibid*.]. He asked Narayan to convene an action committee to decide the next steps. In attendance at this meeting were representatives of left, right, and centrist opposition parties [*ibid*.].

The Railways Ministry interpreted Fernandes' letter as evidence of "spectacular improvement" in the position of the state vis-a-vis the railway workers [*ibid*.]. However, the NCCRS claimed that any appearance of workers wanting to resume work was a result of force, citing the workers at Moghulsarai who were forced back to work at bayonet point but again left their posts as soon as they were no longer under threat of bodily harm [*ibid*.]. An NCCRS statement warned the public that trains were being operated by inexperienced personnel and that, as a result, train derailments were likely [*ibid*.]. The Railways Ministry countered that precautions were being taken to prevent train derailments; any derailments that were to occur would be due to sabotage [*ibid*.]. The day after this statement was released, there were reports of sabotage on the Southern Railways ("Coach factory" 1974). At Guntakkal Junction in Andhra Pradesh, it was discovered that fish bolts had been removed at several junctions [*ibid*.].

On the 21st May, 1,132 railway workers in Uttar Pradesh were sentenced to two to four months rigorous imprisonment for their participation in the strike ("Charge sheets" 1974). In the city of Bombay, 49 people had been arrested under MISA and 659 had been arrested under the DIR since the strike began ("Arrests in city" 1974). Despite the state's escalation of violence, the strike showed no signs of ending. Central and Western Railways were running at 30% of normal services and more than 90% of staff were on strike ("90 p.c." 1974). Opposition leaders met to develop a strategy to settle the strike and, in a speech in Parliament on behalf of the AITUC, Dange urged a settlement ("Hectic bid" 1974). While Indira Gandhi conceded that there was a need to revise the wage structure as a whole, she maintained that no negotiations would be resumed until the strike was called off [*ibid*.]. Dange pressed for a meeting between the Prime Minister and the leadership committee of the NCCRS [*ibid*.], stating,

> I am sorry to note that the most reasonable demands made by the AITUC and many of the leaders of the NCCRS to solve the deadlock have evoked no favourable response from the prime minister and her cabinet. ("Rail stir" 1974)

While the action committee of the NCCRS called an emergency meeting and demanded a judicial inquiry into police excesses ("Rail leaders" 1974), the CPI tried to strike a different line. SA Dange made a surprise announcement on May 24th that CPI affiliated trade unions sought assurances that there would be "no victimization" if the strike were called off ("Dange's surprise" 1974). Other opposition leaders interpreted this move as an attempt by CPI leadership to foster a special relationship with Congress at the workers' expense [*ibid*.]. The media claimed that this development demonstrated that the facade of unity among opposition parties was crumbling [*ibid*.]. Union leaders disparaged Dange's call for a settlement, alleging that it bore suspicious resemblance to the three-point formula proposed by the government [*ibid*.]. The NCCRS expressed trepidation about conflict among the left, as disunity among the parties could jeopardize workers' unity and, thereby, the strike ("Banerjee hits" 1974). The Socialist Party called a meeting of left parties to further deliberate on strategy.

On May 28th at 6am, the strike was broken ("Railmen call" 1974): Indira Gandhi approved the mobilization of 600,000 federal police and paramilitary officers, along with an additional 750,000 state police and state paramilitaries to break the strike [Sherlock 2001: 410]. As George Fernandes put it, the workers, "did not prepare for civil war" [Fernandes quoted in Sherlock: 410]. Fernandes, and other members of the NCCRS action committee decided to withdraw the strike in response to this display of military force ("Railmen call" 1974). The decision was not, however, unanimous [*ibid*.]. The NCCRS claimed that workers were demoralized, the strike was fizzling out, and with the CPI call for workers to act locally, the action committee was not optimistic that railway workers would vote to continue the strike [*ibid*.].

SSP MPs, including Raj Narain and Rabi Roy, called the strike a defeat for workers ("Defeat for workers" 1974). In a joint statement, they blamed the defeat on the "tyranny of the government, particularly the vindictive attitude of the prime minister" but lauded workers' "heroic resistance to the governmental oppression" [*ibid*.]. Jan Sangh President, LK Advani, said that the government should immediately implement all demands of the railway workers that were conceded during negotiations given that they had graciously withdrawn the strike ("Generous gesture" 1974). Advani further appealed to the state to

release arrested leaders and workers immediately, and to withdraw the eviction notices that had been served on striking workers [*ibid*.]. CPI(M) leader P. Ramamurthi stated that, while his party disagreed with the decision to withdraw, and had concerns about the consequences of conceding too readily, the Party would support the opposition coalition's decision to end the strike [*ibid*.]. Ramamurthi blamed Dange and the AITUC for the end of the strike, and in a statement to *The Times of India*, alleged that Dange was partaking in private correspondence with the Prime Minster in which he undermined the efforts of the NCCRS ("AITUC blamed" 1974). Said Ramamurthi, "I leave it to the working class to draw their own conclusions from the attendant circumstances and decide whose bidding the AITUC leaders had at last resorted to this line of naked disruption" [*ibid*.]. CITU President, BT Ranadive stated that he believed the decision to withdraw the strike was incorrect and premature. In his assessment, the strike should have gone on for a few more days, during which, he claimed, workers could have reached a settlement ("Generous gesture" 1974). The AITUC Secretariat, not surprisingly, supported the end of the strike, calling the decision to withdraw "timely" ("Timely says AITUC" 1974).

On May 28th, George Fernandes and other NCCRS leaders were released from Delhi's Tihar Jail ("Fernandes, 22 others" 1974). While union leaders were released from jail, the Railways Ministry meted out consequences for rank and file workers who participated in the strike. Many served their full prison sentence, were not paid back wages or reinstated in instances of dismissal, and remained evicted from their homes ("Fernandes, 22 others" 1974; "Railmen assured" 1974). The official statistics on the strike from the Railways Ministry report that, over the course of the strike, 25,000 workers were arrested and up to 6,000 were dismissed ("Fernandes, 22 others" 1974). Even if these figures are underestimated, the toll of the strike for the rank and file was clearly significant.

The NCCRS called for the immediate resumption of negotiations: the Railways Ministry and Prime Minister had previously promised that if the workers were to withdraw the strike negotiations could be resumed. However, the Railways Ministry refused, stating that, "The government will not yield on the two main issues of bonus and parity in salary with the employees of public sector undertakings" ("Fernandes, 22 others" 1974). In George Fernandes' first press conference after his release from jail, he claimed that the Prime Minister was trying to kill the trade union movement, and pledged to start a trade union organisation for all transport workers ("Threat by Fernandes" 1974). But weeks after the strike had ended, negotiations had yet to be resumed. Fernandes

continued to call for negotiations and for "no victimisation" against workers who participated in the strike. In response, Mishra said, "it is unfortunate that Mr. Fernandes is making such irresponsible statements. Under no circumstances will the government allow any political adventurist to hold the nation to ransom" ("No general pardon" 1974).

In the absence of negotiations, it took only two months for the Railways Ministry to roll back wages to their pre-strike levels [Fernandes 1991: 413]. But workers continued to participate in sporadic wildcat strikes for the remainder of 1974 and into the first half of 1975 [Sherlock 2001: 413]. Worker unrest was not quelled until the Emergency was declared in June 1975.[6]

In April 1974, a week before his arrest in connection with the strike, George Fernandes said that,

> Mrs. Gandhi is not interested in averting the railwaymen's strike because she intends to use it to declare a national emergency and institute a personal dictatorship," adding that, "the attachment of the propertied classes to democracy is superficial, they preserve its shell only so long as it serves their interests and they would be more than willing to destroy it as soon as they face a serious crisis and conclude that the use of naked force is necessary to curb popular movements and expectations. ("Democracy Under Siege" 1974)

Fernandes stated that his experiences during the railway workers' strike led him to the conclusion, "that the government of the day had taken a deliberate decision to suppress the working class and to create a situation in the country where some kind of fascist rule was possible." He elaborated,

> [w]e could see the signs of this: for instance, the MISA and its use against trade union workers, against political workers! Another action was the killing of those who in our country are known as Naxalites… there was a consistent effort made to numb the conscience of the people… Therefore, I believe that the railway strike was used as kind of a 'dress rehearsal' for the ultimate fascist take-over that took place in our country almost a year later. [Fernandes 1991: 21]

At the time, the media dismissed Fernandes' assessment as a paranoid overreaction, but it turned out to be remarkably prescient. The railway workers strike, in violently repressing trade union activity,

[6] In January 1975, LN Mishra was assassinated [GUHA 2007: 483]. Mishra had travelled to Samastipur to inaugurate the Samastipur-Muzaffarpur broad-gauge line of the North-Eastern Railway when a bomb exploded as the minister was stepping down from the platform on which he had delivered his address ("LN Mishra among 23 hurt" 1975; Sahastrabuddhe and Vajpayee 1991: 626). While railway workers were suspected, the CBI was never able to unearth conclusive evidence ("CBI misled" 1976). Indira Gandhi nonetheless blamed Mishra's death on the JP Movement and its "cult of violence," but the responsible parties were never apprehended and the motive for the assassination remains unclear [GUHA 2007: 483].

demonstrated to Fernandes and other opposition leaders that *satyagraha* was insufficient in the face of a violently repressive state.

The Baroda dynamite conspiracy

On June 25th, 1975, Indira Gandhi declared a state of Emergency suspending India's constitution. George Fernandes soon led a violent resistance movement against Gandhi's dictatorship. This movement culminated in the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case, in which Socialists and Jan Sanghis were accused of planting bombs in New Delhi [Rajeshwar 2015: 80]. Many of those involved in the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy had participated in the railway workers' strike, or were sympathetic to it, and claimed that railway workers' unrest was one of the key factors in Gandhi's decision to declare a state of Emergency. Fernandes' group had three goals: (1) to inform the public that real and widespread opposition to the Emergency exists; (2) to gain sympathy abroad; and (3) to organise acts of defiance aimed at bringing an end to dictatorship in India [Reddy 1977: 343-344]. Wrote Fernandes in an underground communique, "Our struggle is to overthrow the government" [Fernandes 1978: 13].

While Fernandes' group believed that *satyagraha* and other forms of non-violent resistance were perhaps preferable, under the Emergency, they contended, such tactics would not be effective.[7] Because most of the Socialist leadership was in jail, protest was left to a handful of committed student activists who had gone underground at the start of the Emergency. The sheer numbers needed in order to undertake *satyagraha* were not available. Media censorship was an even greater consideration: Fernandes and his group concluded that, because *satyagraha* depends on media coverage in order to affect politics, it could not succeed given censorship of the press [Reddy 1977: 298, 314].

Fernandes explained in an underground communique, "It is my deep conviction that *satyagraha* is *still* the best weapon", but, "[n]o-one had proposed that the vagaries of violence should not fight against the dictatorship, nor has it been hinted at that those steeped in the techniques of non-violence should not resort to violence" [Fernandes

[7] Erin Pineda points to similar dynamics in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Notes from a Birmingham Jail" [Pineda 2015].

1978: 13-14]. He elaborated, "After all, violence does beget violence. Mrs. Gandhi's rule is based on violence and falsehood. True, it will finally be defeated by truth and non-violence. But as long as it lasts, it will continue to provoke in people a violent upheaval, even if there are many among us who would consider violence as not so legitimate a way of struggle" [*ibid*.: 14]. When questioned by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate at Tis Hazari during the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case trial in February 1977, Fernandes stated,

> [a]s Gandhiji said, given the choice between cowardice and violence to resist evil, he would not hesitate to choose, and he recommended that the people should choose violence. While my belief in non-violence is a conviction, inherited from one of the great thinkers and humanists, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, I also believe, as Gandhiji believed, and no doubt Lohia himself believed, that injustice and evil should be fought wherever it raises its head. My fight against the dictatorship was born out of such convictions and it never entailed killing. [Fernandes 1991: 92]

While Fernandes was committed to *satyagraha* in principle, he contended that the exceptional circumstances of the Emergency warranted the use of violence.

One of the accused in the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy, Kamlesh Shukla[8], told me that this group had planned to blow up the All India Radio Station[9] and to set off bombs on Safdarjung Road near the Prime

[8] The police report on the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case details Kamlesh Shukla's alleged involvement in the Conspiracy:

> Investigation revealed that George Fernandes A-1 had made Delhi an important base for his illegal activities where some of the alleged overt acts constituting offences were committed by some of his co-conspirators in pursuance of the criminal conspiracy. George Fernandes was operating the conspiratorial activities of the co-accused in Delhi while staying at the house of Captain RP Huigol at Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. His meetings with Vijay Narain Singh A-10, who made arrangements to receive the consignment of explosives at Varanasi from Baroda, Kamlesh Shukla A-12, Viren J. Shah A-14, and others secretly arranged in Delhi by Dr (Miss) Girija Huilgol, daughter of Capt. RP Huigol, and CGK Reddy A-11. At these meetings possible targets for sabotage activity in Delhi were discussed. Kamlesh Shukla A-12 had in the meanwhile received one suitcase containing the explosives (37 dynamite sticks, 49 detonators, and 8 rolls of fuse wire) which was received at Delhi has since been recovered from the house of Kamlesh Shukla A-12 at his instance and its keys from the possession of Sushil Chander Bhatnagar A-13 [REDDY 1977: 2050-2057].

[9] The target of All India Radio Station has significant parallels to the discussion of Radio-Alger in Fanon's essay "*Ici la voix de l'Algerie*" [1959]. Fanon writes, "*Le poste de TSF, en Algérie occupée est une technique de l'occupant qui, dans le cadre de la domination coloniale, ne répond à aucun besoin vital de l'indigène*" [FANON 1959, 56-57]... "*L'explication semble d'avantage se trouver dans le fait que Radio-Alger est perçue par l'Algérien, comme le monde colonial parlé. Avant la guerre, l'humour de l'Algérien lui avait fait définir Radio-Alger: 'Des Français parlent aux Français'.*" [FANON 1959: 58].

Minister's residence, although (he said) at night when nobody would be on the roads or in the radio station [Henderson 1997: 140; Sinha 1977: 70-71]. He explained to me that the use of violence as a tactic of resistance to the Emergency could be traced to the railway workers' struggle. Said Shukla,

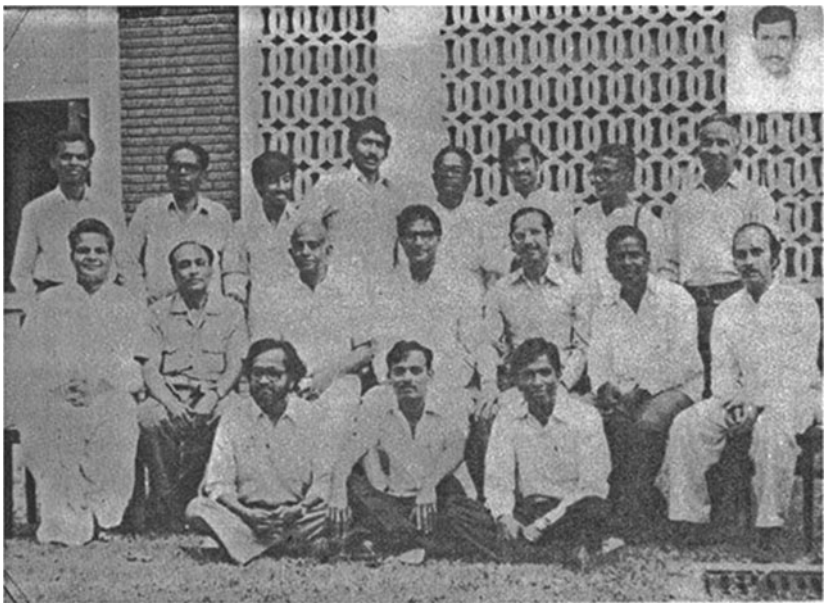
> [...] we decided to do something about the Emergency and since there was the authoritarian procedures that were adopted to silence people, we thought to do something. We went and obtained dynamite, and knew some places to create noise so that—By authoritarian means the government was trying to show that people are cooperating with it and there's no protest, and uh, if the protestors were being arrested, put behind bars, they were of no use, because how could you have a protest without them? So when such things used to take place, somehow BBC correspondents will come to know about it and BBC will broadcast it. So, we tried to do something, even though it was what we considered violent. Uh, and at that time, our leader, Mr. George Fernandes, he was chairman of Indian Labor Administration that is the largest Union of Railway Workers in India. So, they and our leader announced some strike of the railwaymen that was more concerned with the demands of the railwaymen, their wages and their working conditions. It was the largest trade union, and uh, railways are the largest network in India and could have affected the government in a very serious manner. So, one of the reasons for clamping down the Emergency was given was the threat of the railway strike. And the publicists of Indira Gandhi's government tried to propagate that socialists, especially George Fernandes and those closest to George Fernandes were trying to disrupt railways' movement.

The photo below (figure 2) is of the accused in the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case. Kamlesh Shukla is seated in the middle row on the far left; George Fernandes is seated in that same row, fourth from left [Reddy 1977: 1052].

Kamlesh Shukla told me that dynamite was procured from a mining site in Baroda, stolen by miners, and given to journalists who brought it to Patna where it changed hands before being brought to Delhi; this account was confirmed to me by Lalit Mohan Gautam. Mr. Shukla explained further,

> [l]ook there was, the government was acting as if nothing was happening, no protest was happening as if Indian people were cooperating with the government. So, what could be done, because soon there was no freedom to protest. All human rights were, under Emergency, all human rights were abolished. In fact, the supreme court, the infamous judgement, that the government can kill anybody, legally, and there can be no legal recourse. So, that was a very terrible situation. Things like that hadn't even happened during the British rule! So, and even with meeting in the coffee house, exchanging news, only limited things could be done. So, what happened was that some journalist friends in Baroda who were very friendly with some mining people, people involved in mining, and with the construction boom in the cities, there was a lot of mining of stone, mining, etcetera, going on in the cities. So, these building suppliers in Baroda

FIGURE 2
The accused in the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case (after Reddy 1977).



were using dynamite to cut the stone. And they were friends with the journalists who were also socialist party workers, so they said that we can use these dynamite sticks also, to create some noise. So, George Fernandes had gone there also. Then, when the contact was established and a network was created, then they started sending these dynamite sticks to various places, like in Delhi. It was sent to Bihar, to Bengal, to somewhere or wherever. And then some material was being printed, you know Tamil Nadu had a DMK government then, which was opposed to the Congress Government and one of the DMK leaders had, was editing and publishing, a daily newspaper, he had a large press. So, large material was being printed there, and then through Railway Union sources would be brought to Delhi, or brought to Bombay or brought to other places, and then these will get distributed. Coffee House used to be one of the distribution points of such material. We would take this bike there and the bike will be handed over to someone in Patna. So that is how something could be organized to let the world know that the Indian people were protesting against the Emergency, against the taking away of the human rights, against the right to live.

However, Kamlesh Shukla was a bit cagey when I pressed him for details:

Author: Once you got the dynamite, what was the plan? What were you going to do with it?

Shukla: Just to create noise.

Author: Did you have a location in mind?

Shukla: No, Mrs. Gandhi accused us, that we were trying to blow up railway lines. This we never did. We were only trying to create some noise in say, the roadside. Some roads.

Author: In Delhi itself?

Shukla: Outside too. And taking care that nobody gets harmed. Nobody gets harmed. So many times it so happened *ki* that when the dynamite exploded, since we were taking so much care not to harm anybody it never became news. Only if somebody gets harmed, then it will become news [narrator laughs]. But people, you know, there was some weak link in the chain that got arrested and named all the names they knew who were part of the network, and then most of the people got arrested, even George Fernandes got arrested and it became a celebrated case. At that time I didn't know what sentence I would get, maybe life sentence. But somehow, Mrs. Gandhi held election in 1977, March 1977, and she was badly defeated so a new government was formed under Morarji Desai and one of the first things Morarji Desai did was to issue orders for our release. So the day the Desai government was formed, we were out.

Author: I heard from some of the other people we talked to that All India Radio station was at some point a potential target? Is that accurate?

Shukla: That is true. Because that would have created more noise. That would have become world news, the BBC, the Japanese, everyone would have reported it.

[…]

Author: Did you consider any other places or was this the only such place?

Shukla: We considered to blast some roads. So, tried to do it, with little success.

Author: Which roads?

Shukla: [laughs] Why do you want to know? Safdarjung Road. Not far from Mrs. Gandhi's residence.

Lalit Mohan Gautam, leader of the non-violent faction of Socialist resistance against the Emergency, stayed with Kamlesh Shukla when they were underground. He told me the story of how he came to stay with Kamlesh Shukla and how he learned of the plan to blow up the All India Radio Station:

> But there is an interesting incident, it was in the second month of Emergency. It was somewhere in July, a friend of mine, Kamlesh Shukla, he was Editor of George Fernandes' paper, he used to live in Safdarjung Development Area… In a good house, it's a good colony, on the third floor. There was another fellow who was underground from UP, but he later on joined Congress. We came across each other in Bengali Market. He said, "where are you staying, and what are you doing?" And I told him everything about how I was passing out pamphlets and everything. By that time hundreds had come out. He said, "I am staying at Kamlesh Shukla's place." And I said, "*Mene*[10] Kamlesh Shukla has not been arrested yet?" He said, "no". I said, "is it a safe place?" He said, "yes." "Okay, show me," I said, and we went there in the evening. So Kamlesh said, "why don't you sleep here itself?" I said, "all right". So we had food and we slept. There was a cot, a solid cot, *takhat hai to ispe so jaaiye*[11]. In the morning I got up, I said *ki bhai*, *ye kaisa takhat hai?*[12]. *Mene kholkar dekha to* sticks *vagairah theey, mene socha koi* material *hoga*[13]. Then I asked, "What is this?" *Aapne raat ko sula diya tha mujhe*[14] though it was uncomfortable. Then he said, "Dynamite *hai*. These are dynamite sticks." *Mene kaha, ye kya hai?*[15] He said, "use *karni hai*.[16]" *Mene kaha ye kahan se* use *ho jayengi?*[17] *Mene kaha*[18], it can't be used. It can't be used unless, unless *ye jo* sticks *hain, phategi nahin*[19], it will not explode. Dynamite sticks need to be filled in a hole and the hole must be airtight. Then only it will explode. He said, "no-no, dynamite is a dynamite." I said, "no-no, what are you talking!" I had known these in quarries, *kyunki hamara, kyunki hamara*[20] mining quarries, mining stones, I had seen them in Lakadpur working everyday. They used to clear it, they used to shout, at the top of their voice, get out from the hill, get out from the hill, because they would start the explosions. In order to quarry the stone. Dynamite sticks on their own, I said, *phir mene kaya*[21] George has fooled you, they can't explode on their own, they can't be exploded. If you light them, they will just burn like any other

[10] You mean
[11] This is a board, sleep on it.
[12] That, "brother, what sort of a board is it?"
[13] I opened to see sticks and etcetera were there. I thought it must be some material.
[14] You had asked me to sleep [on this].
[15] I asked what is this?
[16] [I/we have to] use it.
[17] I said, how will you be able to use this?
[18] But how,
[19] It won't blast
[20] Because our, because our
[21] Then but how

material! He said, no, no, I have located a place, All India Radio. All India Radio *ki dewaar me*[22] there is a hole. Today, we will insert these sticks there, and make an explosion. I said, "Are you mad? It will not explode there. Unless it is a hole which is airtight, it won't explode!" He said, "no-no, you associate with me in this." I said, "no man, I am not going to take part in this foolish exercise." I said, "no, no, I don't want to be associated with this, man."

Lalit Mohan Gautam had been recruited by Kamlesh Shukla to participate in blowing up the All-India Radio Station, but he declined, not because he was ideologically opposed to violent resistance, but because he thought the plan was flawed. He explained,

[…] this experiment of exploding was not carried out anyway. Though it was named as the Baroda Dynamite Case, but actually no dynamite had been blasted anywhere, nowhere. The only possibility was me doing it, at All India Radio, but I declined very early on. There was no point in getting it exploded, *mene*[23] at the most, if I had attempted it, it will hurt me more than the wall. But it would not have exploded, I was very sure of it. I have seen umpteen number of times how dynamite is exploded! It's not an easy exercise… I never got convinced, and I think he never attempted it also. He can't run. I could do it and I could run also, but I will not do it. Privthi Singh was another fellow during the Emergency, and I don't think he was arrested. And there was another, George may not have disclosed his name, but there were others who were arrested who hadn't even seen dynamite sticks! Barring two persons which I know had seen and known about the dynamite sticks is, Kamlesh, who made me sleep on them, and the other fellow was Privthi Singh, an MLC from Bihar.

Kamlesh Shukla was eventually apprehended by police. Ramchandra Pradhan raised money for his defence and—even in the face of repeated police threats—attended the trial each day to show his support. He was one of the only witnesses to the Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case trial. Ramchandra Pradhan told me that, at the beginning of the trial,

[…] there were only 2-3 people used to visit in the court. I was one of them. Sachidanand Sinha was one of them. There were few people, very few. I was there. I remember one incident where—Because we had to support our friends. George Fernandes was also a friend. Kamlesh Shukla was a friend. Most of them were. There was an ABVP there who was, of course, *not* my friend. But he was one of them.

Ramchandra Pradhan continued,

[s]o we used to go [to the court], and there was one small incident. One of our friends, he was a member of Bihar Legislative Council, he had been arrested and somehow or another, because the police tortured [him], he became a kind of a witness to the cause. So, George asked me, why don't you talk to him, he will come with you in the court. So I went to him, and he said—and we were good friends—"what you are doing?" Then he said, uh, "I can't do anything." Now, he was so scared, maybe the police had told him, "your children will be

[22] In the wall

[23] I mean

> killed," or whatever it might be… So, on every occasion that Kamlesh had been brought to the court I was going. So, on one of those days, a police officer came to me, I remember. He was from Patna, in my home state. So he took me aside, and told me, "don't come to the trial any longer, because we have been discussing, and you will be arrested." And because he was from Patna maybe, from the area I come from, so he said, "I am giving you this information." I told him, "I don't want to be arrested." I didn't want to be arrested. But I cannot leave my friends in the lurch. I will have to come. I *will* come! If I'm arrested, I'm arrested, I can't do anything else. Because I cannot—how I can I face my whole life if I think because of my fear of arrest, you know, I have forsaken my friends? So, I said, "I will come. If you can prevent my arrest, if you are interested, do that. If you can't—' well, I didn't finish that sentence. I said, "if you can prevent it, okay." Who wants to go to jail? I don't want to, but I will definitely come [to the trial].

When I asked whether Socialist resistance during the Emergency contributed to the restoration of democracy in India, Parasnath Chowdhary, former secretary to George Fernandes replied,

> [m]aybe, because for example, this George Fernandes Dynamite Case. He wanted to overthrow the government by violent means and then the government was known to this very well. There were intelligence reports that the movement had gathered momentum. This violent movement. And it was being led by a Socialist leader. Socialist leaders had a very important contribution to whatever was happening… Firstly, in taking the JP Movement to newer heights, and secondly in opposing Mrs. Gandhi's dictatorship. They were in the forefront. A major portion was operating underground and trying to do things by peaceful means, and the other, George Fernandes, was leading a violent part of the movement. So there was combined effort on the Socialist side, they were very much there and they were also the most vocal. They always came overground, many of them, like Lalit Mohan Gautam. And this was a great defiance. Everybody was so scared, nobody would ever—if a policeman came on the scene, everybody would start pissing in his pants. And now this man, Lalit Mohan Gautam, comes and takes handbills and goes and throws them and defies the dictatorship. This was major. And there were many Socialists who were ready for any action. If Mrs. Gandhi had continued with her Emergency, she would have met with a very bad fate. She couldn't have done it for long, that much I know.

Ramchandra Pradhan similarly stated, that,

> [w]hether it was George Fernandes and his group through armed rebellion—the Baroda Dynamite Case—or through protests, like Lalit Mohan Gautam, it was, it was, there was no doubt about it, that as a group, from all the political groups, the Indian Socialists, they stood out as the defender of human liberty.

Conclusions

In his memoirs, CGK Reddy argues that George Fernandes chose violent means of resisting the Emergency state over

satyagraha because the Socialist resistance lacked sheer numbers as a result of the arrest of most Socialist Party leaders, and because media censorship prevented coverage of non-violent protest. But even before the Emergency, state repression of the Railway Workers' Strike in 1974 had compelled Fernandes and his comrades to rethink the efficacy of Gandhian non-violence as a tactic of resistance against the postcolonial state even *before* its authoritarian turn. In its violent repression of the railway workers' strike and its illegal imprisonment of workers and trade union leaders, Indira Gandhi's administration demonstrated to Fernandes and his fellow socialists that there was no peaceful solution to the ever increasing social conflict of 1970s India.

When Gandhi declared Emergency, Fernandes and his comrades reassessed the political situation and concluded, based on their experiences with state violence during the Railway Workers' Strike, that violence was the only means by which they could combat the authoritarianism of the postcolonial Emergency state. This historical narrative demonstrates that when the postcolonial state uses violence to suppress a non-violent social movement, social movement leaders see violence as the only remaining tactic at their disposal. When the state demonstrates a lack of regard for the sanctity of human life by indiscriminately killing unarmed subjects, *satyagraha* is no longer an effective strategy for resistance. Indiscriminate killings of unarmed subjects necessitate violent tactics of resisting the state [Singh 2007: 66]. This is true whether the indiscriminate killings are perpetrated by colonial agents [Minh 2007: 9; Singh 2007: 66] or by ruling classes who continue to use the same violent tactics in order to quell resistance after, as Walter Rodney terms it, "flag independence" [Rodney 1972: 279].

The actions taken by the Baroda Dynamite Conspirators demonstrate what is missing from social movement theory: while *satyagraha* may be a significant part of the repertoire of contentious politics, violence against property is the tactic best suited to resist the violence of the postcolonial authoritarian state. As George Fernandes reminds us, "violence does beget violence" [Fernandes 1978: 14]. Movements against the colonial and postcolonial state, as Fanon concludes, "can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence" [Fanon 2002: 36].

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METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Because of the specific barriers involved in conducting archival research in the Global South, and because of obstacles I faced due to the controversial nature of research on the Emergency, I believe this warrants an appendix further discussing the methods employed in this paper.

I visited twelve archives, in six cities, where I examined sources on the Emergency along with other pieces of key information. I spent nearly two years in India (Aug. 2012-Aug. 2013, July 2014-Jan. 2015), three months in London (March 2014 and May-Jun 2014), and eight months in Berlin (January-August 2016) conducting archival research.

At the **British Library** in London, UK, I used the India Office Library's collection in order to research the colonial origins of the firm, Coffee House. I relied on the founding documents of the firm, reports detailing its growth and diffusion, and statistical series on the Coffee Houses along with statistical series on the coffee sector in colonial India. I also found key information about the larger political economy of coffee in the British Empire, including files on the commodity surplus crisis in the 1930s and 1940s, files detailing inter-empire competition within the coffee sector, and intelligence reports on the Communist Party of India, which organized the Coffee House workers.

At the **Zentrum Moderner Orient** in Berlin, I looked to the papers of Indologists working in the former Deutsche Demokratische Republik who had conducted field work in India during the Emergency. Of particular interest to this project are the Krüger Files, which contain not only various printed materials on the Emergency from Socialist and Communist viewpoints, but also Dr. Krüger's personal notebooks in which he details his impressions of Emergency-era India.

At the **National Archives of India**, in New Delhi, I collected information about Indira Gandhi's economic policies, both domestic and foreign. I was the first researcher to examine certain reports on her family planning policies, and I also discovered documents about the relationship between India and the World Bank in the years leading up to the Emergency. While there are several files on the Emergency listed in the catalogue of the National Archives of India, they remain classified; they have not yet been transferred from the Home Department to the National Archives, and are not (as of this writing) accessible to researchers.

At the **PC Joshi Archives on Contemporary History** at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, I collected key files on the inner workings of the Indian Communist Party, its views on economic development in India, and its relationship to the Indian trade union and labor movement.

At the **Central Secretariat Library** in New Delhi, I collected statistical series on coffee in India, including statistical series containing fiscal data on the Indian Coffee House. I also found statistical reports on the cooperatives in

India, along with government reports on the relationship between the cooperatives and economic development in India.

At the **Delhi Archives** in New Delhi, I found information specific to the Indian Coffee House locations in New Delhi and records of disputes between the Delhi Indian Coffee Houses and city government since independence. I also found information concerning the slum clearances carried out in Delhi under Indira Gandhi.

At the **Punjab State Archives** in Chandigarh, I found documents on the colonial and postcolonial labor movement in the Punjab.

At the **VV Giri Archives on Indian Labour** in NOIDA, I collected documents on the Indian labor movement and the relationship among organized labor, the Communist Party of India (undivided), the Congress Party, and Congress Socialists in the years leading up to and just after India's independence.

At the **Haryana State Archives** in Panchkula, I found key documents about the agricultural cooperative movement in colonial and postcolonial Punjab and its role in agricultural development.

At the **KN Raj Memorial Library** in Thiruvananthapuram, I found government documents on the political economy of coffee in postcolonial India, and government documents on consumer preferences and tastes for coffee over time in India.

At the **Kerala State Archives** in Thiruvananthapuram, I found documents detailing the role of trade unions in Kerala in the fight for India's independence, along with documents about the Indian Coffee House from 1938-1968. These documents on the coffee house include information about how MJ Simon, Coffee House founder, sourced coffee from plantations in Kerala for all coffee house locations, and about plans to expand the Indian Coffee House in Kerala in the 1960s after it had become a cooperative.

I also sought to access records at the Coffee Board of India's office in New Delhi, having been told by several senior social scientists in Delhi that the Board kept a small archive which might contain information about the anti-Emergency activists who met in the Connaught Place location of Indian Coffee House before it was bulldozed in 1976. After repeated attempts, I was able to set up a meeting with a special duty officer. This official asked me for sexual favors in exchange for access to the archives, at which point I cut contact. At a later date, I asked a male friend to try to gain access to these records on his own behalf. After several months, my friend was able to obtain a phone meeting with a higher-up official at the Coffee Board in Bangalore. This more senior official told him that the Coffee Board's policy is to destroy records at the end of each quarter and therefore, we were told, the Coffee Board of India's records on the Emergency no longer exist.

Because none of these archives have records available on the Emergency itself, I initially thought to look to newspapers for information about the events of the Emergency. However, the press was heavily censored during this period

of Indian history, a fact confirmed to me by the journalists I later interviewed. The information that I was seeking, about slum clearances, forced sterilization, and about resistance to the Emergency, was explicitly censored. Some journalists who tried to publish information about these and other topics were arrested; others were picked up by police and beaten in order to reinforce this censorship.

My decision to conduct oral history interviews with anti-Emergency activists was informed by the above challenges. To contact these men, I enlisted the help of my friends and contacts in student politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, where I was a research fellow from 2012-2013 and tangentially involved in student politics through the New Materialists group.

My friends and contacts in the Socialist party were able to find leaders in the anti-Emergency movement, arrange interviews, and accompany me on these interviews. Having a committed young socialist at the interviews, I believe, helped the narrators to feel more comfortable during the oral history interviews. There was however one instance when, upon finding out that I had ties not just to Jawaharlal Nehru University but also to Yale University, one socialist leader assumed that I had right-wing sympathies and was therefore reluctant to be interviewed. After several conversations, and by sharing my published articles with him, I was able to convince him that I was a bona fide academic. Ultimately I was able to interview all key leaders of the Socialist resistance to the Emergency residing in Delhi.

I had somewhat less success with the Communists. Despite having several friends and contacts get in touch on my behalf with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) headquarters in Delhi, nothing ever materialised. I was told that the CPI(M) believed that I was a CIA agent and for that reason I was refused help in facilitating interviews. While I would have liked to have more Communist voices in this project, it remains the case that the Socialists were the most active group in leading the opposition to the Emergency.

I was ultimately able to interview Communists, Trade Unionists, and Naxalites through my Socialist narrators' contacts, but was not able to interview any Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh anti-Emergency activists.

My hope is that their recorded contributions will serve as an important counterweight to the censored newspaper records and to government reports (should they ever be de-classified). For now, these interviews are among the few primary source records of the contributions of Indian Socialists and their allies to the restoration of democracy in postcolonial India.

Résumé

En mars 1974, le dirigeant syndical et président du Parti socialiste indien, George Fernandes, a formé un nouveau syndicat indépendant de cheminots et a mené une grève massive dans tout le pays pendant environ un mois. Deux ans plus tard, en mars 1976, Fernandes est arrêté et inculpé dans l'affaire « Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy », un complot visant à attaquer des cibles stratégiques à New Delhi en résistance au régime autoritaire d'Indira Gandhi. De quelle manière le travail politique de George Fernandes a-t-il évolué au cours de ces deux années, passant de la tactique traditionnelle du mouvement syndical lors de la grève des cheminots en 1974 à l'élaboration d'un plan visant à attaquer des objectifs stratégiques pour résister à l'État postcolonial ? Pourquoi un activiste qui a préconisé jusqu'alors des tactiques non-violentes change-t-il de stratégie au point de devenir le leader d'un mouvement utilisant principalement des tactiques violentes ? L'article montre que, dans sa répression violente de la grève des cheminots et son emprisonnement illégal des dirigeants de la grève, le gouvernement d'Indira Gandhi a convaincu Fernandes et d'autres dirigeants de partis d'opposition qu'il ne pouvait y avoir de solution pacifique au conflit social croissant en Inde au début des années 1970. Par conséquent, lorsque Gandhi s'est établi comme dictateur, les anciens partisans du satyagraha ont estimé que la violence symbolique contre l'État était la tactique la plus à même de contribuer à la restauration de la démocratie en Inde.

Mots-clés : Mouvements ouvriers ; Autoritarisme ; Violence ; Sociologie historique ; État d'urgence.

Zusammenfassung

Im März 1974 gründet George Fernandes, Gewerkschaftsführer und Präsident der indischen sozialistischen Partei, eine neue unabhängige Bahnerer-Gewerkschaft und steht an der Spitze eines landesweit stark befolgten, einmonatigen Streiks. Zwei Jahre später, im März 1976, wird Fernandes als Hauptangeklagter im Fall der « Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy » verhaftet, das Bombenattentate auf strategische Ziele in New Delhi zum Ziel hatte, um dem autoritären Regime Indira Gandhis Widerstand zu leisten. Wie hat sich die politische Arbeit George Fernandes in zwei Jahren wandeln können – von einer klassischen Gewerkschaftstaktik hin zu einem Bombardierungsplan strategischer Ziele eines postkolonialen Staates? Wie konnte ein bis dahin gewaltfreier Aktivist sozialer Bewegungen seine Strategien ändern und eine Bewegung aufbauen, die sich der Gewalt verschreibt? Meiner Meinung nach hat die Regierung Indira Gandhis durch die brutale Niederschlagung des Eisenbahnerstreiks und der rechtswidrigen Verhaftung der Streikführer Fernandes und anderen Oppositionsführern bewiesen, dass es keinen Platz für eine friedliche Lösung des zunehmenden sozialen Konflikts im Indien der frühen 70er geben konnte. Als sich Indira Gandhi zum Diktator mauserte, sahen die ehemaligen Verfechter des satyagraha im symbolischen Widerstand gegen Staat die einzige Möglichkeit, die Demokratie in Indien wieder herzustellen.

Schlüsselwörter : Arbeiterbewegung; Autoritarismus; Gewalt; historische Soziologie; Ausnahmezustand.