

What Remains of Maduroismo? Vijay Prasad on Venezuela & US Imperial Decline

In this in-depth interview, Vijay Prasad offers a sweeping analysis of the U.S. escalation against Venezuela, the alleged kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro, and the enduring legacy of the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America. Support Independent media to remain bold: <https://patreon.com/IndiaGlobalLeft> Link for donation: <https://paypal.me/sankymudiar> We begin by unpacking how the United States exercises asymmetric power—through sanctions, coercive diplomacy, financial warfare, and media narratives—and how these tools shape outcomes in Venezuela and across the Global South. Prasad explains what remains of Maduroismo today: the political structures, popular support, and contradictions within Venezuela's Bolivarian process. The conversation also explores Delcy Rodríguez's interventions, the meaning of sovereignty under siege, and whether U.S. power is entering a phase of strategic decline—or becoming more reckless as it weakens. Beyond Venezuela, we examine the future of U.S. interventions globally, the limits of conservative critiques of Donald Trump's foreign policy, and whether such critiques offer anything meaningful for anti-imperialist movements. Finally, Prasad turns to strategy: • Can the Left unite anti-corporatism and anti-landlordism into a mass politics? • Is a gentle critique of imperialism ever useful—and does the same logic apply to critiques of capitalism itself? • What kind of clarity is required to rebuild an internationalist Left today? This interview is essential viewing for anyone seeking to understand U.S. imperial power, Latin American resistance, and the strategic dilemmas facing the global Left.

#Mudiar

Hello and welcome to another episode of *India and the Global Left*. If you're new to the show, please smash that subscribe button. Also, consider becoming a YouTube member, a patron, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Let me welcome our guest tonight, Dr. Vijay Prasad. Dr. Prasad is a historian, author, journalist, and well-known critic of imperialism. Vijay, welcome back to *India and the Global Left*.

#Vijay

Hey, it's great to be here. This is one of my favorite shows.

#Mudiar

Okay, thank you so much. I wanted to focus on Venezuela today with you, to give our viewers an update on what's been happening since January 3, when the U.S. regime—or administration, as you

might prefer to call it—kidnapped Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. You’ve been having discussions about imperialism with many people over the last few decades or so. So first off, how would you describe or explain the kidnapping of the Venezuelan president by the U.S. administration?

#Vijay

I mean, it's an illegal act. You can't just go into a country and grab a head of state. So many laws were violated—the UN Charter, head-of-state immunity, the Charter of the Organization of American States. You can keep going. It was a complete, flagrant disregard for international law. And then, on top of that, the indictment against Nicolás Maduro Moros and Cilia Flores was ridiculous. I read the twenty-odd pages of the indictment after they arrived in New York. The United States actually pulled one of the key parts of the charge against President Maduro, which claimed he was the leader of the Cartel de los Soles.

And I mean, they had to admit—as we’ve all been writing now, and I wrote something over a year ago—that there’s no such thing as the “Cartel of the Suns.” It was a term made up by Venezuelan journalists in the 1990s. The U.S. government had to pull that, had to take it out of the indictment. What’s left? That he has guns? I mean, the U.S. has no jurisdiction over that, whether it’s true or not. You know, there’s no evidence of narco-terrorism. It’s an absolutely ridiculous indictment. It was based on that indictment that the enormous military operation took place, in which a hundred-plus people were killed—Venezuelans and Cubans. You know, what is this? It’s crazy. And, um...

#Mudiar

How does it look from the perspective of the region at large? Of course, Cuba is very important—it’s been under the U.S. siege for decades. But we’ve seen recently this so-called “New Monroe Doctrine,” which has kind of escalated the historical U.S. strangulation of the region. So if you’re someone in Latin America, or for that matter in Central America, how does this abduction—or kidnapping—look from their perspective?

#Vijay

Well, firstly, it was enormously shocking that the United States has that kind of weaponry. I think people underestimated what the U.S. actually has. You know, the last time we saw a full barrage against a country was about 21, 22, 23 years ago, when the U.S. entered Iraq in 2003 in full force. Yes, of course, NATO planes bombed Libya. There have been bombings in Syria, bombings in Somalia, northern Nigeria—I mean, Yemen, you name it. Yeah. But this was—and of course, the largest of them all, Afghanistan and Iran—but that wasn’t a full-scale attack against air defense systems. Here, the United States went in and decapitated the air defense systems. They have some pretty sophisticated sonic weaponry.

As Trump said, “We have the ability to make a country go dark.” They did that. You know, that’s impressive—and scary. Countries are afraid. Even Gabriel Boric in Chile, who has been, I mean, really unfairly critical of the Venezuelan government—Mr. Boric said that day itself, “If it’s Venezuela today, it could be anybody tomorrow.” So, on one side, it’s really rattled people. They can now see that this Monroe Doctrine, with a Trump corollary, comes with this kind of military hardware. I think that’s important to say first. In Venezuela itself, this has really shaken the country, because despite the fact that Acting President Delcy Rodríguez has said, “We’re going to continue the revolution,” and so on, they don’t want to see the United States turn Caracas into Gaza.

They know the U.S. has the capacity to do that, you know, and they’re unwilling to risk—I don’t know—tens of thousands of Venezuelan lives for the sake of being stubborn on this. They’re going to find another way to resist the United States right now. The situation is to find a way to bring the temperature down, which is why they’re negotiating with the U.S. government. I mean, they want anything short of surrender. I think that’s important. The United States has the military capacity to destroy Venezuela. Does it have the political capacity to govern Venezuela? No. And I’m sure we’ll get into that. But even Donald Trump admitted that the U.S. government’s chosen opposition is simply not popular in Venezuela. I mean, he said so. Yeah, he said so.

#Mudiar

So, Edmundo González—or, for that matter, María Corina Machado—they are extremely, extremely unpopular. And this has been admitted by U.S. officials at multiple levels, including the CIA, Donald Trump, and others. There has been talk, speculation, allegations, rumors about the possibility of Rodríguez Cabello taking leadership in Venezuela after the kidnapping of President Maduro. If you could clarify what remains of the Madurismo structure—in terms of the party, leadership, and its popularity—what still exists in Venezuela, I think that would be a good foundation for people to understand what’s going on there.

#Vijay

Well, for that, we need to go back—underneath all this—to the leadership, and that’s the base of Chavismo. You know, when Hugo Chávez came to the presidency in 1999, after winning the 1998 election, he started a major social upheaval. I mean, he built an electoral base by bringing together different factions of the left. He constructed this immense idea of Bolivarianism—the idea that you’ve got to take Venezuela back to Simón Bolívar’s vision. It was incredible politics, incredible to watch him do that. But he knit a base together.

In the first five years of government, roughly from 1999 to 2004, what Mr. Chávez was able to do was take a portion of the oil revenues—obviously not all of it, but a section of it—and create social housing, education programs, and so on. He took populations that were living in slums, for instance, and said, “No, no, no, we’re going to get rid of this slum housing. Right here, right next to the

homes of the middle class, you're going to build an apartment building and you're going to live there. We're not going to evict you. You're going to live there, your children are going to go to school, you're going to get food, you're going to have a decent life, and you're going to govern yourselves."

You're going to become a commune inside this middle-class neighborhood. And he produced, therefore, this base of Chavismo. When he died, that base of Chavismo remained with the political formation of Hugo Chávez, which was the Socialist Party. That's the party that Nicolás Maduro then led into the elections in 2014, and he won by a very slim margin against Henrique Capriles—something like 51 to 49. It was extremely tight. OK, the one thing I can tell you about Venezuela is this: if they wanted to rig elections—which is what the U.S. and the opposition keep saying—they wouldn't rig it to win 51 to 49. You don't rig an election that close.

You take your lessons from Paul Kagame in Rwanda, where you win 99 percent of the vote. Or, you know, from Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt—you win 98 percent of the vote, or whatever it is. I mean, that's how you rig an election. Nobody rigs an election 54 to 48 percent; that's ridiculous. You know, you're going to rig it, you rig it big—not this. This is not a rigged election. I think it's a pretty good estimate that the Chavista base is a little more than 50 percent of the population that votes, and the base of the opposition is just under about 45 percent or so of the population that votes, because that's the range we're talking about.

The larger population—it's very difficult to tell what the base is—but there's a solid Chavista base. And Nicolás Maduro, again, during the pandemic, during the worst of the sanctions, tried to protect the social policies of Chavismo. The most credible leader of the Chavista base that actually emerged from that base is Diosdado Cabello. He's the most important reference, as you'd say in Spanish, of the Chavista base. And he also happens to lead the Socialist Party. Very interesting. And the U.S. government knows this. In the indictment against Nicolás Maduro Moros and Cilia Flores, there are six people named. One of them is Diosdado Cabello. He's named in the indictment because the U.S. government knows that.

He's really important to Chavismo. You know, you take this guy out and that's a problem. Yeah, he's important. OK, there are lots of levels of leadership, but he's hugely respected and loved. He plays a role in that. He's a guy of the grassroots—you know, he understands how people think and work. He's a dynamic speaker and so on. And he's also a very good team player, because when Nicolás Maduro Moros was taken, there was no palace intrigue about who's coming next. Delcy Rodríguez was the vice president, and she then became acting president. There was no struggle for power. But what she did was actually much more impressive: in her first public appearance, she did a televised address.

She was sitting right there, and next to her was Diosdado Cabello. This was a very important symbolic gesture to the Chavista base—that all is good with us, we're not walking away from the base. But imagine what this meant to the CIA, because that's the guy they want. You know, they

want Nicolás Maduro Moros, of course, but they also want Diosdado. They didn't get him, and he's still there. You know, if Delcy Rodríguez had set him aside, then I would have said, OK, this is really not a good situation—we don't know what's going to happen. As soon as the new National Assembly was seated, she had to move into a kind of reform phase of the hydrocarbons law, where there were going to be some oil deals.

The payments will go through Qatar and so on. I mean, they're in a desperate situation economically. OK, I think they've also understood that all the talk about multipolarity—and I've been on with you before and said multipolarity is a little exaggerated—we're really talking about a new mood in the Global South. We don't actually think there's multipolarity. You know, there was no Russia coming in to save the day, no China coming in to save the day. They understand the limitations of their situation. They have to make a deal with the United States. And despite the fact that their president is sitting in a U.S. prison—the first combatant is in a U.S. prison—they're going to have to make a deal.

You know, you'd have to be someone who isn't responsible for the Venezuelan people to call this a sellout. It's very easy for someone who either doesn't live in Venezuela or isn't responsible for the well-being of the Venezuelan people to take some kind of ultra-leftist position. But she has to protect the city of Caracas from being turned into Gaza. She has to protect the well-being of the Venezuelan people. She has to protect the Bolivarian Revolution. She can't afford to be reckless. And I think especially now, given what the United States says it can do—where the U.S. is willing to behave recklessly—for Delcy Rodríguez to counter that recklessness with her own, from a position of military weakness, would be suicidal.

#Mudiar

I guess that's a very important point. I think there's a misunderstanding about the Global South. Given the enormous asymmetry of power—on one side the U.S. empire, on the other these smaller Global South countries—sometimes this gets obscured by the rise of China. People start talking about the decline of the U.S. empire, the decline of the dollar in certain cases, the losses in the tariff wars. But they don't understand how vulnerable other Global South countries are. As you said, Russia or China wouldn't necessarily confront the U.S. when it escalates in these regions. Given this reality, and given all the talk about the decline of the U.S. empire, some scholars even say that imperialism as a category has become less relevant.

I wonder, how would you define these talks under coercion? The mainstream media has presented them as back-channel talks. Others—what you've categorized as ultra-leftists—some within the left have misunderstood this as not being tough enough. We've seen this in the case of Iran, for instance. When they talk, it's like, either you're giving up the principles of the revolution, or you're betraying it. But that totally lacks an understanding of real power. How would you describe these talks about the reforms within the hydrocarbon industry—the diplomatic talks going on between Rodríguez and the U.S. administration? If you could put that in perspective, that would be helpful.

#Vijay

So the important thing to recognize is that the only leverage Delcy Rodríguez has right now is the lack of a political partner the United States can find in Venezuela. Number one, the U.S. has come to understand that the opposition was “made in the USA.” It was, in fact, U.S. money—from the National Endowment for Democracy and other agencies—that created the group Súmate, out of which María Corina Machado became an important figure. Leopoldo López and all these people are basically “made in the USA.” They were constructed with money coming in from the U.S.—large amounts of money.

Ambassador Chris Story—the U.S. ambassador—encouraging street revolts and so on. It’s quite repulsive when you look at Chris Story’s history, what he did when he was ambassador. So, you know, I mean, sitting there in Colombia, dictating terms to this Venezuelan regime—really prone. Talk about surrender. I mean, this right-wing opposition, they surrendered their integrity to the United States. Yeah. So the United States has come to terms with the idea that, you know, if you have somebody like María Corina Machado going to Trump, after all that, and laying the Nobel Prize at his feet—like the Gauls defeated by Caesar, putting their shields at Caesar’s feet.

You know, she comes and begs Trump to take her back into the fold. And Trump sort of dismisses her now—wants to go to war over Greenland because, he says, “Norway didn’t give me the Nobel Prize,” or whatever it is. You know, the fact is they don’t have a credible opposition. Juan Guaidó—not credible. Leopoldo López—very much not credible; he was a gangster. María Corina Machado—not credible. Eduardo González—even less credible. And then Henrique Capriles, who has come into the National Assembly, is seen as the so-called loyal opposition, which is crazy, because Henrique Capriles has stayed in Venezuela and has fought to build the right-wing opposition to the Bolivarians.

And he’s not interested in, you know, coming to power on U.S. jets. People like him—and I’ve interviewed many of them—say, “We don’t have a chance of winning a majority in the country because people aren’t attracted to the message of austerity, you know, of bringing in U.S. oil companies.” They’re not attracted by that. Yeah. It’s not attractive for Venezuela. So the U.S. government has understood that. Trump said, “Look, they’re useless.” Yeah, okay, fine. Then he said, “We’re going to appoint Marco Rubio the boss.” You know how he tweeted that he’s the president of Venezuela. Okay, the U.S. has been through this dance before, yeah? This was called the conquest of Iraq.

When they first took Iraq, they said, “Okay, we’ve got an Iraqi. That’s the María Corina Machado of Iraq.” His name was Ahmed Chalabi, yeah? It turned out Ahmed Chalabi was useless. He was a crooked banker—swindled the banks in Jordan, whatever. They had to discard him quickly. Then they said, “Okay, fine, we’re going to have a viceroy.” In fact, they used that term—viceroy, U.S. viceroy in Iraq. That was Paul Bremer, who was going to run Iraq. And that was a real disaster—total corruption and so on. The U.S. doesn’t have, you know, tools in its toolbox for the political side

of things. It has tools on the military side, but nothing politically. So the United States understands that.

And I think Delcy Rodríguez understood that her only leverage is that the U.S. right now doesn't have an alternative to the government that exists in Venezuela at this moment. So she's going to have to negotiate with them. You know, they need her, and she's going to have to deal with that, because if she doesn't talk to them, they're going to attack again. They'll keep going until they find somebody in the leadership of this government who's willing to deal with them. And I think that's a pretty realistic bit of game theory. If you game this out, they're going to come in again. They could assassinate her, they could take her—it doesn't matter. If they don't need her, they'll shove her aside somehow.

Yeah, militarily, because they have that capacity. And then somebody else comes in next, you know, or they come in and they take out Diosdado. That would be quite calamitous for the Chavista base. They'd have to find another reference. And there are other references. I don't want to make this a one-man issue, but he plays a role. And so, you know, this is a worry. And I get it—I get that they are negotiating. But I also get the fact that they feel stranded, that the allies in the Global South have stranded them. And that's, I think, something of real concern. And look how the U.S. did this—just hours before kidnapping Nicolás Maduro, he meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping's senior envoy.

And not only to Mr. Xi, who's the senior envoy of Xi Jinping—he meets the director of Latin American Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing. The deputy director, all of them are in Miraflores Palace. They meet with Nicolás Maduro. They go back home to sleep in their beds. And while they're asleep in their beds, the United States does this. Please don't tell me the U.S. government didn't know they had come, because I knew they had come—I saw it on Twitter. While it was happening in Miraflores Palace, or shortly thereafter, they showed photographs of it. Yeah. So the U.S. knew this was happening. They monitor all of it in real time. They knew that the most senior official of Xi Jinping and the top people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were in Caracas.

And they didn't say, "Hold for a night, let them leave." They just did the thing. You know, in my opinion, it's a direct insult to the Chinese. And the Chinese haven't come out and said, "You did this while our high officials were there." Why haven't they made a diplomatic issue of just that—just that you endangered the lives of their senior diplomatic staff? They haven't made a public statement about it. This also shows their reticence to get drawn into this. Yeah, what have the Russians said? You know, violation of—well, where are the Russian jet fighters, the Russian response? Nothing. So you can imagine how it feels to be stranded with the responsibility of a large number of Venezuelan people on your shoulders.

#Mudiar

Given this situation, where Venezuelans feel stranded, and given that we've seen international norms and rules just go for a toss, the U.S. empire, in its decline, has gone berserk. What are the checks and balances? I'm also thinking—not just about Venezuela or other nations—but about the core within the U.S. empire itself. Because Trump apparently came to power riding on this façade of "America First," which some people thought meant there was a core that was against intervention. Maybe some of that is true. I'm not sure how you read people like Steve Bannon and Tucker Carlson, but there is a base that's fatigued from U.S. interventions across the globe. Where does this stop? What's your sense of the future of U.S. interventions around the world?

#Vijay

But see, I'm surprised that you, in fact, mentioned Tucker Carlson. I'm surprised you brought that up because a few days after this illegal raid on Venezuela and the kidnapping of Nicolás Maduro, Donald Trump hosted oil executives at the White House—executives from Chevron, Exxon, all of them. Who was in the room with him? Tucker Carlson. Tucker Carlson was a special guest, and he was there clapping when Trump walked in, beaming and so on. Look, don't completely misconstrue people like Tucker Carlson. They are not against U.S. foreign adventures. Do not misconstrue them.

#Mudiar

Can I ask a follow-up here? Because I think that might be important for you. Some people make a distinction when it comes to Tucker Carlson himself—there's very little doubt that he doesn't stand on the side we stand on. But Tucker Carlson is riding on a wave of discontent from a base that some people say is genuinely against U.S. intervention. And these are people not necessarily on the left when it comes to capitalism and so on, but from within the right, within conservatism. Some people say there's a genuine base that's against U.S. intervention. I don't think so.

#Vijay

You don't think so? I don't think so, because, see, Marjorie Taylor Greene, the congresswoman from Georgia, came out and said to Trump, "You know, what are you doing? You said no foreign interventions." Then she says, "I'm not going to run for my seat. I'm not going to run for my seat." Wait a minute—she says, "What are you doing?" And Trump just says, "You're nothing." So she decides, "OK, I'm not running for my seat." Why? Because it's a politically weak position in the MAGA community. Trump is everything. And listen, that section that says "no foreign wars"—what they mean is, "I don't want my kids to come back dead from Iraq or Afghanistan." But if you're going to go out there and kidnap the president of Venezuela and give us the oil, we're with you. You're going to get us Greenland? We're with you. You're going to bomb Iran from the air?

We're with you. I just don't want my kids to die in a war, and I don't want our precious treasure to be wasted. But if you're using our military to get us the oil, to get us something—go ahead. That's

the level of the anti-foreign war sentiment. It's not really a commitment against foreign adventures; it's just, "I don't want my kids to die." Why? Because a section of the MAGA base has children in the military. These are not the elites who don't have kids in the military—some of them do, and they don't want their kids to die. They saw the eldest kid die in Afghanistan; they don't want the youngest kid to die in Venezuela. So Trump is not sending troops into Venezuela. That's not going to be the issue. He understands the limits. He's going to use the "mother of all bombs" on Afghanistan—he was the one who dropped that bomb. People have forgotten.

He's not Mr. Peace. Yeah, he bombs everywhere—yeah. But from the air, where the United States faces no threat to its soldiers, there will be very few body bags of U.S. soldiers coming back. It's overwhelming force—150 military aircraft over the skies of Venezuela, all kinds of strange equipment that made people bleed. I don't even know what the reality is. Yeah, heads exploding—we don't know what happened in that complex. We don't really know yet. But what we do know is he's not going to allow enormous numbers of body bags. That's the limit of his base. The other limit of his base is waste of money. It's not going to happen. He's going to keep saying, "Look, you know, we didn't waste money," even though, if you do the calculation...

The U.S. taxpayer is paying for the raid, the bombs, all of that. And it's ExxonMobil that's going to win the prize. So it's not really the same people. But that bluff has been going on for a long time. I don't think there's a limit to the base's appetite for Trump to go against Greenland, Canada, whatever. If he keeps "winning," so-called, they're happy with him. So, Tucker Carlson is not credible in any way. I mean, when you make that distinction, it doesn't fly. Because if that distinction were true, then why would he allow himself to be at a public event, clapping after a foreign intervention? He knows his base supports the attack on Venezuela.

It shows that America is strong. Remember, they are "America First." They are not America isolationists. That's what Marjorie Taylor Greene didn't understand. She thought it meant Trump would use our money to take care of her constituents in Georgia. No, these are not isolationists. That's an America isolationist approach. These are "America First," which means, you know, reconstruct U.S. hegemony—whatever it takes. Does it take an atom bomb somewhere in Asia? Go ahead. You know, we don't care. We are American. I mean, that's the kind of Trump base we're dealing with. You know, it doesn't have limits on this. The limit is the body bag. The limit is if they think their money is being wasted on adventures abroad.

#Mudiar

Yeah, I guess on the left we don't make that distinction very often, because we've been saying that you have to be principled and ideologically aligned on one side to be genuinely anti-imperialist. I mean, you can't disregard much of the working class of the Global South, you can't ignore the labor aristocracy within the imperial heartland, and then talk about non-intervention. Because ultimately,

you're the people whose language about immigrant workers, whose language about people doing manual work, is so grotesque that you can't just have a genuine anti-intervention position in Latin America but also across the globe.

But yeah, I do interview conservative thinkers on foreign policy—people like Colonel Wilkerson—who argue from within a conservative base. I don't agree with him on things like state spending, questions of efficiency, private versus public sector, or what to do with rent, etc. But while I interview them, I do feel that there is a conservative current—maybe within the think tank, I'm not sure how wide that base actually is—but within the think tank, there's a section of traditional conservatism whose understanding of capitalism is very fraught, whose understanding of imperialism as an integral part of capitalism is also very fraught. But nevertheless, they seem to be exhausted and principally opposed to things like military intervention or even the presence of firepower.

#Vijay

Yeah, but, you know, the thing is, personally, OK, that's fine, and it's all very well. But that's a form of genteel critique—you know, a critique of gentleness, in other words. They were fine when the CIA was doing covert things, when they were overthrowing governments. I mean, Colonel Wilkerson, for instance, was the number two to Colin Powell. When Colin Powell went into the chamber of the United Nations Security Council and lied about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, later Colonel Wilkerson said, well, the CIA lied to them. I mean, this is Colin Powell we're talking about—and Larry Wilkerson.

I mean, how do you get taken for a ride by the CIA? You know, when the rest of us outside were saying, this is ridiculous, it doesn't add up. I mean, you guys are torturing people and getting evidence—we know that only after the fact. I don't trust their judgment at all. I know that Mr. Wilkerson and I have shared platforms together on Zoom, and we've been in a film together and so on, but I don't trust their judgment. I mean, where were you when you were in the military, and you were, I suppose, OK with the U.S. anti-terror conflicts in the 1990s, when the U.S. was bombing Yemen, bombing Sudan?

Yeah, they bombed a pharmaceutical factory—the Al Shifa factory in Khartoum, Sudan—the only factory that produced a number of important lifesaving drugs in Eastern Africa. I mean, where were they then? Why didn't they resign then? Or why didn't they speak then? Why haven't they spoken about that? The judgment of the genteel conservative critics of Trump is meaningless to me, because when it counted, they remained silent. Because of the vulgarity of Trump, they're put off. They're put off by his vulgarity more than by the fact that the U.S. can go and overthrow a bad actor abroad. They seem quite OK with that.

Frankly, I don't think I am. I have yet to see that section of genteel conservatives go back and address their own pasts—the kinds of things they supported—and give us an account of that. I mean, how is it possible that you're upset with Trump now, but you were OK with Clinton doing

something, or somebody else doing something else? Or how are you OK with how the United States dealt with the Iranian Revolution and then the Islamic Republic? How are you OK with the U.S. providing chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein to use against young Iranian soldiers at the front, tossing mustard gas at them?

I mean, how are you OK with that? So I'm afraid I have very little patience for their, you know, genteel criticism, because their criticism is about tone. It's about the way of doing things. It's not a criticism, as you just said, of the structure—but even tone. I mean, what tone, man? Entire youth were gassed with mustard in Iran. You talk about, “Oh, Iran is this.” If Iran hadn't had to face the attack from Iraq in 1980 and then eight years of war, the government wouldn't be so paranoid. The government would have been much more open to the world, much less in a siege mentality.

Yeah. Now you say, “Oh, you know, they are so closed-minded.” Well, guess who made them closed-minded? They're not closed-minded. In fact, they're quite rational, because they know what you're capable of doing to them. So they're always prepared, always scared of what kind of horrors you can inflict on them. You know, twenty people come out on the street in Tehran, and they immediately say this is created from outside. Why? Because this is exactly what you do to them. You inflict this on them. You create the social structure of paranoia. It's not something that comes from within the Iranian Revolution or that the Islamic Republic imposed on them.

So these are the gentle critics. Yeah. I mean, I went on a rant, but for God's sake, guys, wake up to your own realities. When you're critical of Donald Trump now on Venezuela, you've got to understand you don't have a base in the United States that follows you. Your base now is the liberal base, bizarrely. It's the liberal base. Where do people like Lawrence Wilkerson go? What kind of programs do they come on? Yeah, they come on liberal and left programs. They're not invited to go on the right-wing shows on Fox and so on. Nobody takes them seriously.

#Mudiar

I wanted to ask you very briefly about Fox. Given your answer, for me it's a broad discussion about the left's strategy toward multiple strands of political thinking and political bases. I was also wondering about your thoughts on a section of the working class—let's say in the West—that is genuinely disillusioned with corporate America or corporate Western capitalism: against landlordism, against rent, against insurance companies, particularly health insurance, but also car insurance, big banks, pharmaceuticals, and so on. But these are people who are not necessarily critical of capitalism or of profit per se. So, as someone on the left, what would be your strategy toward the working class that doesn't have a comprehensive critique of capitalism but is definitely disillusioned by corporatism and by the large inequalities of power and wealth?

#Vijay

Well, the first thing to say is that this is not actually restricted to the West or the global North. This is a problem of what you might call "money democracy." In India, for instance, you can have a general strike every year—200, 250 million workers go on strike annually. You've had millions of farmers gather around Delhi in a massive farmers' strike, and so on. In Brazil, you have very large demonstrations—landless workers, trade unions, enormous mobilizations—and still, they can't convert that into electoral power. They have a certain kind of political strength on the ground, but they can't turn it into electoral power. What's the problem? What's going on in Europe, in France? You have enormous demonstrations against the reform of the retirement age.

You have protests over pensions, enormous demonstrations—Paris in convulsion, farmers driving their tractors into the city. But they can't really convert that into electoral gains. What's going on? I have a feeling the problem here isn't that the working class doesn't have a critique of capitalism. You don't need a critique of capitalism to come to power in an election on a reform slate. You don't need that. You know, we don't even have reform slates winning elections in the United States. We don't even have a party that wants to reform the structure—you don't even have that. Bernie Sanders barnstorms through the country, large rallies and so on, with a genuine reform slate. Yet he's not a radical.

He's not anti-capitalist. He's not even anti-imperialist. But he has a genuine program—the things you mentioned: health care, insurance, this, that, and the other. Yeah. Galvanized, but not permitted to be in the main election. Yeah. This happens over and over again. There is a problem with democracy, and we have to face this fact. You know, it's not just a question of ideology—that the working class doesn't have the, quote-unquote, correct ideology. No. I mean, if they had faith in the political process, people might actually participate in it. Yeah. But the political process is money. In India, 80 percent or more of this vast election money that we know—above the waters—we don't know what's underneath, you know, what the rest of the iceberg of money looks like, the illegal money.

But of the legal money, over 80 percent, I'm told, goes to the BJP. So then the question is, these are money elections. You know, there's a way in which the system prevents genuine candidates from entering elections—people who have, call it what you will, a people's agenda. Not a radical agenda, a people's agenda. On these very issues you talked about—the basic reforms—they just don't get a place in the structure. They get set aside. This happens all the time. You know, again, it's not just a Global North–Global South thing. It's an election problem. We have a problem with the systems of elections. They just don't permit certain kinds of agendas. And we're not talking about radicalism.

That's actually the stunning thing—you don't need to be a radical to be shut out of the system. The examples are: in the United States, Bernie Sanders; in the UK, Jeremy Corbyn; and in France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon. I mean, the French, by some extraordinary turn of events, have the largest bloc in

the National Assembly. They have a right to claim the prime minister's chair, but Emmanuel Macron, the president, just won't let them have it. He'll put in as prime minister a person with one seat rather than the leader of the largest bloc. And somehow that's legal in France. This is a serious issue.

Imagine the public that votes for, you know, the left bloc in the French parliament. Then they're going to think, what's the point of electing the left? They don't have any ability to convert it. Let's just vote for Marine Le Pen and let her come in—she'll shake things up. I mean, if you want reform, if you want your retirement age protected, you think maybe she'll do it, because they can't do it. They can't fight Macron. We need somebody who can fight him. So in that sense, it's not just an ideological issue. OK, maybe it's partly ideology, but it's also got something to do with the systems we have.

The electoral systems are simply not democratic. That's the problem—you have elections, and then you have democracy, but they don't really line up. In the United States, you don't have a democratic election system, nor in Britain, nor in France. I mean, in Britain, how did Keir Starmer's Labour get such an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons? They didn't get an overwhelming share of the vote. That's something to do with the system. It's bizarre. In India, you can win an election with 15 percent of the vote if you're the largest vote-getter in that district. So what do you do? You pay fifty candidates to run—you pick a fellow.

OK, you know, I'm running from the Congress Party. My name is Vijay Prasad. The BJP will find another fellow named Vijay Prasad and put him up there, maybe in some other constituency. It'll confuse the electorate—you know, which Vijay Prasad am I voting for? There are four of them! Yeah. And then their candidate wins by 20 percent or 18 percent. What kind of democracy is that? This is not democracy. It's an election, sure—I'll give it to you, it's an election. Why should I deny that? I'm not living on another planet. It's definitely an election, yeah, there's definitely voting happening, but it's definitely not democracy. So therefore, I don't know if it's entirely an ideological issue. I think it's also a democracy problem.

#Mudiar

Yeah, I guess you and I have the same view about elections and how much they lack actual popular legitimacy. I mean, it's just money power. Ultimately, there's this question of who you go to if you want to win elections. A lot of people say you go to the voters, but the real answer is you go to those who have the resources—the media outlets, those who provide you helicopters and buses and free money, and so on and so forth. At the end of the day, you may or may not go to your voters, but you'll win the elections if you have media, helicopters, transportation, and all that. So actually, I wasn't thinking about elections; I was thinking about people's understanding of the economic system itself.

Given my interest in economics, I've been talking to people about their perceptions—their understanding and experience of the economic system. And when I talk about the specifics, when I

discuss the particularities of our economic systems—whether it's about how food is distributed, how rent is monopolized, or how the public sector has been contractualized and privatized—I see a pattern. I recently went to a power station in India and did a small survey. They're running with only 27 permanent workers out of a total staff of 135. So the level of contractualization that's been happening across the world is part of our larger understanding—it's part of neoliberal capitalism.

And yet, as leftists, we see this shift—there's tremendous discontent about contractualization and privatization. But people don't use the word "capitalism" the way they used to, up until the 1970s. I did some research on the 1920s and 1930s, and the way language about capitalism was used in those sources—how it was discussed alongside imperialism, and how illegitimate capitalism was considered as a system—people today don't really use the term that way anymore. And that's what I was wondering, given your statement about imperialism: that unless and until you have a comprehensive understanding of imperialism, your gentle critique is not worth my time. Would you apply the same logic to the gentle critique of capitalism? That was my question.

#Vijay

So, you know, all of this has to do with how you're able to understand a system. First, you understand the system based on your own experience of it. For instance, that's why I said with imperialism: a population says, "I don't want to see my child come back dead from a foreign war." So my understanding of imperialism—or what I'm against—is you sending my child overseas to be killed. If other people are dying, that doesn't bother me. But that idea—that I don't want my kid to go abroad and get killed—is the beginning of a conversation about the imperialist system. That person has a vested interest in understanding that your kid goes abroad to die not to defend your country, but to defend the system. That's the beginning of it.

So you actually have a personal experience—one, of a child dying, and two, of the potential of a child dying. Somebody says, "I don't want my child to go and die." So you have a material stake in the conversation. You're not talking theoretically; you have an actual material stake. And there, you can have an interesting conversation about what that means. You need a political force to come into people's lives to have that conversation. Now, unfortunately, I come to elections, because elections are when people are attuned to having these conversations. And if you can't do that, then people can't take, in a sense, the material reality of their understanding of imperialism and build it into a larger theory.

Similarly with capitalism—yeah. Somebody says, "Look, I can't pay my hospital bills. I'm going broke," or "Insurance premiums have gone up," or "Why should the retirement age change?" and so on. You know, you're experiencing the tentacles of the capitalist system, but you're not necessarily seeing the whole system. Nobody sees the whole system. Even the most sophisticated analysts keep trying to put the system together. That's the nature of analysis: you get a whole bunch of discrete points and you try to join the dots. So people see three, four, five, six points in their own experience. A working-class person sees a lot of those points in their own experience. The question

is how you put it together. The simplest way to put it together is to say, "My boss is a horrible person."

Yeah, you personalize the issue: "My boss is horrible. I got the wrong insurance company. I should've gone with the other carrier." You were right, you warned me, I'm an idiot. Yeah, you individualize it—you make it about bad consumer choices and so on. These are ways in which you, in a way, mute out the points of experience of the system. But again, it begs the question: you need a political formation in your life that's available—somebody saying to you, "Wait a minute, it's actually not your fault." Because if you pick this company or that company or the other company, they may have marginal differences, true, but they're all pretty bad. Yeah. If you go to ChatGPT and say, "ChatGPT, these are five insurance plans, which is the best one?"

Chances are that ChatGPT is going to come back to you and say, "Well, I've listed them in order of which is the worst. Yeah, but this one is better than the others." Because you didn't ask it, "Are they all the same? Are they all part of the capitalist system?" The question you asked was, "Which is the best?" Why? Because you have to survive. You have to buy insurance, so you need to know which is the best. It becomes consumer choice, you understand? It's not—what happens is that when you have a bad experience with the capitalist system, you think, "Well, this airline is bad; if I'd only taken the other airline." So these are all ways you mute it. Somebody has to politicize it for you. It's not necessarily a spontaneous thing.

You know, you can have mass demonstrations against United Airlines, for instance, or against some issue. But that kind of spontaneous demonstration isn't necessarily politicizing. Yeah, it politicizes you in the sense that you gain confidence in your ability to be political. But you still need somebody out there connecting the dots. That means you need some political references. And again, we come back to elections—if the electoral system is so suffocating that you don't have political references there, the Bernie Sanders types aren't even allowed to develop a social democratic ideology. And then the left, the hard left, gets completely marginalized because it doesn't actually appear at the time of politics and speak at the level of ordinary people.

It's just telling you capitalism is doomed. You know, it's kind of in the land of doom. Yeah. But for people, you have to be at the level of their dots and connect them. Communicators like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie are very good at that—at the level of the dots. Yeah. But if they themselves are being shut out, imagine the problem. So I'm saying to you, it's not that the elections thing is a separate conversation; it's actually about the strategic path to lift up. You can't just have a research institute or a think tank where you write a PhD and the working class says, "Oh, Mudiar Jyotishman has written a PhD—now we get it." Yeah. How are they even going to know your PhD exists?

Yeah. What's the means of communication from your PhD to their understanding of their dots? Somebody has to mediate that, and that's a political force, I'm afraid. So then you come back to the whole question of what the understanding of politics is, because that mediation just isn't available in most societies. In India, you have major left parties—they are the mediating force. You have trade

unions—they are the mediating force. But you also have, you know, 1.5 billion people, and these organizations are very small. They don't have the capacity to reach every household, to go door to door and have the conversation with hundreds of millions of people. Because that's what you have to do.

#Mudiar

Yeah, we'll leave it there in the interest of your time. But I wanted to discuss what's going on in Venezuela, and at the same time, I wanted to place that within a broader understanding of imperialism and capitalism—since the mainstream media always treats these developments as isolated events and ignores the larger framework of imperialism and capitalism. Vijay, it was wonderful as always. Thank you so much for your time.

#Vijay

Thanks a lot.

#Mudiar

All right.

#Ayushman

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Mudiar Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we've tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We've interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you've liked our content and want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please consider donating to the cause—the link is in the description below. And if you're not able to do so, don't feel bad; you can always like and share our videos with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.