



COMMON SENSE

With Paul Jacob



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Capitalism vs. Caste

An "Untouchable" in India's caste system has changed his mind.

Chandra Bhan Prasad, an Indian writer and activist, was once the worst kind of socialist. According to a profile in the *New York Times*, he had been the kind of Maoist revolutionary who "carried a pistol and recruited his people to kill their upper-caste landlords."

Now Prasad says the best way to lift low-caste members of society out of poverty is to increase economic freedom, let capitalism flourish. He accuses hardcore leftists of "hatred for those who are happy."

Prasad is conducting a survey of India's untouchables to learn about the impact of the economic liberalization that has been underway in India since the early '90s. His survey finds that they are less likely to be confined to the traditional jobs of their caste, like skinning animals. And that they enjoy more social privileges than they once did.

The *Times* reporter advises that the results of greater economic freedom are uneven, that many untouchables are still mired in poverty while members of the upper caste still possess great advantage. Not very surprising, eh? You can't expunge decades and centuries of bad policy and entrenched prejudice with a snap of the fingers.

On the other hand, if you want to bring millions out of grinding poverty, the abundant wealth created by capitalism sure comes in handy. Socialism will keep them poor just fine.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.