

The Day of the Disappeared: The Twenty-Seventh Newsletter (2018)



Dear Friends,

Greetings from the desk of the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**.

I'm eating lunch on Thursday (August 30) with the team from our Buenos Aires office. The television screen is above us. The commentary is fixed on the rapidly slipping exchange rate. Yesterday, the exchange rate was US\$1 to 31 Argentinian pesos. The rate now is US\$1 to 40 Argentinian pesos. Writing these numbers is already irrelevant: who knows what the rate will be by the time you read this newsletter. Graffiti across Buenos Aires and La Plata bristle against the government of Mauricio Macri. There is anger here, but also exhaustion. Last night, we observed a demonstration by students at the University of La Plata. They had mobilised to defend education, in particular to offer support to the teachers who were to take to the streets of Buenos Aires the next day. That teachers' protest morphed quickly – as the peso fell against the dollar – into a general demonstration against the government.

Argentina, India, Turkey – each of these countries sees a slide in their currency, the compromised sovereignty of their democracy to the imperialism of high finance (for more on this, see our **dossier #7**, an interview with Professor Prabhat Patnaik on trade wars and finance). Few available exits exist from what appears to be an endless crisis, a crisis that feeds on crisis and generates new crises. More dollar-denominated loans will be taken to pay off the urgent debt service obligations, which will compound the debt and roll the crisis over for a few months. There is little expectation that exports will increase at such a pace that its earnings will be able to cover the debt. The theory of development had been reduced to a theological expectation that export-oriented growth would pay off the foreign-direct investment (known as FDI in all languages). Those who continue to pin their hopes on export-oriented growth are as delusory as those who believe that the earth is flat.

It would be valuable for the finance ministers of Argentina, India and Turkey to stop work for a few hours and read Eric Toussaint's excellent **assessment** of the constraints put on Greece by the imperialism of high finance. Toussaint, of the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM), looks carefully at Greece's narrow policy space produced by the European Central Bank and the IMF, the private banks and the governments of the West. The government led by Syriza made commitments to these powerful entities, which made it impossible for Greece to effectively move out of its endless crisis. The situation of Greece is an object lesson for Argentina, India, Turkey and other middle-income countries. It is their past and their future.

Keep an eye out for the dossier from our Buenos Aires office of **Tricontinental: Institute of Social Research** on the Argentinian crisis. It will be released in November.



Today is the International Day of the Disappeared. A day ago, I walked in the Plaza de Mayo, the square before the Pink House where Argentina's government sits. It is here that the mothers of the disappeared continue to march, searching desperately for their children and grandchildren who were killed by the military Junta between 1976 and 1983. Many of them have no word yet about the fate of their family members, mostly left-wing activists who had devoted their brief lives to the well-being of the working-class, the peasantry and the excluded. Amongst them was the writer Rodolfo Walsh, who wrote a powerful open letter to the dictatorship on the first anniversary of the dictatorship.

I was reading Walsh's letter when I learned that the police from Pune (Maharashtra, India) had arrested five sensitive people – patriots of the Indian poor – for unspecified crimes. There is something surreal about these arrests, as surreal as the arrest of Shahidul Alam in Bangladesh and Daren Tatour in Israel. In the Indian Supreme Court, Justice DY Chandrachud said of these arrests, 'Dissent is the safety valve of a democracy; if you don't allow safety valve, the pressure cooker will burst'. This is the judiciary speaking. Governments do not believe this – believing instead that anyone who helps organise the anger of the people is anti-national and so, seditious. Drawing inspiration from Walsh, I **write** of the general desiccation of space for democratic action. • The economic slide cannot be stopped by a knife in the gut of a left-wing activist or a nuclear test or another trip overseas by the itinerant prime minister. What can derail the conversation is for every household in India with a television set to be transfixed on what appears to be a totally fallacious series of arrests. One of those arrested, the journalist Gautam Navlakha, wrote a **note** that suggested that his arrest – and that of his comrades – was merely a 'political ploy against political dissent by this vindictive and cowardly government'. These are brave words. Gautam ends his note with this poem from Shailendra (translation from Hindi by Surangya).

Tu zinda hai toh zindagi ki jeet par yakeen kar

Agar kabin hai swarg to utaar la zameen par

Yeh gham ke aur char din sitam ke aur char din

Yeh din bhi jayenge guzar

Guzar gaye hazaar din

Tu zinda hai

As long as you are alive, believe that life will be victorious.

If there is a heaven somewhere, create it here on earth.

The days of grief are numbered, the days of injustice are numbered.

These days shall also pass, like a thousand days have before them.

You are alive.

In the picture above, Gautam smiles as he is led away by the police.



On December 21, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly passed **resolution 65/209**, which expressed the deep concern of the member nations of the UN for the enforced or involuntary disappearances of people across the world by governments. The resolution welcomed the fact of an International Day of the Disappeared, which had begun to be commemorated on August 30 at the initiative of the Latin American Federation of Associations for Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared (*Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos*). The group was formed at a meeting in Costa Rica in 1981, at a time when the ‘dirty wars’ in Central America tore at the heart of society. This was also during the military dictatorships in South America.

In Turkey, the Mothers of the Disappeared (Cumartesi Anneleri) held their 700th weekly demonstration against the disappearance of their children. The picture above is of Arat Dink, the son of the murdered Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. As the police came close to detain him, four members of parliament of the HDP (the left-Kurdish party) surrounded him. They did not allow him to disappear.



The arrests of the Indian writers and lawyers took place days before August 30.

On the day itself, in Buenos Aires, massive crowds gathered despite the rain to protest the attack on education and on the slide in the peso. A short subway ride from that protest is the old secret torture and detention centre, where five thousand militants of the trade union and student movement had been taken in the years of the military dictatorship. The place is now a museum. When I was last in Argentina, I met the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, who asked me then if I had been to see the Escuela de Mecanica de la Armada. It has taken me more than a decade to visit this torture museum. Please read my diary of the visit [here](#). The picture below is the tribute from **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** to our dear friend Eduardo Galeano. It was Galeano who wrote – bitterly – that Latin America ‘inspired universal contributions to the development of methods of torture, techniques for assassinating people and ideas, for the cultivation of silence, the extension of impotence, and the sowing of fear’.

Above is a picture of a militant taken after her first interrogation. She faces the camera. She is brave. As the shutter drops, she lifts her fist in defiance. Her fate is clear. She will be killed. We do not know her name. ‘Her bravery’, I write in my diary, ‘is a signal across time to all of us. As long as you are resisting, you are not defeated’. The last phrase is from the Lebanese Marxist **Mehdi Amel**, who was assassinated on May 18, 1987.

Warmly,

Vijay.

Please visit our [website](#). We have a great deal of material there, including the past newsletters in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. You can sign up for the newsletter at the website.