

The Eighth Newsletter (2018): Blindness In Our Times



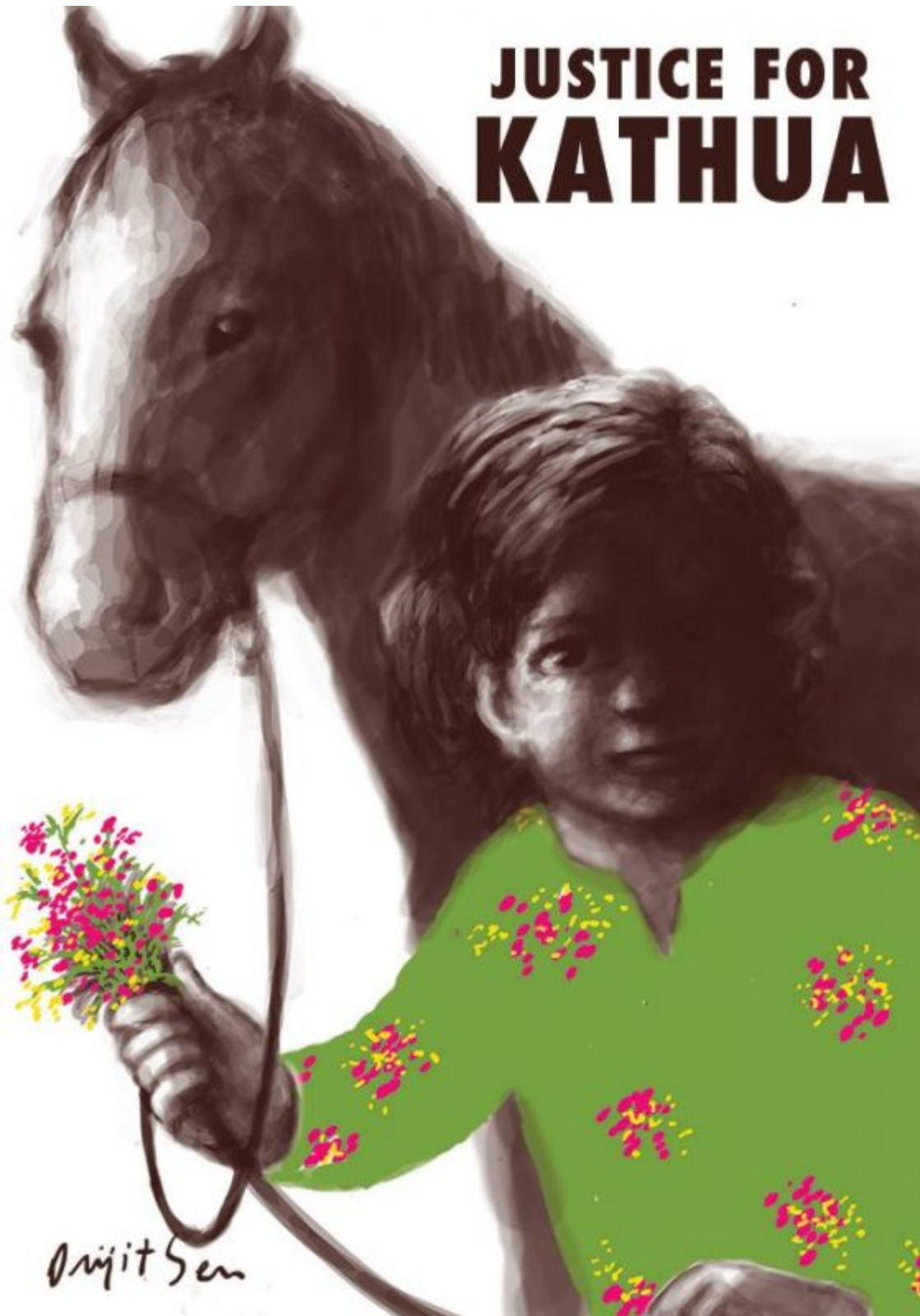
Dear Friends,

A few days ago, I read a study about Vitamin A deficiency, which leaves half a million children blind. It was a shocking statistic. It came as I read a set of World Health Organisation reports on the diseases of poverty – diarrhea, malaria and so on. Each of these ailments have simple solutions – but these are not available for the poor. High rates of respiratory ailments strike women of the working poor because they are forced to cook on stoves that generate a large amount of carbon monoxide. Designs for smokeless stoves can be seen in almost every university – and yet these stoves are not made available to the working poor. Because they have no money, the working poor go blind and suffer from smoke poisoning.

The prevalence of these diseases of the poor offer once more evidence of the inhumanity of our times. As I write this, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) deliberates at its 22nd Congress in Hyderabad. The delegates to this Congress are trying to work out the political line for the party. Those who roll their eyes and wonder about the relevance of the Left in these times should pay attention to the diseases of the poor. There is no political interest from the parties of liberalism to develop serious policies to tackle this abomination. It remains with the Left to be focused on disease and hunger, illiteracy and war – the perils of our times. At *Newslick* this week, I have a brief note on the Party Congress and of the necessity of the Left. You can read it [here](#).

Why are governments unable or unwilling to put at the centre of their work these malignancies? Even governments that are sympathetic to the working poor and would like to work out an agenda to solve these structural problems, find themselves trapped by the policy framework of the present. Two weeks ago, I joined CS Soong on the radio to talk about the first *Working Document* from **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**. We spoke for an hour about some of these issues – enduring problems and the need to find solutions to them. You can listen to the radio show [here](#). It is based on the *Working Document*, which is available to be downloaded freely [here](#).

JUSTICE FOR KATHUA

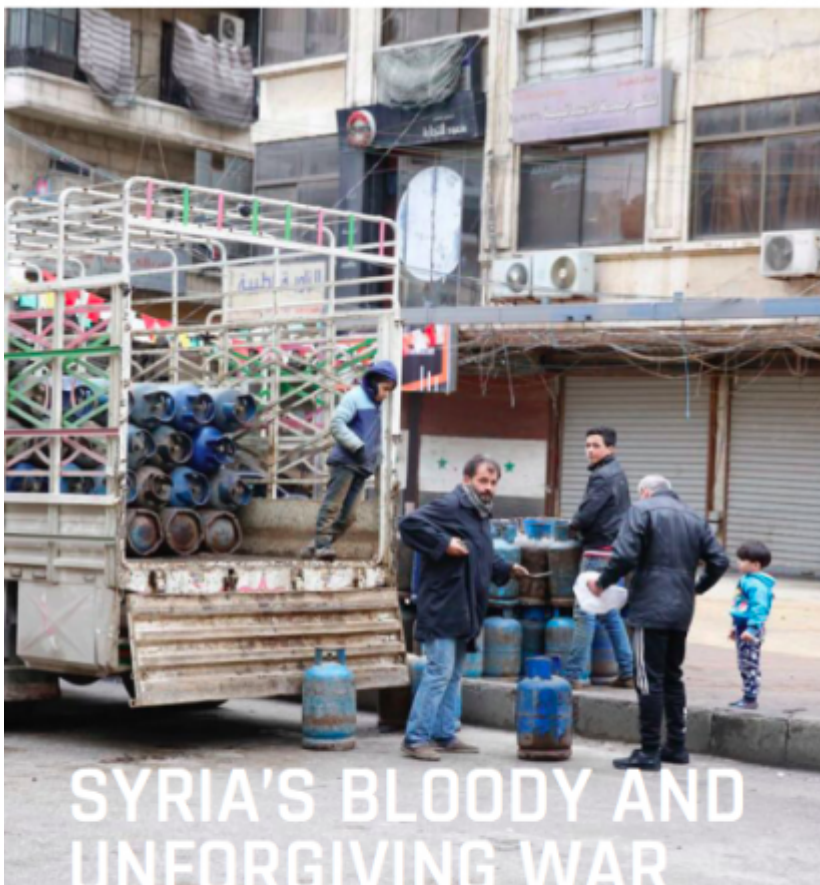


Poverty manifests itself in many way, one of which is through sexual violence against girls and women of the working class. India today is seized by two brutal incidents, one the kidnapping, confinement, gang rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl from an impoverished family in the

Jammu and Kashmir, and the other the rape of a young woman in the home of an elected official. In both cases, the party of India's right-wing, the BJP, is implicated. The elected official is from the BJP and the BJP sent its people to defend the men who gang raped the eight-year-old girl. These incidents are part of a culture of violence, but more specifically they are attacks on girls and women from vulnerable communities who were targeted by men who see themselves as superior not only as men, but for their religion, their caste, their class and their political affiliations.

The brutal incidents, the role of the BJP and the complicity of the state has drawn people to the streets. Demonstrations across the country have begun to define the issue. It is because of these protests that the perpetrators have been arrested. They are in prison, but the culture of this kind of violence remains on the streets.

My report on the rapes, on the culture of violence and on the protests can be read [here](#). The image above is by the designer Orijit Sen. It was a poster seen at the protests.



Allegations of another chemical attack – this time in Douma (Syria) – flooded the global media. The United Nations’ Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was seized with its responsibility to go into Syria and investigate the allegation. Before the OPCW team could enter the country from Beirut, the United States, the United Kingdom and France bombed some sites of alleged chemical weapons production by the Syrian government. The bombing run seemed coordinated with the Russians. Nobody wanted to make any mistakes and draw the Russians and Iranians into a wider conflict, which means an attack on Israel or on US interests in the region (the US naval base in Bahrain, for instance). The attack seemed motivated entirely by public relations in the West – how to handle the expectations set by Obama’s ‘red line’ in 2013. No serious strategy seems to motivate these bombing runs.

What is odd about the bombing runs, and which I emphasised in a quick report for *Alternet* which you can read [here](#), is that if the US government had information about these sites why did it not bomb them in 2017 (during Trump’s previous bombing raid), why did it not hand this information to the OPCW in 2013 (to better enable it to do its job over the course of that year) and why did it bomb sites with chemical weapons that would release its gases and liquids into the air and groundwater?

There is so little that is clear about this conflict and yet such certainty in the global media. There is an unwillingness to ask basic questions despite the fact that we have so many reasons not to trust the US government as the first (and often only) source for information. Syria is certainly being destroyed. That is without doubt. Discussions should centre around the question of political reconciliation, as we argue in our **Tricontinental Dossier** on Syria (free download [here](#)). But this is not the focus of the Left. It is focused on tearing itself apart over a debate that is not consequential.



The cost to the United States of this current bombing run in Syria was near \$250 million (the cost of the 112 tomahawk missiles alone was \$224 million). This does not include the cost to the citizens of the United Kingdom and France. Meanwhile, for instance, the people of Flint, Michigan are being poisoned by the terrible water produced by their criminal municipality and by old, broken lead pipes. To replace those pipes would cost over \$100 million. But there is no urgency about tending to the working poor. No emergency here.

As our first *Working Document* puts it, there is a tax strike by the plutocracy who fail to contribute to public finances. What money exists goes towards war. Trump has now increased the US military budget (or what is publically known) to \$719 billion – an increase of \$94 billion, which is itself more than the annual military budget of Russia. This money to the military drains money that could solve pressing social problems.

Our friends at the Institute for Policy Studies and National Priorities Project have produced an important study – which you can read [here](#) – for the Poor People’s Campaign in the United States. This audit reveals the extent of poverty in the United States and the scandalous lack of regard by the elected officials for the working poor. There is blindness by the plutocracy in such a rich country. If they are so heartless towards their own citizens, imagine the attitude towards people who live far away.

Please be in touch to let us know about things you are doing and reading, about things we need to cover in this newsletter. You can reach me directly at vijay@thetricontinental.org.

Warmly, Vijay.