

The Fourth Newsletter (2018): Economics and Miners



Dear Friends,

Greetings from Brazil, where the political situation is tense. Brazil's top court just gave the former president Lula temporary relief from prison. You might remember that I had shared with you a short brief on the political persecution of the Left in Brazil (you can read it [here](#)). Lula has come to define the hopes of Brazil's working and oppressed peoples, people who see the country now in the hands of the government of a 'soft coup'. Lula remains the candidate for the presidency of the Workers' Party (PT). It is to be seen if the judiciary will allow him to run in the elections later this year. We, at **Tricontinental** (from our office in São

Paulo), will be producing a dossier on the Lula case in a few months.

Today, at our **Tricontinental** website, we have released our first Working Document. It is called *In the Ruins of the Present*. The document makes the argument that the new technologies and political arrangements of globalisation have weakened the power of workers and strengthened the power of those who control money. Social decay followed. Poverty and hopelessness alongside the lure of commodities began to define cultural life for billions of people. Social democrats, whose policy framework was defined by neo-liberalism, failed to address the needs of the people. It was in this gap that emerged the monsters of our age, the neofascism of the strongmen.

The second half of the Working Document – which I have authored – is about the question of what must be done by the Left in our different locations in response to this. It goes into the decomposition of the working-class, peasantry and other allied groups and then suggests – through the experience of our movements – some ways out of the impasse. The Working Document is available for free download [here](#).

Please read it. Please circulate it. Please use it as you see fit. It is a Working Document. We welcome feedback. We'd be happy to publish critiques of it. We would very much like this document to stimulate a debate.



The question of the dynamism of the communities of the working class has been placed firmly on the table by the people of Morocco. The Hirak Rif (Rif Movement) of the past several years is now joined in the town of Jerada by the protests of the people against the mining conditions and the general deterioration of their livelihood. Bravery is the main character trait. They have faced off against police violence and the lies of the authorities. It is a sign of the human spirit that the people of Jerada have not wilted before the immense pressure placed upon them. At *Newslick*, my Radical Journeys brief report is on this struggle (with fantastic photographs from Jerada). Please read it [here](#).

For an excellent retrospective essay on the February 20, 2011 uprising in Morocco, please see Ilhem Rachidi's essay at *Towards Freedom* ([here](#)). Ilhem makes a great deal of the slogan that the people are no longer afraid. This is a fact of our times. The people are indeed not afraid. But then what comes next? Will they be able to move an agenda against the *makhzen*, the ruling bloc of the country? (Last year I had written a brief explainer on the situation in Morocco for *The Hindu*, which you can read [here](#)).



That bravery and resilience was on display this week in Brazil, when the World Water Forum held in Brasilia was interrupted by militants who came into the conference venue and spray painted signs to demand that water remain in the commons and not be made into a commodity. In São Lourenço, six hundred women of the MST (*Movimento dos Sem Terra* – Movement of the Landless), occupied a Nestlé factory. Their message echoed that of the spray paint. They will not tolerate this basic gift of nature to be stolen by those who have money. One of the leaders of the occupation, Nivia Silva, said that the MST and the people in general would not allow the ‘soft coup’ government to auction Brazil’s water. If you read Portuguese, [here](#) is the Charter of São Lourenço, as released by the women who led this protest.

If you have not read our **Tricontinental** Dossier #2 on *Cities Without Water*, then please do so. It captures the issues raised by the protests around the privatisation of water as well as offers an alternative perspective on how water should be managed. You can read our dossier [here](#).

It is important to point out that our movements are not merely critical of the status quo. They offer an alternative. They resume the discussion of a new utopia, a socialist horizon that is necessary against the rather miserable conditions of the present.



Meanwhile, along the grain of the women in Brazil, the workers of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and other allied unions, took to the streets against a Minimum Wage Bill, which would mandate the lowest wages to be half of what the living wage is in South Africa. They will build towards a General Strike in the country on April 25. Keep an eye out for that.



On history's bad side, the war in Syria. The northern Syrian town of Afrin fell last week from the hands of the Syrian Kurds into those of the Turkish military and various Turkish-backed militia groups. The repression inside the city is horrific. Reports from contacts who remain trapped there or who have fled to other towns held by the Syrian Kurdish forces suggest that the Turkish forces are being brutal against anyone who worked with the previous authorities. I have a report at *Alternet* on developments in Afrin and in the Syrian war in general. You can read it [here](#).

With the addition of John Bolton to his team, Trump has now assembled a war cabinet with itchy fingers. What chaos they will want to produce in West Asia is to be seen. Will they renew calls for a war on Iran? Will they conduct a bombing run on Damascus? What will these madmen in charge of the most destructive army in the world produce? I hope that the forces of good will stay their hand. The streets beckon.

In April, we at **Tricontinental**, will release our dossier on Syria. It will be made up largely of an interview with Omar Dahi, a Syrian economist and an editor at the *Middle East Report*. Omar has offered a sagacious and humane perspective that I hope will help us make sense of the events in Syria and the possibilities for his country. Please look out for it in a few weeks.



Finally, in Delhi, the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University are on a Long March to defend their institution in particular and higher learning in general. We, at **Tricontinental**, stand with these students and hope that their hopes and dreams are not crushed by the bitterness of administrative policy.

