

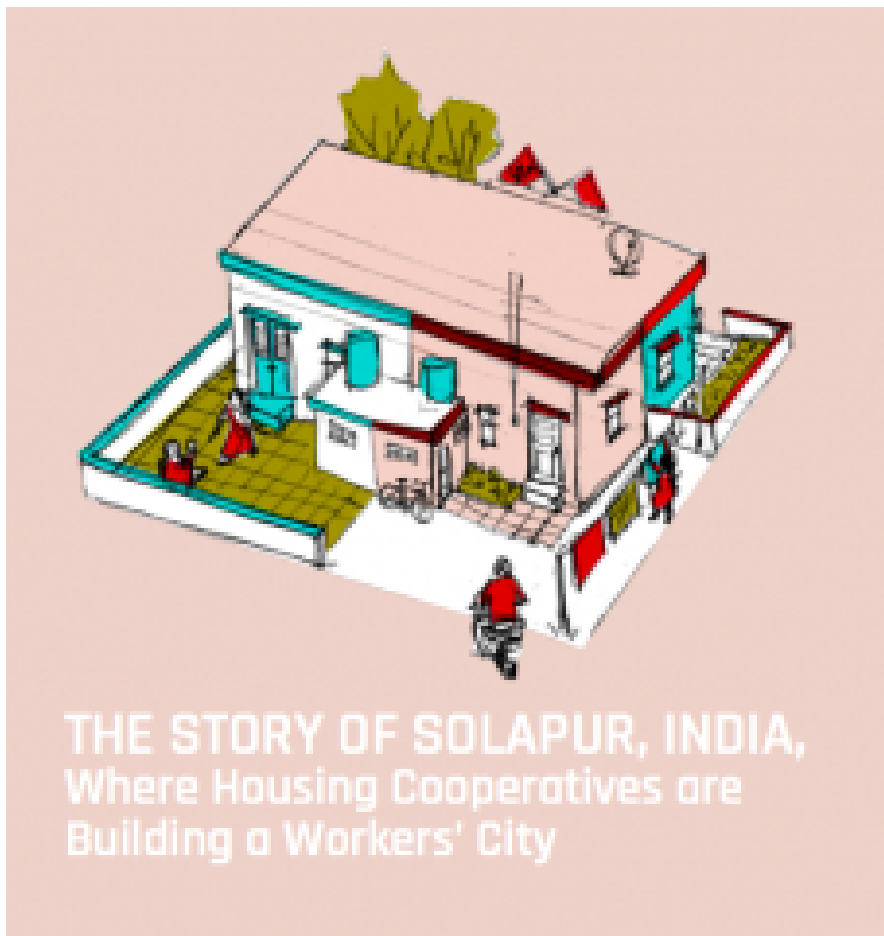
The Nineteenth Newsletter (2018): Right to a House, Right to a Life

Dear Friends,

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

A **glance** at the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is instructive. Article 25 reads that ‘everyone’ has the right to ‘a standard of living’, which includes ‘food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services’ as well as the ‘right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond control’. In other words, human beings should treat other human beings humanely.

Take the example of housing. In 2005, the United Nations **estimated** that worldwide 100 million people were homeless. Over the years, the UN and other agencies have made the case that close to two billion people lack adequate housing. Why do people have such poor access to housing? Because our social system decrees that if you do not have the money to shelter yourself, then you deserve to suffer from exposure. Money and property are the barriers to the right to housing – not lack of space or lack of compassion.



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In Solapur (Maharashtra), the left-wing trade union – the Centre of India Trade Unions (CITU) – led the initiative to create housing for *beedi* (cigarette) workers. Pressure from the workers through their union forced governments at different levels to respond to their need for housing. The workers acted together to build cooperatives and to build 15,000 homes since 2001. An additional 30,000 homes are to be built in the next four years. In June, this housing project won the Transformative Cities 2018 Award from the Transnational Institute. From **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** comes *Dossier #6*, a close look at the workers' housing initiative in Solapur. You can read it here. Please read it and circulate it.

Here is an example of worker-led humane policy. Another example can be found further south of Solapur, in the state of Kerala (India). Kerala (population: 35 million) has a long history of progressive politics and policy. The state is currently governed by the Left Democratic Front, which has built on the rich history of cooperatives and of people's initiatives to drive a humane and progressive agenda. One example is the Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society, set up ninety years ago, continues to thrive (you can read about it in a LeftWord **book** co-written by the Finance Minister of Kerala, T. M. Thomas Isaac – **reviewed** in the current issue of *Frontline* by C. T. Kurien). The current Left government in Kerala has taken this progressive dynamic further. It has encouraged the creation of a cooperative society for and of the transgender

community in the state. The objective of the transgender cooperative society is to both provide financial stability for members of the community, but also to tackle transphobia in society. At *Newslick*, Shilpa Shaji has a very useful [story](#) on these developments for gender equality.

While we are on Kerala, it is important to bear in mind that the progressive polices are not met universally with acclaim. From the Delhi office of the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**, Subin Dennis [writes](#) in *Newslick* about the murder of Abhimanyu, a leader of the Students Federation of India. The attack on the militants of the Indian Left in Kerala, but also in Tripura and West Bengal, has been unyielding. Where the Left is strong, the violence has been particularly gruesome. A few days before Abhimanyu was killed in Kerala, Tapas Sutradhar – a Communist leader in Tripura – was murdered in Panisagar. Both Abhimanyu and Tapas Sutradhar wanted to produce a world where everyone had a right to life; their lives have been taken from them.



Newly elected Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, running for "Juntos haremos historia" party, waves to his supporters after winning general elections, in Mexico City, on July 1, 2018.

Anti-establishment leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador won Mexico's presidential election Sunday by a large margin, according to exit polls, in a landmark break with the parties that have governed for nearly a century. / AFP PHOTO / ALFREDO ESTRELLA

It is fair to say that Mexico has not had a socialist president since Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Cárdenas did not call himself a socialist, although Leon Trotsky said that his government was 'no doubt the bravest and

most honest government of those times'. Now, with the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Mexico once more has a socialist in the tradition of the 1911 Mexican Revolution in the presidential offices of Los Pinos. No doubt that López Obrador (known as AMLO) is a man of the Left, a person absorbed by the need to bring people into politics and to mobilise people to put pressure on the state. But, how much room will AMLO have to drive a socialist agenda? What will he do in an adverse situation when Mexico is in a prolonged fiscal crisis and when international finance will certainly barricade the country if his government tries anything radical? If he had been allowed to win in 2006 – when fraud seized victory from him – Mexico would have moved left at the high-point of Bolivarianism. But that was not to be. Now, with Bolivarianism under siege, López Obrador takes power. My **report** on the Mexican elections is on the context of this Mexican election.

What will the victory mean within Mexico? Popular organisations have been considering how to make sure that they remain alert to the attack on this government and how they must push the government to open up a progressive project. Marcos Tello, at *Resumen Latinoamericano*, **offers** a window into the views of the popular movements. It is not going to be an easy situation. Trump will breathe heavily into Mexico, as will the Mexican oligarchy. The 'mafia state' remains intact. It will not cooperate with any progressive project. The struggles will deepen. López Obrador will have to govern not only from the presidential palace, but also from the streets.

The importance of being rooted in citizens' movements and the streets is something clear in Mexico. It is equally clear to the Left in Japan. Conversations with Japanese Communists, whose party claims about ten per cent of the electoral vote, makes it plain that they cannot move an agenda without being rooted firmly in various citizens' campaigns be it to protect open spaces, to fight against nuclear power or to fight against the indignity of homelessness. In Kyoto, the old capital of old Japan, I learned of the history of the Communist movement here and of the Communists close association with mass public struggles to create a better context for the Japanese people to build their lives. My report can be read **here**. The picture above is of the popular Japanese Communist leader – Akiko Kurabayashi – who is a nurse and a long-time member of parliament.



In Solapur, the workers – organised by the Left – are building their homes. In Japan, the Left is busy with citizen’s groups fighting to build a better city. In Mexico, the Left will be busy making sure that the new government does not abandon its principles.

Meanwhile, in Yemen, the war continues, with eight million people on the brink of famine. Western arms continue to flow to the Saudis and the Emiratis, whose war seems both futile and endless. Migrants continue to flee war zones and zones of poverty, with the Mediterranean Sea claiming another two hundred lives this week (more than a thousand this year). Meanwhile, an honest UN investigator writes a note on poverty within the United States and he is chastised (see my **report** on this in *Frontline*). The picture above is of a mural drawn by the Yemeni artist Murad Subay. It captures, in essence, the force that impinges on human dignity and freedom – poverty, the curse that produces war and suffering. No answer to poverty will come from Trump or from Modi or from Macri. It will have to come from the rest of us. It will have to come from the tea garden workers of West Bengal, below, who stand in the rain for better wages and work conditions, for a better life.



This newsletter is now available in the following languages: English, French, Malayalam, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish.

Warmly,

Vijay.