

## The Seventh Newsletter: Manual of Anti-Democracy



Dear Friends,

For LeftWord Books, I have been editing a volume that selects Lenin’s main writings. I have enjoyed going back and reading the texts not just for what Lenin is saying but for his style. Lenin writes in the middle of an argument. You can almost see him scribbling his words down on scraps of paper as his comrades stand around – in the midst of two or three arguments – the text itself pushing Marxist theory forward at the same time as Lenin develops the slogans for political action. Our volume will be out in a few weeks.

While reading Lenin on self-determination (1915), I came upon a paragraph that made me stop:

The proletariat cannot be victorious except through democracy, i.e., by giving full effect to democracy and by linking with each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in the most resolute terms...While capitalism exists, these demands – all of them – can only be accomplished as an exception, and even

then in an incomplete and distorted form. Basing ourselves on the democracy already achieved, and exposing its incompleteness under capitalism, we demand the overthrow of capitalism, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, as a necessary basis both for the abolition of the poverty of the masses and for the complete and all-round institution of all democratic reforms.

Full democracy is our standard, not the mutilated form of democracy on offer in our times. Not this incomplete and distorted democracy, which has allowed money to corrupt politics and which has allowed force to determine the victor.

I read this section from Lenin as Brazil's former president Lula turned himself in to the federal authorities to begin a prison sentence. The campaign against Lula is a perversion of the democratic process, which I wrote about in *The Hindu*, [here](#). I also recommend this powerful interview given by João Pedro Stedile, one of the leaders of Brazil's Movement of the Landless Workers (MST), which you can read [here](#).



What is happening in Brazil has its cognates elsewhere - in Turkey, where the opposition politicians are in prison, and in West Bengal, where the opposition is not even allowed to file nomination papers for elections. At *Alternet*, I have begun an incomplete manual of anti-democracy - with an emphasis on the arrest and intimidation of political oppositions. The focus is on West Bengal, where the entire political opposition is being treated brutally. This is a nasty dynamic - this erosion of basic democratic rights. You can read my essay [here](#).



But the manual of anti-democracy is not widely read. Press reports of electoral theft are mute. The stolen election in Honduras went by silently; few report that the leaders of one of the main opposition parties in Turkey are behind bars; few bother that Colombian left-wing activists – many of them former FARC fighters – have been arrested or killed. The corporate press has truly failed us. It has been evasive where it needed to be honest.

In Beirut, a few weeks ago, I delivered the Nadim Makdisi Memorial Lecture. This is an annual lecture given by a journalist in honour of a journalist. I am humbled to have been asked to give this lecture, following Patrick Cockburn, who gave it last year. The current issue of *Frontline*, where I have been writing for the past quarter century, has published almost the entire lecture. It is about the evisceration of truth in the corporate media. Truth, I say, is the first casualty not only of war but also of business. The lecture takes you on a journey through my reporting career, from an anti-Muslim riot in Seelampur in 1993 to an al-Qaeda camp in Syria a few years ago. You can read it [here](#).



At **Tricontinental**, our dossier #3 is on the war in Syria. I highly recommend the half hour that it will take you to read it. You can download it [here](#). Our dossier tried to explore the main issues that confront our understanding of this war and that confront any peace in the country. Threats to destroy Syria remain on the table. More accusations of chemical weapons use in Douma suggest that there will be more bombing runs by the West against the country. But the options before the West are few if any. At *Newslick*, I have a brief note on the paralysis of the West – unable to arm its favoured rebels, unable to get any traction with limited airstrikes and unable to launch a full-scale regime change war. You can read it [here](#). Trump says, ‘missiles will be coming’, but the question is what will they hit? ‘Get ready Russia’, says Trump. Is this an empty threat? Will Trump be preparing to open the doors of hell?

Indeed, it is becoming more and more clear that despite Trump’s assembly of a War Cabinet it will be unlikely for the United States to launch its wars of choice against either Iran or North Korea. The new aggressiveness by Russia and China has blocked the era of regime change wars. This is certainly a new situation, which is one that people like Bolton and Pompeo do not understand (for a fuller explanation of the Ministry of War’s incoherence, see my report in *Frontline* [here](#)).

Wilfred Owen’s Anthem, For Doomed Youth (1917) is a warning for the warmongers,

What passing bells for these who die as cattle?

Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

We, at Tricontinental, are hard at work on dossiers on the Venezuelan and Mexican elections and on a *Notebook for Political Education no. 1* on the debate around the theories of imperialism. Our offices in Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, New Delhi and São Paulo are developing their research agendas in line with the needs of our movements. I'll be introducing you to the work they are doing in the months to come.

Meanwhile, the old Guatemalan dictator – a favourite of the CIA – Efraín Ríos Montt is now dead. This man – who called himself Major Tito – was responsible for the brutal military campaign in the Guatemalan highlands from 1981 to 1983. In his book *The Last Colonial Massacre*, the historian Greg Grandin writes,

Anti-communist zeal and racist hatred were refracted through counterinsurgent exactitude. The killings were brutal beyond imagination. Soldiers murdered children by beating them on rock as their parents watched. They extracted organs, fetuses, amputated genitalia and limbs, committed mass and multiple rapes, and burned some victims alive. In the logic that equated indigenous culture with subversion, army units destroyed ceremonial sites and turned sacred places such as churches and caves into torture chambers. By the time the war ended in 1996, the state had killed two hundred thousand people, disappeared forty thousand, and tortured unknown thousands more.

Ríos Montt will not be forgotten. We remember him to condemn him and the condemnable State Terrorism of the 1980s. They form a chapter of their own in the *Manual of Anti-Democracy*.

Warmly,

Vijay.