

The Twenty-fourth Newsletter (2018): We Are The Mosquitos



Dear Friends,

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

In 1942, on August 9, the Indian people rose up to overthrow the British Raj. The uprising is known as the Quit India movement. It sent a strong message to the British that the Indian people would no longer tolerate the colonial state. This week, across India, protests broke out with the message to the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP – BJP Government Quit India! It was a bold message, but one with a focused agenda. The people responded to the call from the All-India Kisan Sabha, the farmers' union, and from the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Four basic demands structured the protests:

1. Complete liberation from debt for the peasants and agricultural workers.
2. Legal guarantees for minimum support price for all producers at one-and-a-half times the cost of production

and a reduction of input costs.

3. Immediate land rights to tillers and the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.
4. Pension of Rs. 5,000 per month to all agricultural workers as well as poor and middle peasants.

The crisis in the countryside, as documented over the past few decades by our **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** Senior Fellow P. Sainath for example, should give every decent person pause. In a recent **study** done by Yoshifumi Usami and Vikas Rawal, their findings about the decline in employment shines a bright light on this crisis. At the end of their paper, Usami and Rawal note, 'With declining labour absorption in agriculture, rural women workers were left high and dry, and were forced to withdraw from the labour force. On the other hand, new young male workers, jostling for employment opportunities, entered the agricultural labour force. As young and more educated rural male workers entered agriculture, their older brethren, with lower levels of education, were pushed into the construction sector. Over this period, construction emerged as the employer of last resort, requiring most arduous labour and employing workers with lowest levels of education'. What this tells us is that the employment situation in India – as elsewhere – is lopsided, reliant upon real estate booms and bubbles, with governments fearful of developing pro-people policies.

The picture above is from Agartala (Tripura). It was taken on August 9 during the nation-wide protests. It capture the essence of the struggle – the people versus the state, who have decided to be the barricade for the planet's minority (the richest 1% who last year seized 82% of the wealth generated, while the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity saw no increase in wealth – according to a **study** by Oxfam). Struggles such as this, and reticence to see the future in them, reminds me of the West African proverb – *if you think you're too small to make a difference, you haven't spent a night with a mosquito.*



Trump’s tariff-driven trade war continues. More standoffs with China and with the North American neighbours of the United States. It is clear that the process of globalisation has not benefitted the working-class and the peasantry. In fact, quite the opposite. But, would these tariffs be beneficial? The head of the UN Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, **says** that the tariffs would hurt the world’s poorest countries. Whether this is the case or not is to be seen. But Dr. Kituyi makes an important point, namely that one of the problems of our time is ‘nationalist unilateralism’. What he means is that the United States is unwilling to come to terms with the emergence of a multi-polar world. The US reinstatement of sanctions against Iran (about which see my report here) is one sign of this unilateralism – even though fiercely contested by the China, the European Union, Russia and Turkey. Another is the US domination over the world of finance and trade.

Dr. Kituyi’s assessment is not sufficient. We, at **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**, have been thinking about the debate around tariffs. For our August dossier, we spoke with Professor Prabhat Patnaik, one of the leading Marxist intellectuals in the world. In an engaging interview that begins with a short assessment of the ‘trade wars’ and that leads to the potential that this opens up for China, Prabhat gives us his keen interpretation of the current situation. He offers very important advice to left-leaning governments that might worry about raising funds for social development – pointedly to the new government of Mexico. On the table, as far as Prabhat is concerned are capital controls, an instrument that governments with a commitment to their people must use against the *freedom* of the *imperialism of finance capital*. You can download the dossier for free **here**. Please read it, discuss it and circulate it. We welcome your thoughts on this dossier.

The picture above and the pictures in the dossier are from **Jacky Muniello**, a Mexican photographer who has with great sensitivity documented the world of migrants.



At one end of Latin America, there was an assassination attempt against the Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. Threats against both the Venezuelan government and Maduro have come fast and furiously from the United States government as well as from the right-wing leadership in Colombia. The former president of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos said that he ‘hoped’ that ‘Maduro falls in a peaceful way’. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, when he was CIA head, said last year, ‘I have to be very careful what I say, but we are very hopeful that there may be a transition in Venezuela’. This is dangerous talk. It legitimises violence and coups. Maduro survived. But this enemies, and the enemies of freedom, remain at large.

At the other end of Latin America, in Argentina, millions of people made it clear that they stand against the culture of violence – the patriarchal world of coups and of femicide. The central issue was abortion rights. Last year, Chile voted to allow women to make informed decisions about their health. This year, Argentina wanted to join the ranks of those countries who legalised abortion, but more than that – which did not fear women’s desire. Sadly, Argentina’s Senate – in a narrow vote – disagreed. But only for now. Nayla Pis Diez, a researcher at the Buenos Aires office of **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**, and I show that focus should be on the movement’s slogan *Ya Ganamos* – We Already Won. The tempo has changed. Younger people do not accept the unpleasantness of patriarchy, just as they have less fealty to the military and to the world of coups. You can read our report [here](#). It is an homage to our tribe of mosquitos.



Last week, I mentioned the protests in Dhaka (Bangladesh) led by school children who were angry about traffic accidents. The celebrated photographer Shahidul Alam had been covering the protests – taking pictures of the crowds and showing what was going on via Facebook Live. Shahidul is the founder of Pathshala, whose students provided the photographs for our second dossier on *Cities Without Water*. Shahidul’s reports from the streets were crisp and credible. No wonder that al-Jazeera invited him on the air to talk about the events on the streets of his city. That evening, about thirty-five detectives came to his home and arrested him. Shahidul remains in custody. I wrote an early report on his arrest in *The Hindu*, which you can find [here](#). Now, Arundhati Roy, Eve Ensler, Naomi Klein, Noam Chomsky and I have called upon the Bangladeshi government to release Shahidul (you can read about our letter [here](#) and [here](#)). Thousands of artists and writers around the world have joined in the fight for the release of Shahidul. There are very dark clouds over Bangladesh.

If you think you’re too small to make a difference, you haven’t spent a night with a mosquito. The phrase has been on my mind all week. But mosquitos can also be crushed. Saudi and Emirati forces just bombed a school bus in Yemen. At least thirty children – all under 15 – died immediately in the bombing (48 others are injured). A very forceful **statement** came from Henrietta Fore, the head of UNICEF – ‘Attacks on children are absolutely unacceptable. I’m horrified by the reported airstrike on innocent children, some with UNICEF backpacks. Enough is enough’. But it is *not* enough for arms dealers, who will continue – with the blessings of Western governments – to re-arm Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Extermination, in plain sight, is ongoing in Yemen.

Our **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** image of the week (see below) is of Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), a feminist and abolitionist who fought within the United States for justice of the widest kind. ‘Let women’s claim be as broad in the concrete as the abstract. We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favouritism, whether of sex, race, country or condition’. She seems to have been thinking of Argentina and Bangladesh, of India and Yemen – of all the people who act in solidarity.

Warmly, Vijay.

PS: you can find all the previous newsletters at our **website** as well as our dossiers, working documents and other materials. If you’d like to receive this newsletter in French, Portuguese or Spanish – let me know. To subscribe to this newsletter, visit the website.

