



Dossier n° 85
Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research
February 2025



The artwork in this dossier draws from the Red Books Day 2025 Calendar. Each of the twelve contributions, produced in collaboration with the International Union of Left Publishers, is inspired by a red book from a different region of the world. Red Books Day celebrates left books, their authors, and the people's movements they ushered in on 21 February 1848, the day Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*. It is a day that celebrates the joy of reading.

COVER

Artwork by Kael Abello (Venezuela/Utopix and Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research).

THE JOY OF READING



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All Russia was learning to read, and *reading* – politics, economics, history – because the people wanted to *know*... In every city, in most towns, along the Front, each political faction had its newspaper – sometimes several. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets were distributed by thousands of organisations and poured into the armies, the villages, the factories, the streets. The thirst for education, so long thwarted, burst with the Revolution into a frenzy of expression. From Smolny Institute alone, the first six months, went out every day tons, car-loads, train-loads of literature, saturating the land. Russia absorbed reading matter like hot sand drinks water, insatiable. And it was not fables, falsified history, diluted religion, and the cheap fiction that corrupts – but social and economic theories, philosophy, the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, and Gorky...

– John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, 1919.¹

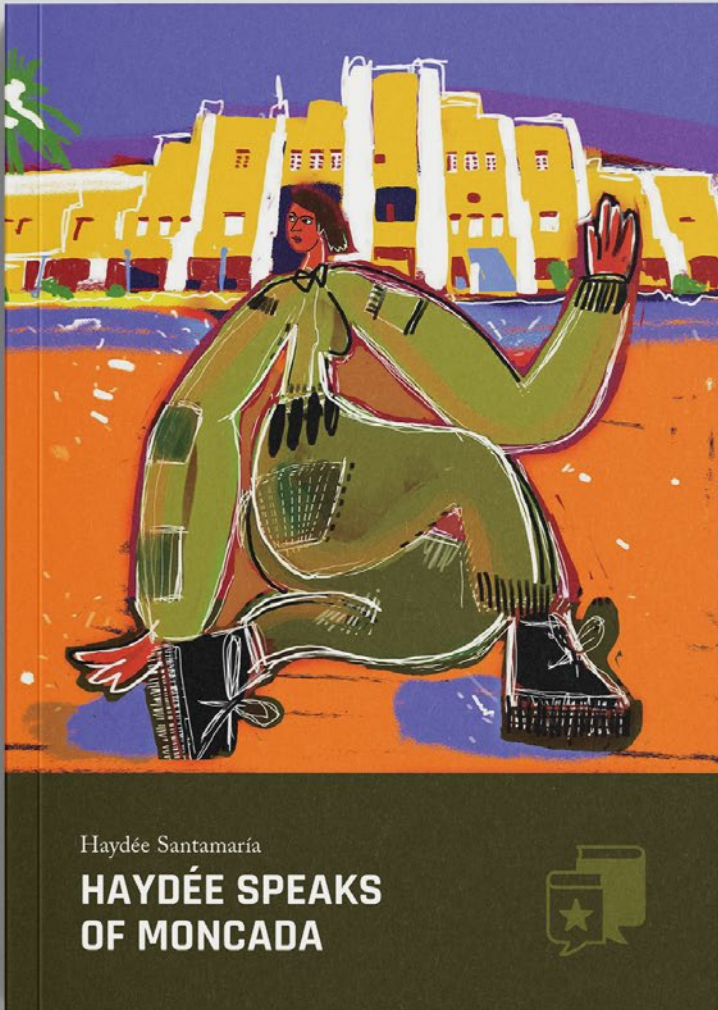
Revolutions of ordinary working people burst through the shackles of society and created an insistence upon a new world. Every one of them, whether directly socialist or driven by national liberation, provides us with evidence of this exuberance to overturn ancient social norms and build egalitarian forms of being and belonging. Since most twentieth century revolutions were led by peasants and workers (Mexico, 1910; China, 1911; Iran, 1905–1911; Russia and Central Asia, 1917), they often focused on how to transform the rigidities of landlordism. To overthrow the landlord's power, it was not enough to distribute surplus land (land reform); the landlord's power was rooted in social hierarchies that sometimes took on a divine character. The oppression of the peasantry was conducted through the

undecipherable hieroglyphics of land records and accounting books, the books of moneylenders and priests. Depriving the peasantry of the ability to read rendered them powerless, a power that, once grasped, made itself clear in every one of these revolutions in the poorer parts of the world.

The bourgeois culture that prevailed across these nations in the nineteenth century adopted reading as a sign of class status. Though books and newspapers flourished with the advent of commercial printing, they were mainly for the bourgeoisie and – in some cases – the petty bourgeoisie. In Mexico, where the presidency of Benito Juárez (1858–1872) expanded schooling and the publishing industry, the cost of a newspaper was far greater than the daily earnings of the average worker or *campesino* (peasant).² Under the regime of landlords in countries such as Mexico and Russia and in colonies such as India and on the African continent, very few opportunities existed for workers and peasants to learn to read. It was only when trade union and communist movements appeared in these countries and their organisations published newspapers and pamphlets, often clandestinely, that working-class and peasant members gained wider access to texts, which were read to them by literate organisers. This form of collective learning became an early school for literacy.

This dossier, *The Joy of Reading*, draws from such traditions to highlight examples of popular literacy from our time, from Mexico to China to India. The last part of this dossier will highlight Red Books Day, a programme that began in India and which has since – through the initiative of the International Union of Left Publishers – expanded across the world.





Haydée Santamaría

**HAYDÉE SPEAKS
OF MONCADA**



Artwork by Valentina Aguirre
(Venezuela/Utopix)

Mexico Reads

At the time of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, only around 22% of the country's population of 15.1 million were literate.³ A long period of unrest gripped Mexico for the next decade, until Álvaro Obregón won the presidency in 1920 and began a process of reform that comprised mass cultural activity such as opening rural schools, training teachers, building public libraries and art schools, and publishing pamphlets and books for early readers. In 1921, José Vasconcelos was named the first secretary of public education and given an open charge by Obregón to democratise Mexican culture.⁴ To reach this goal, the state built thousands of rural schools and teacher training institutes and raised rural teachers' wages from one to three pesos a day.⁵ To run the main training institute, Vasconcelos turned to Communist Party of Mexico member Elena Torres Cuéllar, who expanded these cultural missions across the country and trained over four thousand teachers within a decade. Torres also initiated a free school breakfast programme in 1921, ensuring that tens of thousands of students were fed.⁶

Under Vasconcelos' leadership, the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública or SEP) pushed for the development of quality public libraries in rural areas. To that end, the SEP not only disbursed funds to build the libraries; it also printed and distributed sets of books (fifty for rural libraries and a thousand for urban centres) that would both enhance the cultural life of the peasantry and provide them with practical and productive knowledge. These books included everything from Greek classics to books

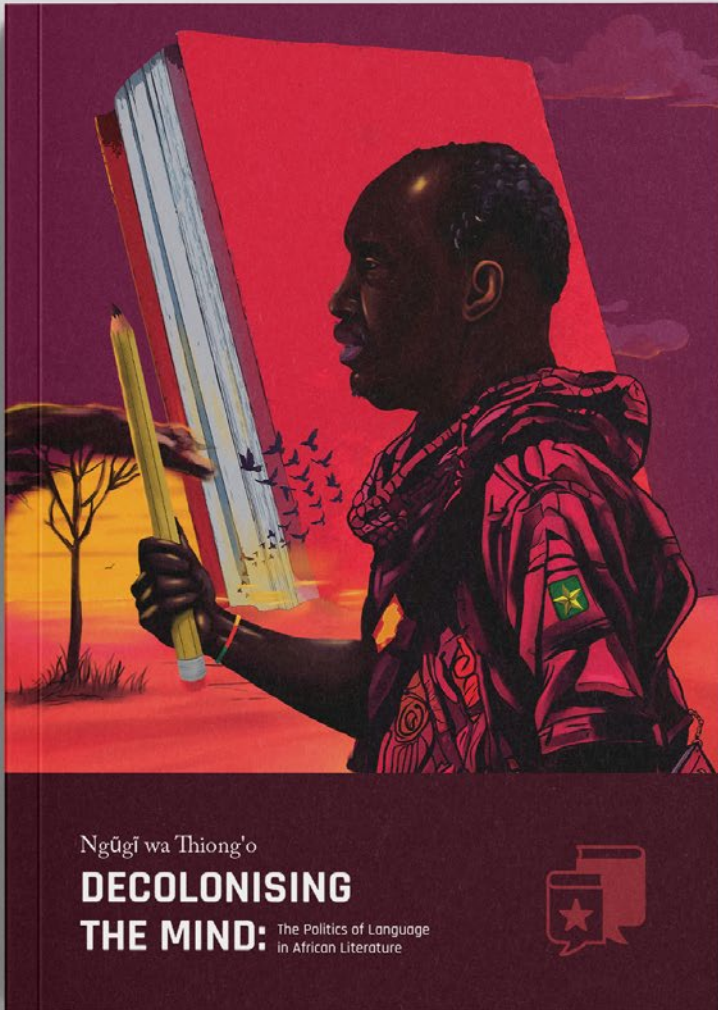
about Mexican history, household management, and agricultural science.⁷ The SEP also published a teachers' magazine, *El Maestro* (The Teacher), which provided information about teaching styles, new ideas in education, and book reviews. Alongside this state initiative, in 1934 sociologist and economist Daniel Cosío Villegas set up the Economic Culture Fund at what was then the National School of Economics (now the School of Economics of the National Autonomous University of Mexico), initially to distribute books to economics students and later becoming a vehicle to distribute a wide range of books across Latin America.

As the Mexican Revolution became institutionalised and its class character began to change, the focus on democratising culture eroded. Literacy rates rose, certainly, but they stagnated at around 70%, and the state educational and public library systems were unable to improve the quality of literacy. Both the schools and the libraries saw their funding drop as the commitment to these institutions declined in the face of financial pressures that culminated in the Mexican debt crisis in 1982. As Mexico's policymakers slipped into the habits of neoliberalism, other currents within society fought to prevent the collapse of the focus on literacy. In 1986, the General Directorate of Libraries began a programme called My Summer Vacation in the Library (*Mis Vacaciones en la Biblioteca*) through which a million children and youth visited public libraries to participate in a range of social activities.⁸ Mexico's library system has built on this programme to hold cultural, music, and storytelling festivals. In 1995, under the auspices of educational reform following the 1993 curriculum update, the SEP created the National Programme for Reading (*Programa Nacional para la Lectura*), which was renamed

Toward a Country of Readers (*Hacia un país de lectores*) in 2000. One of the cornerstones of the programme was the annual selection, production, and distribution of seventy-five books for school libraries across the country.

In 2008, Mexico's National Programme for the Promotion of Reading and the Book (*Programa de Fomento para el Libro y la Lectura*) established the Mexico Reads (*México Lee*) project to use literacy as a tool to reduce social inequality and increase access to knowledge. This programme is rooted in a tradition that builds upon Mexico's own history of literacy campaigns and that of the Cuban Revolution's *Yo, sí puedo* (Yes, I can) adult literacy curriculum created in 2001 (drawing from Cuba's 1961 literacy programme), which has been enormously influential across Latin America. The following year, in 2009, Director of the Economic Culture Fund (*Fondo de Cultura Económica*) Paco Ignacio Taibo II and the writer Paloma Saiz Tejero set up the Brigade to Read in Freedom (*Brigada para Leer en Libertad*) to publish books that the public could download free of charge or pick up at book fairs and cultural festivals. At the heart of the brigade is the joy of reading. As Paloma Saiz Tejero explains:

Reading opens up a series of expectations and knowledge that you wouldn't normally have; it makes you much more critical and gives you weapons to defend yourself every day of your life; it won't make you more handsome or richer; those books that tell you that such things will happen if you read them are pure lies – it's not like that, you won't even become more intelligent – but it does allow you the clarity to decide what you do and don't want to do.⁹



Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

DECOLONISING

THE MIND:

The Politics of Language
in African Literature



Artwork by Othman Ghalmi
(Morocco/Workers' Democratic Way)

Reading Helps the Chinese People Stand Upright

Before the Qing dynasty was overthrown in 1911, most of the population – especially women – suffered from illiteracy, with an estimated literacy rate of 10–15% at the turn of the century.¹⁰ Literacy would not improve much in the years that followed, largely because of the disruption that tore through Chinese society until the 1949 Chinese Revolution. It was only in the 1950s that the literacy rate began to rise dramatically, reaching 57% by 1959.¹¹ By 2021, the adult literacy rate in China had risen to 97%, one of the highest in the world. The massive gains that China has made over the course of the past seven decades have been referred to as ‘perhaps the single greatest educational effort in human history’.¹²

These gains were the result of the initiatives implemented by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the immediate aftermath of the 1949 revolution. These initiatives drew upon experiments such as the Jiangxi Soviet (1931–1934) and the Yan’an Soviet (1936–1948) in southeastern and north-central China, respectively, which implemented different forms of literacy campaigns that targeted rural and adult literacy. Both built upon the Soviet Union’s literacy efforts, such as the illiteracy eradication campaign *Likbez*, which brought remarkable gains to all the Soviet republics as they began to

systematise the knowledge of adult literacy programmes.* In 1921, V.I. Lenin announced at a conference on economic policy that there would be no advancement if illiteracy remained. Without literacy, Lenin said, ‘there can be no politics; without that there are rumours, gossip, fairy tales and prejudices, but not politics’.¹³

Though it is impossible to summarise the entire panoply of activities that shaped New China’s literacy campaign, three of them are important to emphasise:

1. The Chinese word for illiteracy is 文盲, or ‘text blind’, hinting at the historic centrality of knowing the Chinese characters in order to be considered literate. Yet the more than 100,000 characters that make up the Chinese language created barriers towards achieving full literacy in society. In 1955, the revolutionary government set up the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language to create a manageable way to advance literacy, such as by shortening the list of characters to 1,500 for rural residents and 2,000 for rural leaders and urban residents as the minimum requirement for literacy.¹⁴ In 1958, primary schools began to use pinyin (the standard romanisation of Chinese characters) and simplified Chinese characters.

* Though it is not discussed at length in this dossier, the Soviet Union was exemplary for its literacy campaigns in the rest of the world. The statistics of Soviet literacy do not tell the entire story, which is the story of *how* the Soviets were able to defeat the scourge of illiteracy so rapidly. For instance, the Soviets set up reading huts (*izby-chital’ny*) in rural parts of the former Tsarist Empire and ‘red yurts’ (tents) in the steppes in which they housed medical units and literacy teams. This story has not been properly told.

2. As in Mexico and Russia, the Chinese Revolution emphasised the importance of both rural and adult literacy: if parents were not invested in the importance of reading and writing, their children would not be instilled with a joy of reading. Lin Handa, who was one of the most prominent leaders of China's anti-illiteracy campaign, said in 1955 that learning characters should not define literacy; rather, the end goals of the campaign for literacy should be to enable the peasantry to enrich their lives and increase their productivity. According to the anti-illiteracy decree issued the following year, rural adult literacy should be based on the principles of 'integrating the practical' (*lianxi shiji*) and 'learning for the purpose of applying' (*xue yi zhi yong*).¹⁵
3. Finally, the Chinese Revolution highlighted the role of public libraries in its literacy programmes. In 1949, there were only fifty-five public libraries in China. As part of the emphasis on democratisation, New China built libraries in rural areas for the peasantry and factory libraries for the workers. By 1956, China had established 182,960 rural reading rooms that held a range of materials.¹⁶

Such initiatives enabled Chinese society to overcome illiteracy. Today, China faces a set of new challenges, such as how to address young people's addiction to screens and video games. In 2021, China's President Xi Jinping announced that his government would restrict online video game use among young people to three hours per week, to be regulated by both the video game industry and parents. In 2022, President Xi inaugurated the First National Conference on Reading with a speech that highlighted the importance of reading

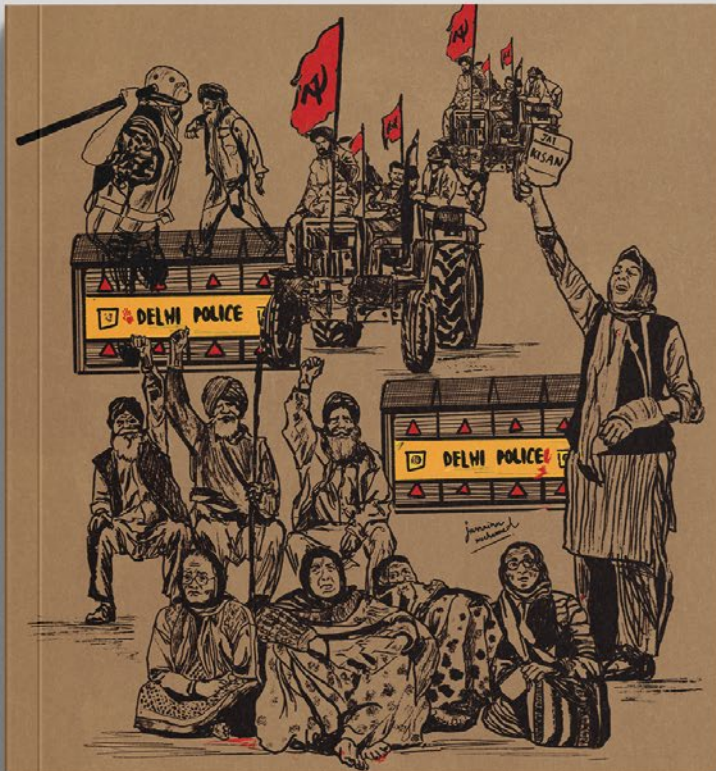
not only for acquiring knowledge, but also for expanding wisdom and cultivating virtues:

Since ancient times, the Chinese people have advocated reading and stressed the acquisition of knowledge through studying the nature of things and the rectification of the mind through thinking with sincerity. Reading helps the Chinese people to carry on the traditional spirit of perseverance and shape their character of self-confidence and self-reliance.

I call on party members and officials to take the lead in reading and learning, foster virtues and ideals, and improve abilities. I hope that all our children will have a habit of reading, enjoy reading, and grow up in a healthy way. I wish all of our people are engaged in reading and contribute to an atmosphere where everyone loves reading, has good books to read, and knows how to gain from reading.¹⁷

That same year, the Shanghai Library (East Branch) was opened to the public. Just across the road from Century Park in Pudong district, the library buzzes with activity every day, but particularly on Sunday evenings. In many of the poorer nations of the Global South, it would be common to see children playing on the street at this time. In the Global North, perhaps the children would be indoors, eyes glued to pixels on a screen. In Shanghai, children collect stacks of books, sometimes seated on the lap of a father, mother, or grandparent, excitedly flipping from one page to the next.

A small but prominent section of the library is dedicated to Marxist literature. The shelves are arranged in chronological order: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Xi Jinping. The most memorable section of the library is the children's section, packed with rows upon rows of colourful children's books, with couches, tables, and booths inviting you to sit and read. This is where people – adults and children alike – come to exercise their right to read (outlined by Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Reading, in this tradition, is a decidedly social activity that helps develop empathy and cognitive capacity, especially among youth, and connects people to their history, culture, language, and ancestors.



Naveen Kumar

KADANA KANA



Artwork by Junaina Muhammed
(India/Young Socialist Artists)

The Scent of Books in Kerala (India)

Kerala, a state in southwestern India with a population of roughly 33.4 million, is governed by the Left Democratic Front, whose main party is the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M).¹⁸ If you drive into any town or city in the state, you will be sure to see a public library filled with people browsing for books to borrow or sitting at a table and reading. There are over nine thousand public libraries in Kerala, which has an enduring tradition of reading due to the active presence of the communist movement.

In the 1920s, during the movement to defeat British imperialism, anti-colonial Indian nationalism placed the importance of literacy on its agenda. One of the instruments for a literacy campaign was the public library, which had already become an important part of the development agenda in the states within India ruled by more liberal princes (such as in Baroda, now known as Vadodara). What is interesting about the story of the library movement in India is that many of its pioneers were groups of friends who pooled their books and newspapers to begin small libraries in their villages and towns. For example, P. N. Panicker, known as the father of Kerala's library movement, recalled how, after he managed to subscribe to a newspaper – an option that was largely limited to the wealthy – eight or so people would gather at his home and ask him to read it aloud. 'I used to read them biographies of great men on days when we missed the paper', he said; 'a friend of mine subscribed to two other dailies,

and he had a small collection of books. Pooling together these books and newspapers in a small room, freely rented for the purpose, we started a small library'.¹⁹ There are thousands of such stories. Many of these libraries *later* became part of the state library system, from which they benefit greatly through the provision of resources. Such small libraries continue to anchor the library movement in Kerala, where the library movement is concentrated and began, and other parts of India.

Mayyil Grama Panchayat, for instance, with a population of over 29,000 people, is one of the 93 local governments in Kannur, the district with the largest number of libraries in Kerala. This locality has 34 libraries affiliated with the Kerala State Library Council. That means that there is nearly one library per square kilometre, each with a capacity of around 872 people. This is an extraordinary density of libraries for any part of the world. These libraries are well-funded by the state, equipped with computers and a unified catalogue, and staffed with well-trained librarians who are an engaged and available resource for the whole community.

Every one of these libraries has a backstory, and many of them are named after social activists such as nationalist or communist leaders. Here are a few of them in Kannur:

- Velam Public Reading Hall (Velam Potujana Vaayana-shaala), in Mayyil.* In 1934, Indian National Congress member Ishwaran Namboothiri arrived in the Mayyil panchayat (village council) to promote the Hindi language among the villagers. He built a small shed for his school, which eventually became a library that houses 18,000 books at present.
- Paral Public Reading Hall (Paral Potujana Vaayanashaala), in Thalassery. In 1934, a sixteen-year-old girl named Kaududi donated her gold jewellery to M. K. Gandhi as her contribution to the freedom movement against British imperial rule. The money from the gold was used to fund the creation of the library, which now includes an archive of the district's history.
- S. J. M. Reading Hall & National Library (S. J. M. Vaayana-shaala & Desheeya Granthaalayam), in Kandakkai. During the nineteenth-century social reform movements in

* In Malayalam, the language spoken in Kerala, *granthaalayam* means library, while *vaayanasbaala* means reading hall, a place where people can sit and read, some of which are small rooms that have just a few newspapers and magazines but very few or no books. However, sometimes *vaayanasbaala* is also used to refer to a library. All institutions listed here have a library and a space for reading, as is the case with most libraries in Kerala.

The names given here in parentheses are the official names of the libraries. Some of these names incorporate words in Malayalam and English. The Malayalam script is phonetic, which implies that words are pronounced as they are written. But over the course of time, Malayalam words have frequently been transliterated into English with spellings that give an inaccurate idea of how the words should be pronounced. Here we have used spellings that are as close as possible to the way the Malayalam words are pronounced. In the case of proper names, the widely used standard spellings have been retained even when their transliterations do not reflect the actual pronunciation.

Kerala, a man named Sree Jathaveda Guru went to Kanda-kkai to teach the villagers there about the need to fight and transcend caste hierarchies and discrimination. As part of this work, Guru established a small library which has since grown to hold a collection of over ten thousand books.

- C. Madhavan Memorial Reading Hall (C. Madhavan Smaaraka Vaayanashaala), in Pinarayi. The Communist Party of India's first conference in Kerala was held secretly in Pinarayi in 1939. Two decades later, the progressive youth organisation Sree Narayana Aashrita Yuvajana Sangham created the C. Madhavan Memorial Library, named after a social activist. Thousands of books are collected and stored here each year through a local system of donations. That community spirit has expanded: now, when a new home is built in the area, a fruit tree is planted nearby in the name of the library.
- Kulappuram Reading Hall & Library (Kulappuram Vaayanashaala & Granthaalayam), in Ezhome. In the 1950s, weavers from the village of Ezhome built a reading room called the Young Men's Club. That reading room is now a three-floor climate-controlled library with a space for public events, a large playground, and a vegetable garden. The library also offers unique social services including book deliveries and motorcycle driving classes for women which have helped over a hundred women obtain their driving licence. In 2008, the library partnered with health workers of the Government Medical College Kannur in Pariyaram to conduct visits to 700 homes in the village.

Doctors and librarians visited each home in the area to collect health information and provide information about municipal services.

- Homeland Upliftment Reading Hall & Public Library (Deshoddhaarana Vaayanashaala & Public Library), in Chala. Situated along the edge of a date palm grove, this modest library was established in the 1960s by peasants who earned a living rolling beedi (hand-rolled cigarettes popular among workers in the Indian subcontinent), weaving cloth, and carrying out various forms of daily wage labour. These peasants pooled their money to build a place for reading and reflection. Today, the library has around 9,000 books.
- Thaliyan Raman Nambiar Memorial Public Reading Hall (Thaliyan Raman Nambiar Smaaraka Potujana Vaayana-shaala), in Kavumbayi. Leading activist Thaliyan Raman was arrested during a peasant rebellion in Kavumbayi in 1946 and killed by police in a massacre at the Salem Jail four years later. In 1962, local farmers built this library in his honour.
- Avon Library (Karivellur). What began as the Avon Club was converted into the Avon Library in 1973, which today holds 17,574 books and has 619 members. This library conducts readings for children, holds film screenings, and delivers books to the elderly at their homes. A local history group in the library has been the incubator for two history theses written by local scholars.

During the pandemic, the infrastructure of the library movement was key in keeping communities safe and enabling students to continue their education. One notable example of this is the NetWork project, which began in Kannur with the aim of promoting social development in the district's Adivasi (tribal) regions. The project was led by Dr V. Sivadasan, a CPI(M) politician and member of India's Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament), and soon became an integral part of the People's Mission for Social Development (PMSD), a trust under the Kannur District Library Council with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan as its chief patron and Sivadasan as its chairman. The PMSD pledged to help create a library in every ward (the smallest electoral division in the Indian administrative system). As part of this initiative, the PMSD worked with Kannur University and Kerala's Library Council to host the first Indian Library Congress in January 2023 in which half a million people participated. To build up to the congress, the organisers held 1,500 seminars on a variety of topics. Among them were 3,000 librarians, who were joined by employees in the local self-government institutions, government officials, cooperative workers, students, teachers, and others.

The Indian Library Congress has become an annual event hosted in different states across India to promote the following ideas:

1. There must be libraries in as many localities as possible, and these libraries must be repositories not only of books but also the most advanced technology possible.

2. These libraries must be set up not only in urban areas but also in rural and remote areas, such as the hilly tracts of Wayanad in northeastern Kerala.
3. These libraries must become an important and active public space for the community as well as incubators for cultural development and hubs for the organisation of and/or venues for activities such as movie screenings, sports, art fairs, festivals, and vocational training classes. Health centres and science classes must be established next to these libraries.²⁰

The library movement is built by everyday working people. Among them is Rajan V. P. of Payyannur Annur, a beedi worker with a class six education. When Rajan began working at a beedi factory at a young age, he was impressed by the practice of workers taking turns reading the daily newspaper aloud to each other before lunch and a novel after lunch (a practice that can also be found in Cuban cigar workshops). Reading inspired Rajan to study further, which enabled him to get a new job as a clerk in a cooperative bank near his home. By 2008, he was a manager of the bank. That year, Rajan set up the People's Library and Reading Room, which has now blossomed to become a centre of cultural life in the town.

Another key figure of the library movement is Radha V. P. (age sixty), a beedi worker with a class seven education who became the head of her household at a young age. As a young girl, she began to read the CPI(M)'s weekly magazine, *Deshabhimani*, and write letters to the editors commenting on its stories and poems. In 2002, Radha became part of the Jawahar Library's Women-Elderly Book Distribution Project (Vanitha-Vayojana Pusthaka Vitharana

Paddhathi), also known as the mobile library, which began the year prior to take books to the readers' homes, particularly women and the elderly. The sight of her bringing books to every household after work with a library register in one hand and a bag full of books on her shoulder soon became a source of joy for locals. In 2018, she finished class ten and passed the state exam needed to qualify for higher education. Yet, even in the midst of studies and work, her commitment to the library never faltered. 'This is a job that I love', she said. 'I never felt the bag was heavy, as the scent of the books always gave me immense happiness'.²¹

Working people like Rajan and Radha embody the human initiative behind the flourishing library movement across Kerala.



Rastko Močnik

THEORY FOR POLITICS



Artwork by Salvatore Carleo
(Italy/Potere Al Popolo!)

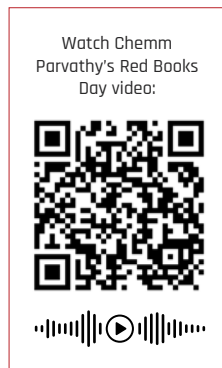
Red Books Day, from Japan to the Moon

On 21 February 2019, the Indian Society for Left Publishers, a group of publishers affiliated with the CPI(M), initiated what would soon become known as Red Books Day. This event, commemorating the 171st anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto's* publication and International Mother Language Day, seeks to rescue collective life on a secular, cultural, and socialist basis. Red Books Day soon caught the interest of publishers from around the world and by 2020 was being celebrated by more than 30,000 people from South Korea to Cuba.²² By 2024, Red Books Day boasted over a million participants in events from Indonesia to Chile (half a million of them in Kerala alone).²³

In 2020, the first year the celebration extended beyond India's borders, members of peasant organisations and trade unions placed circles of plastic chairs on the road in small villages across Tamil Nadu and discussed *The Communist Manifesto*. Meanwhile, in settlements of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST), members sat together and took turns reading aloud during the Carnival festivities. In the mountains of Nepal, the agricultural workers' union held discussions about their own red books while landless peasants in Tanzania talked about the importance of literacy.

Four years later, the ten-day-long Havana Book Fair in Cuba set aside 21 February for a special Red Books Day series of events. In Kerala, Chemm Parvathy produced a Red Books Day video that

showed her dancing in the markets and workshops of Trivandrum to the French version of the *Internationale*. The song culminates with Chemm Parvathy at the beach holding a communist flag, the red sun behind her in the horizon. Alongside her video came a series of original posters designed by artists from around the world to commemorate the day and encourage more and more people to organise readings and performances in their localities.



In preparation for the first international celebration of Red Books Day 2020, the Indian Society of Left Publishers convened meetings of publishers from around the world. These meetings led to the creation of the International Union of Left Publishers (IULP), which now includes forty-five publishers.²⁴ The IULP was formed not only to promote Red Books Day, but more broadly to provide a platform for left publishers to defend from attacks by the right wing and to advance rational and socialist ideas. The IULP has produced several joint books on the same day in various languages, from Romanian to Indonesian (including on the writings of Che Guevara and to commemorate the Paris Commune) and has released statements to defend authors and publishers when they have come under attack.²⁵

The library movement has held Red Books Day events at public libraries across Kerala, where cultural workers sang and acted while hundreds of thousands of people lifted their spirits with rationality and the promise of socialism.

Red Books Day is part of a broader cultural struggle to defend the right to write, publish, and read red books and to fight against contemporary obscurantist ideas that subvert reason. The hope is that this day will go beyond the IULP to become a key date on the calendar of progressive forces. Individuals and organisations far beyond the circuits of the IULP and leftist currents have taken ownership of Red Books Day as it becomes a force of its own and a key fixture on the calendar of progressive forces. By the end of the decade, we hope that over ten million people will participate in Red Books Day.

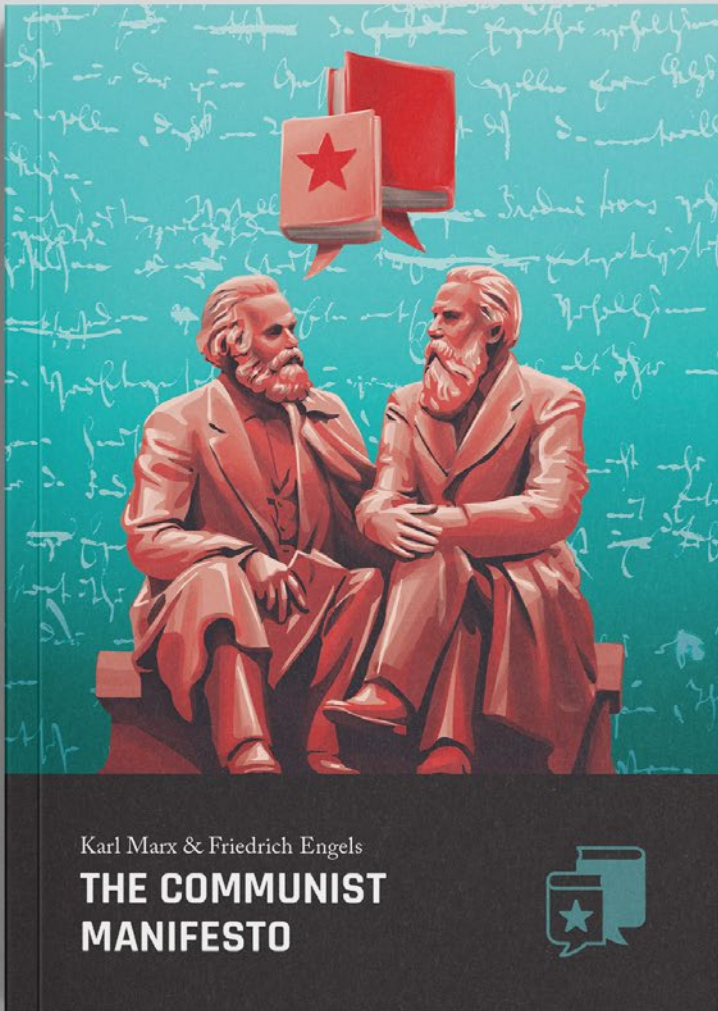


In the 1930s, women from the collective farms of Georgievsky in the North Caucasus wrote a letter to the Soviet government. ‘Of course, we must study in order to be able to manage large farms properly’, they wrote. ‘We want to study all winter; to learn how to read and write; to study the fundamentals of political knowledge and scientific agriculture. Give us more books and notebooks, because the desire to study is very great among the women’. One of these women, Fekla Golovchenko (nearly fifty years old), added, ‘If I’m not properly educated, I can’t handle my brigade’. Education, the women said, ‘is no longer a luxury. It is an absolute necessity, like water for a thirsty man’.²⁶

The words of the Georgievsky women echo those of Paloma Saiz Tejero of the Brigade to Read in Freedom, who told us:

A people who read are a people who build critical thinking; they are promoters of utopias. A people who know their history and take ownership of it will feel proud of their roots. Reading socialises; it shares experiences and information. Books allow us to understand the reason that constitutes us and our history; they make our consciousness grow beyond the space and time that founds our past and present. Reading generates better citizens. Thanks to books, we learn to believe in the impossible, to distrust the obvious, to demand our rights as citizens, and to fulfil our duties. Reading influences the personal and social development of individuals; without it, no society can progress.





Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO



Artwork by Ingrid Neves
(Brazil/Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research)

Notes

- 1 John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2017), 53.
- 2 Omar Martínez Legorreta, *Modernisation and Revolution in Mexico: A Comparative Approach* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1989), 71.
- 3 James Presley, 'Mexican Views on Rural Education 1900–1910', *The Americas* 20, no. 1 (July 1963): 64–71.
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