

The Twelfth Newsletter (2018): Guns and Butter



Dear Friends,

Hard to write anything about what Israel is doing to the Palestinian people in Gaza. Emotions range from anger to sadness, although what the Palestinians require more than ever is solidarity. Over a hundred Palestinians killed in cold blood, while thousands have been injured – many of them maimed for life. Fully backed by the United States, Israel feels no obligation to do anything other than be brutal to the Palestinians.

What options are before the Israelis? They have deliberately annulled the two-state solution by annexing large parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. There is no hope of a one-state solution: as long as Israel insists upon its Zionist ideology, it will not welcome Palestinians who live inside Israel, who live in the Occupied Territory and who live scattered around the world to be equal citizens of a secular state. Gaza, with its two million Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, is merely the most striking part of the wretched fabric of this seemingly endless occupation.

The only future available for Israel – and so, for the Palestinians – is Apartheid, where the state will manage

to squelch, with various structured forms of violence, the aspirations of the occupied Palestinians. The shooting at the Gaza perimeter is shocking, certainly. But it is merely part and parcel of what the Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury calls the ‘continuous Naqba,’ the catastrophe that began seventy years ago in 1948 and persists yet.

For years the Palestinians have been told to take up non-violent resistance, to abjure the armed struggle. But each time the Palestinians protest without weapons (whether by the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement or by civil disobedience), they are treated nonetheless as terrorists. It is worthwhile to note that a Palestinian child has been killed every three days since 2000. This is a slow-motion genocide (on this please read the essay from 2014 by Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, which you can find [here](#)). It is either that or a permanent apartheid regime (on this, please read the resignation letter from 2017 by Rima Khalaf, former head of the UN’s Economic and Social Commission of West Asia, which you can find [here](#)).

As these events unfold in Palestine, I am reminded of Gaza’s great poet Mu’in Bseios, who once sang for his people thus:

If I fall, comrade, in the struggle, take my place. And gaze at my lips as they halt the madness of the wind. I have not died.... I am still calling you from beyond my wounds. Sound your drums, so that the whole people might heed this call and fight.



The Israeli government portrays the Palestinians as terrorists. It is easy for them to throw out the word

'Hamas' and try to close down the conversation. Harder for people to take them seriously. Where there is no Hamas, as in the West Bank, the Israelis are as ruthless. They know that the Americans are behind them. Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem – against international custom – drops the pretence of the United States as a neutral actor. It has thrown its chips in with the Israeli government. No Palestinian now believes that another US envoy can move a peace deal forward. That US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley walked out of the Security Council when the Palestinian envoy began to speak is a sign of the utter contempt shown by Washington to the Palestinians.

Washington has its problems in its own War on Terror. A parliamentary election in Iraq brought to the fore a coalition of forces led by Muqtada al-Sadr, the Iraqi Communist Party and other left-wing civic groups. Amongst those elected was the man who threw his shoes at George W. Bush. Further eastwards, in Afghanistan, the Taliban is resurgent and will once more force a postponement of parliamentary elections in that country. American war aims failed on both sides of Iran, in the two countries that have experienced the full-scale of US military power. Meanwhile, a Chinese train snakes along from Mongolia to Tehran. It is carrying sunflower seeds. On this train lies the future.

At *Alternet*, this week, I have a report that runs from Afghanistan to Iran, through Iraq and China. It does an audit of the US War on Terror. You can read it [here](#). It suggests that one reason the forces of Sadr and the Communists prevailed in Iraq is that they spoke for the precarious working-class of that beautiful but damaged country.



The fate of the precarious working-class is one that is at the top of the table in South Africa. Here, the black workers who build this society find it impossible to make a decent life for themselves. Land hunger is a major

issue, with black workers living in shacks across the landscape. But so too is hunger itself and, of course, unmet aspirations. People openly speak of economic apartheid doing great harm to their lives.

On Sunday, the journalist and writer Richard Pithouse took me to visit the Zikode Extension Land Occupation in Germiston. This Occupation was being done by the local branch of the Abahlali baseMjondolo. The occupied settlement is named after S'bu Zikode, a leader of Abahlali, whom I had visited in Durban a few months ago. It was a lovely morning, to be with people who spoke with great feeling about their lives and then sang defiantly when the police approached to evict them.

You can read my story of the Zikode Occupation at *Newslick*, [here](#). Richard is the editor of *New Frame*, which will launch not long from now. It promises to be an important outlet for news from South Africa. Two of the journalists from *New Frame* have written with passion about this occupation: **Dennis Webster** and **Nation Nyoka**. Look forward to reading more from them at *New Frame*. When you read my story, please watch the videos. They show you the great joy these workers take in their mutual solidarity. There is love here, and hope.

One more journalist who will write for *New Frame*, Niren Tolsi, has a teeth-hurting piece in the *Mail and Guardian* on the theft of land from ordinary people, land that was otherwise used for recreation of various kinds. You can read Niren's story [here](#). I am happy to report that Niren is writing a book for LeftWord Books on cricket – our mutual love.

These stories of theft from ordinary working people by the elite are not to be thought of as particularly South African. We see this everywhere, from India to Brazil, from Thailand to Mexico, from Japan to the United States.



And so, we come to Venezuela. One of the great reforms of the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela was the attempt to protect the precarious working-class from the theft of the elite and the vicissitudes of everyday life. Projects – known as Missions – of various kinds were set up to bolster the ability of the precarious working-class to survive and to give them confidence to demand a different world. Last year, Jeanette Charles – who is a doctoral student at the Bolivarian University (Caracas, Venezuela) and works with Catedra Libre Africa – wrote an assessment of the Venezuelan situation, which you can read [here](#).

In her report, Charles offers one number which would be useful for those struggling to get homes in South Africa: the Great Venezuelan Housing Mission, she notes, has reached 1,725,210 families who had no housing. Now, these families live in housing produced on idle land and unoccupied real estate, which is transformed into ‘popular neighbourhoods with ample space for community development, urban agriculture, socio-economic production and more’. One housing project in Caracas, she notes, has built ‘a youth-driven fashion boutique that designs and sells reusable diapers meant to offset the shortages facing families due to the economic war’.

The concept of the ‘economic war’ against Venezuela is at the heart of our **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** Dossier on the elections in Venezuela. This is a dossier written by our office in Buenos Aires. It is an important piece of work. You can download it free [here](#). The election in Venezuela is on May 20. There is every likelihood that the Bolivarian candidate Nicolas Maduro will win. But there is also every likelihood that the United States – and its allies – will refuse to recognise the election as fair.

Democracy is not in good shape these days. The election in 2006 in the Palestinian territories brought Hamas a victory. The West did not like the outcome, so they did not accept it. It is the backdrop to the massacre this past week. There is every reason why the West does not like the outcome in Iraq’s parliamentary elections. It will certainly not like the outcome in Venezuela. Democracy is only celebrated when the West’s preferred candidates win. Otherwise, it is denigrated.

The needle around the world slowly moves from a desire for butter rather than guns. The powerful do not see it that way. Policies to feed, clothe, shelter and educate the people of the planet are not popular amongst the powerful. They prefer to bomb and encage people. But they are anachronistic. The Palestinians who marched to the fence, the South Africans who dug in their stakes, and the Venezuelans who will line up to vote have different ambitions. They mirror the last line in Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* – ‘For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new person’ (*un homme neuf*).

Warmly, Vijay.