

The Twentieth Newsletter (2018): Assassinations.



Dear Friends,

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

On Wednesday evening, in São Paulo (Brazil), I walked past a wall that had on it the slogan – *Marielle Presente*. This referred to the assassination of Marielle Franco in Rio de Janeiro on 14 March of this year. On Thursday, at 4pm, a march across Rio took place under the banner – *Quanto mais tem que morrer pra essa guerra acabar?* (How Many More Have to Die for This War to End?). It has been 120 days since the murder of Marielle Franco – a socialist, a bisexual black woman, a champion of the downtrodden in Brazil’s *favelas*. Under international pressure, the government in Brazil agreed to an investigation – which appears to go nowhere. There is no confidence that the investigation will develop. The lead prosecutor in the case – Homero Freitas Filho – said that this is a ‘complicated crime’ and that the ‘lack of information’ and the ‘real motivation of the crime’ are the ‘main difficulties’. It is hard to have confidence in such a process. This is the

same judiciary that has been so cavalier with the facts when it comes to the incarceration of the left's presidential candidate, Lula (please **read** the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** dossier on the fight for democracy in Brazil).



There is something to be said about the international attention given to the murder of Marielle Franco. It is important to sustain this pressure.

Meanwhile, in the northern rim of Colombia, assassinations have been going on at a pace that should shock a sensitive person. Over a hundred left-wing militants and community leaders have been killed. Recently, Ana María Cortés was murdered in her village of Cáceres (the name of this village reminds us of that other

community leader and left-wing militant who was killed in Honduras in 2016 – Berta Cáceres). Ana María Cortés, age 46, was a fighter for her community against the depredations of an energy company and a hydroelectric dam – again the parallels with Berta are clear. But she was also the coordinator of the presidential campaign for the left-wing leader Gustavo Petro. Her murder is part of what appears to be a coordinated and sanctioned campaign to erase local leaders of the left from across Colombia. Please read more about this in my short report at *Newslick* [here](#).

The attempt to erase local leaders of the Left is not peculiar to Latin America. Word comes from South Africa, for instance, where an assassination attempt against S’bu Zikode, the leader of the shack dwellers’ movement (Abahlali baseMjondolo), was foiled. You can read about that attempt [here](#) (this report from our friends at New Frame). I have already written about the sustained violence against local Left leaders in the Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura. On July 24, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has **called** for nation-wide demonstrations against these murders. There is very little that separates the threat against S’bu, the murders of Berta, Marielle and Ana María as well as scores of others across Latin America, and the murders and attacks across India.



It is often felt that the future is bleak. So much is against the forces of progress. And yet, there is the curious temperament of human beings who, backs against the wall, continue to struggle.

The German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote a massive three volume book called *The Principles of Hope* (1954-59). In these books, Bloch brought to the front the concept of utopia. Without an idea of a utopia, a hope for a better society in the future, there is the tendency to lapse into despair. What both right-wing versions of neoliberalism and scholastic versions of postmodernism share is a contempt for utopias and

for change. Hayek, in his 1944 *The Road to Serfdom*, suggested that any attempt to intervene in the world for good will end in terror. It is better to leave things as we inherit them. This cynicism about the possibility of change is commonplace in postmodern thinking, where the idea of a future is mocked as an overwhelming commitment to teleological thinking – thinking that is driven by an imagination for where the human journey leads. But human beings, ordinary people who bustle through the contradictions of everyday life, hold fast to some utopian conception. It can often come from religion, but it equally has secular roots. The present is so awful for so many people that hope in a future is necessary. Utopia comes to us in many disguises, one of which is the confident way in which people fight against the suffocation of our present.

That is the only way to understand the ferocious bravery of people from Haiti to Jordan, from Greece to Argentina – people who in these past few weeks have been on the streets against austerity policies pushed by their governments, encouraged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF arrived in Haiti and demanded an end to energy subsidies. The government of Guy Lafontant agreed. The people took to the streets. What brought them there was not simply the rise in oil prices. It is essentially the invalidation of Haiti's freedom – a country occupied by external forces, including Debt and Donors, NGOs and the UN, and most of all, the United States. The government reversed the end to the subsidies, but the unrest continues. The protests were not only about the subsidies. They are about life itself.

The people in Haiti know that unaccountable 'democratic' governments say anything they want and then do what they please when the streets are cleared. This is what has happened in Jordan. The people protested the IMF 'reforms', which were then reversed by the King and the new Prime Minister. The people went home. Deputy Prime Minister Rajai Muasher now says, 'We cannot go back on fiscal reforms. We are committed to the fiscal reforms'. But the government is not committed to what it told the people. The IMF is far more important than the will of the ordinary people. Hope for the rest of us vests in the great feeling of the people far more than in the 'science' of the IMF.

The other front line for the new IMF assault is Argentina. From November 2017 to this June, the government of President Mauricio Macri has raised energy and water rates to above 1300%. This is intolerable. It is what provoke the mass demonstrations in Argentina on July 9. It is what has led to a catastrophic increase in poverty – half of Argentina's children live below the poverty line. Coming up in October from **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** will be a dossier on the IMF and Argentina as prepared by our office in Buenos Aires. Keep an eye out for it.

In May, the IMF visited Tunisia. They pushed for 'reforms'. The government agreed. The language of the IMF **report** is anaemic – reduce energy subsidies, 'contain' the public-sector wage bill and adopt the pension 'reform' bill. Cut, cut, cut. All indicators suggest that while you are reading this newsletter, the people of Tunisia will take to the streets against these policies. They know what it means to talk about containment and reduction, about reform and debt burdens. It means less money in their hands.



Meanwhile, those who make policy – the governments of the Group of Seven (G7) and NATO – enjoy the circus produced by the fulminations of Donald Trump. Trump is a deception. He sucks the oxygen out of public discussion, making ridiculous statements that have little bearing on policy. On the one hand, he threatens the Europeans that the United States will leave Europe’s defence to itself, and on the other hand, his government increases – by 91% – its funds for the US-European Defence Initiative. All the discussion is about Trump’s latest tweet, but there is little sober assessment of the policy continuity between Trump and his predecessors. For a brief look at this continuity, see my report in *Salon* [here](#). I wish more attention were paid, for instance, to the root cause of these anti-austerity protests and to the assassinations of the left-wing community leaders than to the personality disorder of Donald Trump.



Lastly, it is to the credit of the people of the Horn of Africa that the leaders of Eritrea and Ethiopia came together for the first time in two decades. Eritrea’s Isaias Afwerki and Ethiopia’s Abiy Ahmed met in Asmara (Eritrea) last Sunday and pledged themselves to full scale normalisation. Ambassadors will be exchanged, border differences will be sorted out, transportation between the countries will resume, trade will restart. The ‘state of war’ between the two countries is now over as the peace agreement of 2000 will be implemented. Whether this means UN sanctions against Eritrea will be lifted is another question. For now, it is important to celebrate this new-found fellowship. The strains of Bob Marley’s *Africa Unite* (1979) close out this, the twentieth newsletter from **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**,

Africa unite

Unite for the benefit of your people.

Unite for it’s later than you think.

Warmly,

Vijay.

