

The Twenty-Second Newsletter (2018): Message in a Bottle



Dear Friends,

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

When Charles Dickens published his novel *Hard Times* in 1854, he saw only the first sniff of the power of capitalism. Emotions and sentiments, he wrote in this novel, were to be reduced by the capitalist imagination to numbers, to the calculations of profit. 'It is known', Dickens wrote with feeling, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into

vice, or the reverse'. Human feeling was seized by the narrowness of the double entry account book.

This point about the decomposition of virtue is central to our immediate concern. The government of Ecuador put forward a resolution a few months ago to make sure that massive monopoly food corporations were not given free rein to market infant formula in place of breastfeeding. This is a particularly acute concern in countries where there is little potable water and where infant mortality is a serious problem. Ecuador, on behalf of countries with moderate means, worried that monopoly food corporations are using aggressive tactics to manipulate families and health professionals to substitute their expensive formula for breast milk. Reports are now legion that firms such as Nestlé, Danone, Mead Johnson Nutrition and Abbott are using 'milk nurses' (promoters of their product who masquerade as nurses) and the distribution of free samples for a short period as a way to delude parents and to hook children into the drinking of formula rather than breastmilk. Thus, Ecuador went to the World Health Assembly to seek stronger guidelines against this aggressive marketing.

Enter the United States on behalf of the monopoly baby food makers. The US threatened to punish Ecuador by trade sanctions. Ecuador withdrew the resolution. Russia resubmitted it, and it passed. Another example, I suppose, of Russian interference.

Why would the United States object to guidelines that seek to highlight the science of breastfeeding rather than the profit making of infant formula? This is the theme of my report for the Independent Media Institute, which you can read this week at *Common Dreams*. The US administration, under Trump, has been uniquely against science and scientific thinking. It has also been ferociously misogynistic. Here, in the case of breastfeeding, it has combined its obsessions against science and against women.

A UNICEF **assessment** indicates that an infant who grows in conditions of less than salubrious hygiene and with diseases rampant and who is fed formula is between 6 and 25 times more likely to die of diarrhoea and four times more likely to die of pneumonia than a breastfed child. The key element here is the water. Formula must be mixed with water. But where would households of need get the water. Too often, private firms – such as Nestlé once more – have sequestered public water sources for their bottled water plants (on the cities without water, please see the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research dossier #2**). What remains for the households of need is dangerous water. Firms such as Nestlé, which made close to \$8 billion last year, make money stealing water and then forcing formula (which requires water) onto families of need. This is the violence of capitalism.

And then, there is violence as a commodity. The merchants of death – the large arms makers – are at it again. Trump has promised to side-line human rights considerations, a barrier that was often breached by the US government. No junta in South America or no strongman in West Asia would have survived without the massive arms shipments from companies such as Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics. A 2000 **report** by the US Central Intelligence Agency on CIA activities in Chile during the military dictatorship makes the clear point, 'US military assistance and sales grew significantly during the years of greatest human rights abuses'. Nonetheless, Trump has now decided to shun all such considerations, even the fig leaf of concern. In my **report** this week on this new policy, I emphasise the arms sales to Saudi Arabia, which continues its murderous war against the people of Yemen. Here are two sentences to consider from the report, 'Half of all arms sales are to the Middle East. It is well-worth considering that the arms sales, rather than fundamentalism, fuel the conflicts in the Middle East'. Every ten minutes a child dies in Yemen a result of this war, prolonged by the merchants of death.

Meanwhile, the US arms manufacturers make an immense profit. The top 100 arms dealers made \$364.8 billion last year. The top ten firms, most of them from the US, made more than half of this amount. Lockheed Martin made \$43.4 billion. In the *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx wrote, 'The impact of war is self-evident, since economically it is exactly the same as if the nation were to drop a part of its capital into the ocean'. From the standpoint of human civilisation, spending on weapons is a waste. From the standpoint of the arms dealers, there is just so much money to be made.



War is ugly. Preparations for war are as ugly. This week, on Thursday, across Argentina, but particularly in Buenos Aires, tens of thousands of decent people took to the streets to protest the preparations for war. The picture above is from Buenos Aires. The main avenue is packed. The slogan is clear – *Nunca Mas*, Never Again. What it refers to is the decree signed by President Macri that opens the door to the participation of the Argentina military in internal security, or rather in repression. There is a deep memory in South America of the way the *juntas* used the military to crush the mass movements of the people, the tribunes of the Left and the spirit of resistance and humanity. Argentina's junta was merely a reflection of the junta in Brazil and Chile. But there is more to this protest. The people also reject the militarisation of social life, which has shaken to the core the social fabric in Mexico and Colombia and recently in Brazil. These decent people said *Never Again* to the destruction of their society, but also to the military deals with imperialism and to the arms industry which feeds off of the militarisation of social life.



The idea of the militarisation of social life is so important for our present time. In Bihar (India), half a world away, landlords went on the rampage on July 1 against the homes of a very poor community, the Musahars of Mogala village. These landlords have a great deal of land, but they want more. Their appetite, like that of the arms dealers and the infant formula sellers, is formidable. It did not matter that this poor community received rights to the land in 1985-86. Political power is a force of nature. It was like a hurricane against the simple homes. Hundreds of the displaced sat in protest, then came to a rally organised by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Madhubani district. They picked up the Red Flag and marched back to their homes. They are like the decent people of Buenos Aires. What do they care of legality – decrees and police order, ‘laws’ that violate basic human principles. They care about their social life, about the world that they live in, not the world of the people of property, privilege and power.



بنوں، مختلف تنظیموں کی طرف سے عالمی یوم مزدور کے موقع پر ریلی نکالی گئی ریلی بازار سے گزر رہی ہے

These protests – in Buenos Aires and in Mogala – are reflected in Wana, northern Pakistan. There, Ali Wazeer of The Struggle group (part of the Left and Democratic Front) won a parliamentary seat. A decade ago, Wana town was the epicentre of a major battle between al-Qaeda and the Pakistani military. Ali Wazeer kept his head, despite threats against his life. He continued to build the people’s movement against human rights abuses and for social justice. It was this work that brought him the love and affection of those in the area. He won the seat by 23,000 votes. Even rigging could not defeat him. He will be the voice of the Left in the Pakistani parliament. Qalandar Memon reports, ‘A few weeks ago, the Taliban surrounded him and his supporters and fired at them for hours. Many died. He had told me when in Lahore that the Taliban had orders to kill him. A few months ago, he was picked up at gunpoint in Lahore and later had another gun pointed at him in Karachi. If he can defy thousands of Taliban and the military, then one Ali Wazeer should be enough for us against 270 other parliamentarians’.



We hope very much that you have been to our website and read the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research dossier** on workers' housing in Solapur (India). We hope as well that you have liked us on **Facebook** and followed us on **Twitter**. Starting this week, we have also got an **Instagram** page. On the Instagram page, we will launch #TricontinentalTBT – new revolutionary artwork each Thursday. In our estimation, the battle of ideas cannot be waged by words alone. We have to engage the visual imagination. There is a cruelty that has taken hold in our cultures, cruelty promoted by individualism, greed, militarism and hierarchies of kinds. Our social imagination has to be expanded to allow for the belief in different possibilities. For that, art is essential. Art, for the Left, has always played the role of the mirror of social reality and the canvas to explore alternative promises. Neither can art do its work alone, nor can political movements. They require each other.

Warmly, Vijay.