

## The Third Newsletter: Water and Farmers

Dear Friends,



I'm writing to you from Beirut, Lebanon, where the sun is shining brightly and the air is crisp. Not far from here, in the east of Damascus, the war in Syria continues. It is not a war that has disappeared from the consciousness of people who live in this land, where war has marked its landscape and its sensibility. A few years ago, a police chief of Beirut had told me that its civil war (1975-1990) had merely entered into a long half-time break. There is always the sense that the country will be attacked by Israel or that its fragile sectarian arrangements will collapse. But for now, as a former government minister told me last night, Lebanon has the safest borders in West Asia and North Africa. I'm entitled to agree with him.

In Syria, meanwhile, the worst part of the war continues in two locations – around Damascus, where the Syrian Arab Army is in a fierce fight to clear its suburbs of rebel fighters; and in Northern Syria, where the Turkish forces are in pitched battle with the US-backed Syrian Kurdish forces and where the Turkish army has almost entirely encircled the city of Afrin. In Astana (Kazakhstan), the Russians, Iranians and Turks have opened a dialogue that will result – as I hear – in a deal which will allow the Turkish army free rein in the northern part of Syria to break the momentum of the Syrian Kurdish fighters, while the Turkish government eventually will allow the Syrian forces to attack the rebels in the city of Idlib without interference. In *Alternet*

today, I have a report on this deal making around Afrin and Idlib. But my report is also about the expectation in Damascus that the US might bomb government establishments in the city to insinuate itself into the political process. You can read my report [here](#).

Not far from the centre of Damascus, in eastern Ghouta, the government forces have been pounding the rebels – who are, in this area, mainly affiliated to various extremist outfits. This is a tough campaign, which has likely resulted in the death of a large number of civilians. Brief lulls in the fighting have allowed some of the injured to leave the area. But many others are trapped. Much the same happened in Mosul and Raqqa, where US air power devastated the civilians areas in the fight to defeat ISIS. Air campaigns, as the research institute **AirWars** shows, are hideous and inhumane. Whether they are US bombers or Russian bombers or Syrian bombers, the net result is that ordinary people suffer their wrath. At *Frontline*, I have a report on the situation of the war in Syria – seven years later – and of the battle in eastern Ghouta for emphasis. You can read my report [here](#).

At **Tricontinental**, we are preparing a dossier on Syria, which should be released in early April. Keep an eye out for it. This will be a difficult dossier to produce because of the great divergence of opinions about what is happening in Syria.



People Collect pure drinking water from a long distance by boat on the polluted Buriganga River. Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2014.

A week ago, the Turkish army cut off the water supply to the city of Afrin (Syria). Once the Turks seized Mydanki Lake, they shut off the delivery of water. Residents in Afrin are using boreholes for water. The risk of disease has increased. This is the use of water as a weapon of war.

But another crisis of water is on the horizon. Beirut, for instance, is set to run out of water by 2035 (according to a new study by Fransabank). The bank sees the solution for Beirut and Lebanon in privatisation. This is a curious position to take, for it is widely understood that even the public sector water delivery set-up is deeply

entrenched in private hands. Failure to deliver potable water has enhanced the industry for private filtered water, while lack of investment in water delivery is part and parcel of the misuse of public funds. It would obviously be a bank that suggests further privatisation. That is their habit.

I'm happy to let you know that we – at **Tricontinental** – have produced our second dossier *Cities Without Water*, which you can read here (free to download). The dossier is released a few days before the start of the Alternative World Water Forum (Brasilia, March 17-22). The Forum comes just before the major city of Cape Town (South Africa) is said to run out of water. Our dossier goes through the reasons why there is a crisis in Cape Town, why there was a crisis in Sao Paulo (Brazil) and what was done by the Communist government in Shimla (India) to avert such crises. It is a dossier that explains a problem and then provides a practical and tested set of principles to tackle this crisis. The dossier is illustrated with wonderful pictures (such as the one above) from a group of photographers associated with the Drik Gallery and Picture Library in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I hope you will visit their work [here](#).

We wish our friends in the Alternative World Water Forum success in their deliberations and hope they will be able to push back against privatisation as the solution to the crisis of water and cities without water.



Last week, I mentioned the Kisan Long March in Maharashtra. A hundred thousand farmers entered Mumbai, where they were greeted by residents with open arms. They came at night and made their camp. When they heard that the Class X students were going to have their exams the next day, they broke camp and marched all night to their final destination so as not to disturb the students the next day. It is a sign of the great humanity of these workers and peasants. They were not prepared to disrupt the city. They had come to deliver a message to the Chief Minister.

Not long after they began their encirclement of the government buildings, the Chief Minister and his cabinet pledged to accept all their demands. It is a tremendous victory not only for the farmers in Maharashtra but for the All-India Kisan Sabha (the mass front of the Communist Party of India-Marxist) and – of course – for the farmers across the country and for the Left movement. Such victories, of this scale, do not occur easily. Nor does inspiration come without great cost. It took effort and determination for the organisers of the



farmers in the Kisan Sabha to build this campaign and it took a great deal of fortitude and courage for the farmers to march 190 kms to the capital city. Violence from the government was expected. But the dignity of the farmers and the support for their cause stayed the hand of violence. Our Tricontinental Senior Fellow P. Sainath, the founder of PARI, spoke at the final rally. He told Bloomberg that this was a very significant win for the farmers, a short clip that you can see over [here](#) (well worth watching this seven minute clip).

It is with some pride that I can say that the best reporting on the long march came from our friends at Newsclick and at the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI). There are too many stories to point to, so I welcome you to go to their websites to have a look at the range of stories. There are, however, a few stories that I hope you will read:

1. Parth M. N, 'Blistered Feet, Unbroken Spirit' (**PARI**, March 13).
2. 'I am a farmer, I walk this long journey' (**PARI**, March 14).
3. Parth M. N., 'The run the farm, they made the March' (**PARI**, March 15).
4. 'Farmers Paint the Streets Red' (**Newsclick**, March 12).
5. 'Four Leaders You Need to Know About' (**Newsclick**, March 12).

The struggle is not over. Yesterday, farmers rallied in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. They are prepared to follow their comrades from Maharashtra. Other states will follow. This is an unfolding story.



On Wednesday, at 930pm, in Rio de Janeiro, a leftist councilwoman Marielle Franco (1979-2018) was assassinated. Her driver – Anderson Pedro Gomes – was also killed. She was a vocal critic of state violence and had just made a comment on twitter about violence in her society. One more decent person killed.

Warmly,

Vijay.

To leave this list, see below.

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