

FILM

A Social Genocide

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Documented reality, a docu-fiction narrative and a voice over commentary bind Fernando Solanas' "A Social Genocide" (Argentina, Switzerland, France, 2004, colour, 120 mins). The credits are superimposed on children playing in poor localities, vagrants and funeral processions,. Argentine of October 2001 is summed up in fresh bank notes being counted, office files, street garbage, and animal carcass. President Rúa's progressive plans have been replaced by IMF directives. The recession deepens and millions are in poverty. Flight of capital is followed by blocking of bank accounts. Shops are looted, as people on streets bang on kitchen utensils. There is a clamorous demand for the government to resign. Amid the apathy in Argentina, there are spontaneous revolts and insurrections. Police barricades are erected, and there is a state of siege. Fires on road block tyres are countered by police tear gas and bullets. In December 2001, the Argentinians cry; "In glory we shall die, and not in dictatorship anymore."

Repression through police water cannons and mounted police fail to empty streets. Workers, housewives, students, unemployed young men and hundreds of citizens rally to the movement. The film maker wonders: "What happened in Argentine?" With so many people hungry, there is more terrorism, death and social disintegration. The story of "The Never Ending Debt" encompasses corruption, debts, and bank debts used to enrich Argentine financiers. Paintings of bank lobbyists are on the walls of financial bureaux. There are overhead shots of the conference rooms of banks. The Argentine government favours international corporations and banks. In 1976, debts arose from a military dictatorship. The Vietnam debacle led to defeat of USA in power in 1973, but it also resulted in the rise of conservative powers. Interest rates were 16% in 1981, due to an alliance of foreign banks and multi-nationals. Half the debts are private debts, in the accounts of American, British, Italian and German banks. Savings were confiscated by the banks. People demonstrate peacefully. Foreign banks owe money to Argentina, and parent companies were responsible for debts of the subordinates. Banks charged usurious rates of interest. Debts reached \$130 million. Several debts in Latin American countries were private debts, on borrowings by dictators, known as the 'Theory of Odious Debt'.

Since 1983, it has been a 'Chronicle of Treason'. President Raul Alfonso claimed that the state could not bow to international pressure. 1984 ushered a policy of austerity. It was revealed in 1985, that huge public funds were being transferred to banks and public corporations. There were insurgents in the army during 1987. The Radical Party was defeated in elections in 1989. Neo-Peronist Carlos Menem followed the 'Consensus in Washington', and promised productive revolution and rise in wages. The programme of the liberal conservative minority was single minded globalization and amnesty to the junta. Privatization was part and parcel of politics. Social thinkers and political activists express their opinion in interviews.

In the republic of dictators, police protect the political leaders. The National budget was to be approved by Washington, and there are street protests. The

Convertibility Plan of the economic model allowed liberalization of imports, specially fruits and food, and export of machines. The interest rates in Argentine were 50%, whereas in USA and Europe it was only 7%. The industrial manufacturing sectors were under closure. Media remained the driving force of change. The debts had become irretrievable. State enterprises were purchased with government bonds. Capital works remained non-executed. While billions were poured in subsidies, that led to increase in public debts, millions of Argentinians were without water supply and sewage disposal. Legal protection favoured the corporations, who never paid public debt. As unemployment spread, there were protest movements with road blocks. Increasing corporatization and mafocracy, allowed politicians to have loyalty to their privileges only.

The Supreme Court became a court of immunity, during the Menem era. Through animation and cartoons, Solanas depicts Argentinian society faulting the Supreme Court. The high prices caused workers and pensioners to be stripped of their rights. Menem's second term commenced in 1995. There was a sinister alliance of politicians, union leaders, and big companies. Alejandro Fernandez Moujan and Solanas' cameras pan over shacks, shanties, areas of water logging, the meagre meals of boiled maize and rice and intolerable unemployment. Mafocracy united businessmen, politicians and drug runners. Money from drugs and crime left Argentina through money laundering. Kickbacks through dividends plundered public funds. Construction of dams cost five times of estimates. While Argentina was guaranteeing peace in Croatia and Bosnia, it was supplying arms to the conflict. President Carlos Menem was indicted for arms smuggling, but was set free by the Supreme Court. All arms smuggling cases were dismissed. There was a gold mafia, with parallel customs officers. Buenos Aires police were part of the mafia. The 'Argentine miracle' opted for social disaster, and the middle class were wiped out. President de la Rúa opted for repression.

Argentina steadily moved to social genocide, with children and animals living on street litters. With the austerity plans, the visuals document the malnutrition, the underfed, and the patients in hospitals. Doctors are interviewed. Undernourishment was a social, economic and cultural disease. Abandoned children live in garbage dumps. The children, who are survivors of the third generation of underfed children, eat garbage. 90% of the Argentine population are paupers, where 10% own everything. Argentina produces enough food to feed 300 million people, but on an average 35,000 die every year from starvation. In 1998, international organizations hailed Argentina as a model to follow. The visuals underline that international organizations and their proxies are equally responsible for the social genocide, as the Argentinian government. After a quarter century, the economic results were disastrous.

Agricultural subsidies in US and Europe, led to \$150 million losses in Argentina. The neo-liberal models led to massive sell-offs. Banging drums and striking closed shutters, protesters and 'Persistent Action of Mothers' demonstrate against repression. Solanas documents the nationwide marches by students, bank depositors, and women farm hands in December 2001. Human dignity was as good as dead in the apocalyptic comedy, and there was a need for the earth to shake. Clashes between protesters and police continue. The injured

are on stretchers. The protesters march on, in spite of thirty four deaths in clashes. Violent events force President De La Rúa to resign. Built on hand held cameras, "A Social Genocide" resembles life. The visuals drive the narrative. Solanas provides the visuals with necessary time to expose the complexity of the Argentine situation. The film was screened at the Kolkata Film Festival (November 07). □□□