

The 'Dirty War'

Level 3 | **Advanced**

1 Pre-reading: Key Vocabulary

Fill the gaps using one of these words from the text:

immunity **atrocity** **reconciliation** **military coup**
impunity **amnesty** **prosecution** **rhetoric**

1. If you act with _____, you have no risk of being punished for doing something bad or wrong.
2. If you have _____, this means that the law does not apply to you with respect to a particular situation.
3. _____ is the process of accusing someone of a crime and asking a court of law to judge them.
4. A _____ is an occasion when the armed services take over the government of a country.
5. _____ is a style of speaking that is intended to influence people.
6. An _____, is a cruel and violent act.
7. _____ is the process of establishing a friendly relationship with people you once argued or fought with.
8. An _____ is a situation where a government agrees not to punish people who have committed a particular crime.

2 What do you know about recent Latin American history?

Choose the best answer in each case.

1. In which country was the so-called "dirty war" fought?
a. Chile **b.** Argentina **c.** Peru
2. How many people died in the 'disappearances' in Argentina?
a. more than 15, 000 **b.** about 100,000 **c.** over a million
3. In which country did the Shining Path guerilla movement operate?
a. Chile **b.** Argentina **c.** Peru
4. Who was US secretary of state at the time of the Chilean coup?
a. Carter **b.** Clinton **c.** Kissinger
5. What extraordinary developments have occurred in Latin America in the past few weeks?
a. They have decided to offer the military immunity from prosecution.
b. They have decided to arrest people who carried out murders.
c. They have decided to investigate the events of the 1970s and 80s.

Now look in the text and check your answers.

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Extraordinary things have been happening over the past few weeks in Latin America. In Argentina measures have been passed to remove the immunity from members of the military who took part in the disappearances and torture during the "dirty war" against the left in the 70s and early 80s. This means that Argentinians will be able to examine what happened during those dark years, who was responsible and why they were able to get away with it for so long.

In Chile last month President Lagos announced plans to explore the equally grim period in his country's history that followed the 1973 military coup. His measures, set out in the document *No Tomorrow Without A Yesterday*, would allow immunity to some of those who took part in the atrocities in return for their cooperation in the investigation into what happened to the more than 3,000 who died at the hands of the military.

In Peru last month there was the publication of the truth and reconciliation commission's report about that country's own troubled period, mainly in the 80s, when 60,000 died or "disappeared." This, too, could lead to prosecutions, and a reopening of what happened and why.

These developments have met with a mixed reaction in the respective countries. The periods under examination represent extremely painful times. Some, mainly conservative, commentators have argued for "drawing a line" under the events so that, in that over-used phrase, people can "come to terms with what has happened" and move on. Some commentators have also co-opted the rhetoric of President Bush, who has tried

to create the notion of a phantom, all-purpose "terrorist" who carries out his atrocities for no other apparent reason than he is "evil" and "hates freedom". When dealing with such people, goes the argument, any methods are allowable.

One theory used to justify a general amnesty is that of the "two demons". This suggests that the militaries in the three countries were all fighting communist or extremist elements and fire had to be fought with fire. The argument goes that war is war and both sides do hellish, demonic things that cannot be examined fairly in peacetime. This is a dangerous argument. On a numerical basis alone, it does not stand up. In Argentina leftist guerrillas in a 20-year period were responsible for an estimated 600 deaths, compared with the state's 15,000 killings and disappearances. In Chile the military was responsible for an estimated 3,000 deaths while around 150 members of the security forces were killed. In Peru the Shining Path is blamed for a larger proportion of deaths, but the state is held responsible for around 20,000. The argument, however, is not to do with body counts but the fact that the murders and torture were carried out under the authority of the state.

The whole apparatus of the state, from its intelligence-gathering to the use of its barracks and naval schools, was employed in illegal activity in Argentina, Chile and Peru. Whatever one thought of the guerrillas or what they were fighting for, what they did was punishable by law and through the courts. The state almost invariably acted with impunity. "The real test of Peru's willingness to confront its past lies in how the government handles the question of prosecutions," said Jose Miguel Vivanco of

Human Rights Watch last month. "The world will be watching to see if the attorney general puts the necessary effort into investigating and prosecuting these cases."

These are matters not just for the countries concerned but for the international community, and there are lessons to be learned today. President Carter, alone of his fellow office-holders, stood out against the abuses in Argentina. The then US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, who connived in and celebrated the Chilean coup, now has to consult his lawyers before he travels abroad to ensure that he will not be arrested in a country that seeks to examine his shabby role during that period. That is as it should be. Once a state suspends its laws and excuses its actions on a threat of terrorism, the slope is a slippery one, whether the country is a democracy or a dictatorship.

In *The Real Odessa*, his book about the Nazis' escape route to Argentina Uki Goni recalls an episode in Buenos Aires in 1974. A billboard was suspended around the obelisk on the city's main avenue with the message: Silence is Health. The sign was meant to discourage motorists from blasting their horns, but it seemed at the time to carry a much deeper, Orwellian meaning. That silence is finally being broken. Those who have had the courage to raise their voices and to seek justice over the years in Argentina, Chile, Peru, deserve the world's admiration and encouragement.

The Guardian Weekly 20-09-03, page 14

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3 Comprehension Check

Match the beginnings of the sentences with the appropriate endings.

1. In Argentina the government has decided
 2. In Chile the government has decided
 3. In Peru
 4. Some right-wing commentators have argued that
 5. The argument that fire must be fought with fire does not stand up because
 6. Another difference is that while the guerrillas were subject to the law
 7. The threat of terrorism
 8. The author suggests that those who are seeking justice
-
- a. any methods are allowable when dealing with "terrorists".
 - b. the state could act with impunity.
 - c. is not an excuse for states to suspend their laws.
 - d. to remove immunity from members of the military who took part in the "dirty war".
 - e. a report has been published about the troubled period of the 1980s.
 - f. deserve our admiration and support.
 - g. far more people were killed by the state than by the guerrillas.
 - h. to allow immunity in return for cooperation.

4 Vocabulary: Collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns and phrases in the right-hand column. Check your answers in the text.

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. to set out | a. what has happened |
| 2. to meet with | b. atrocities |
| 3. to come to terms with | c. human rights abuses |
| 4. to draw a line under | d. measures |
| 5. to carry out | e. events |
| 6. to act with | f. justice |
| 7. to stand out against | g. impunity |
| 8. to seek | h. a mixed reaction |

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5 Vocabulary: Prepositions

Fill the gaps using an appropriate preposition. Check your answers in the text.

1. to be responsible _____ something
2. to get away _____ a crime
3. to take part _____ an atrocity
4. to lead _____ prosecutions
5. to come to terms _____ what has happened
6. to blame someone _____ something
7. to connive _____ something
8. to discourage someone _____ doing something

6 Vocabulary: Various

Match the words with their meanings:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. grim | a. to plan secretly to do something illegal |
| 2. to co-opt | b. extremely unpleasant |
| 3. shabby | c. to take someone's idea and use it as your own |
| 4. to connive | d. a large place for advertisements (usually American English) |
| 5. a billboard | e. extremely dishonest |

Discussion

Make a list of points for and against granting immunity to those accused of crimes against the people. Is it ever right to forget history so that a country can have a better future?