

The 'Dirty War'

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Pre-reading: Key Vocabulary

Match these words and phrases from the text with their definitions;

1. immunity from prosecution
 2. torture
 3. an atrocity
 4. a military coup
 5. a commentator
 6. an amnesty
 7. abuse
 8. demonica
-
- a. cruel and violent act, often in a war
 - b. someone who writes about a particular topic or who discusses it on TV or radio
 - c. extremely evil
 - d. a situation in which a government agrees not to punish people who have committed a crime
 - e. a situation in which someone is given special protection from the law
 - f. cruel, violent or unfair treatment
 - g. a situation in which the armed forces take over the government of a country
 - h. extreme physical pain used as a punishment or to make someone give information

2 Find the Information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible:

1. When was the military coup in Chile?
2. In which country was the "dirty war"?
3. How many people were killed by the military in the civil war in Chile?
4. How many people died or "disappeared" in Peru?
5. Who is Nestor Kirchner?

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Some extraordinary things have been happening over the past few weeks in Latin America. In Argentina the government has passed laws to remove the immunity from prosecution 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 and to see who was responsible and why they were unpunished for so long. Argentina's popular new president, Nestor Kirchner supports these measures.

In Chile last month President Lagos announced plans to investigate the terrible period in his country's history that followed the 1973 military coup. His measures 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 were killed by the military.

In Peru last month a report was published about the events of the 1980s, when 60,000 died or "disappeared." This, too, could lead to prosecutions, and an investigation of

what happened and why.

The reaction to these developments has been mixed. The 1970s and 80s were an extremely painful time. Some conservative commentators suggest that these events are now best forgotten so that people can get on with their lives. Others have followed President Bush and suggested that all terrorists are "evil" and "hate freedom". When you deal with people like this, they say, any methods are allowable. Many of them are asking for a general amnesty because the militaries in the three countries say they were all fighting communist or extremist elements and they had to fight fire with fire. They argue that war is war and both sides do terrible, demonic things that you cannot investigate fairly in peacetime. This is a dangerous argument, which is invalid on the basis of simple numbers.

In Argentina, for example, leftist guerrillas were responsible for an estimated 600 deaths, while the state was responsible for 15,000 killings and disappearances. In Chile the figures were 150 killed by guerrillas and 3,000 by the military. In Peru the guerrillas killed a lot more, but the state killed around 20,000 people. In all three countries the state allowed

murders and torture to take place.

The actions of the guerrillas were punishable by law and through the courts. The state, on the other hand, could do what it liked. These are matters not just for the countries concerned but also for the international community, and there are lessons to be learned today. President Carter was the only one to criticise the human rights abuses in Argentina. The then US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, helped to organise the coup in Chile and celebrated when it happened. It is a very dangerous road when a country suspends its laws because of "terrorism".

In 1974 there was a large advertisement in the streets of Buenos Aires with the message: Silence is Health. The purpose of the sign was to stop motorists using their car horns, but it seemed at the time to carry a much deeper meaning. That silence is finally being broken. Those courageous people who have fought for justice over the years in Argentina, Chile and Peru, deserve the world's admiration and encouragement.

The Guardian Weekly
20-09-03, page 14

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3 Comprehension Check

Choose the best answer.

1. What will the new laws in Argentina mean?
 - a. That members of the military will have immunity from prosecution.
 - b. That members of the military will be punished.
 - c. That people will find out the truth about what happened in the 1970s and 80s.
2. What will the new measures in Chile mean?
 - a. That people will have immunity from prosecution in return for information.
 - b. That members of the military will have immunity from prosecution.
 - c. That members of the military will be punished.
3. What are conservative commentators saying?
 - a. That people should forget these events.
 - b. That all terrorists should be punished.
 - c. That the argument is a dangerous one.
4. In Peru 60,000 people died or "disappeared". Who was responsible for more deaths?
 - a. The guerrillas.
 - b. The military.
 - c. Neither. They were both the same.
5. What was the purpose of the "Silence is Health" advertisement?
 - a. To carry a deeper meaning.
 - b. To frighten people.
 - c. To stop drivers using their car horns.

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4 Vocabulary: Opposites

Complete the table using adjectives from the text;

- | | |
|---------------|-------|
| 1. clean | _____ |
| 2. ordinary | _____ |
| 3. unpopular | _____ |
| 4. forbidden | _____ |
| 5. safe | _____ |
| 6. liberal | _____ |
| 7. right-wing | _____ |
| 8. cowardly | _____ |

5 Vocabulary: Word Building

Complete the table

- | Verb | Noun |
|----------------|-------|
| 1. admire | _____ |
| 2. encourage | _____ |
| 3. prosecute | _____ |
| 4. disappear | _____ |
| 5. investigate | _____ |
| 6. cooperate | _____ |
| 7. punish | _____ |
| 8. publish | _____ |

6 Discussion

It is better to forget the past and concentrate on building a new future.
Should we forget past crimes in the name of cooperation?

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Key

1 Key Vocabulary

1. e; 2. h; 3. a; 4. g; 5. b; 6. d; 7. f; 8. c

2 Find the Information

- 1973
- Argentina
- 3,000
- 60,000
- The president of Argentina

3 Comprehension Check

1. c; 2. a; 3. a; 4. a; 5. c

4 Vocabulary – Opposites

- dirty
- extraordinary
- popular
- allowable
- dangerous
- conservative
- leftist
- courageous

5 Vocabulary – Word Building

- admiration
- encouragement
- prosecution
- disappearance
- investigation
- cooperation
- punishment
- publication