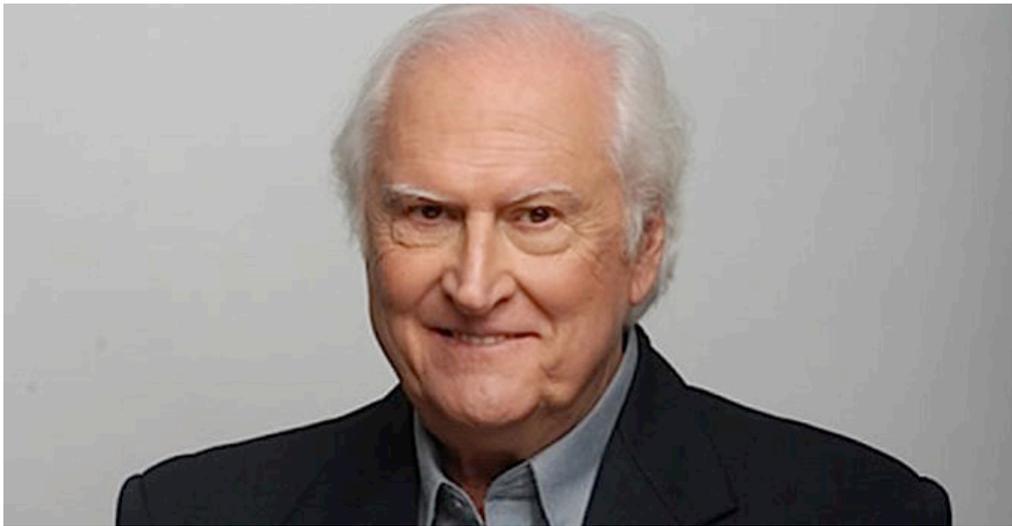


Interview

Pradip Biswas

***A Journey to Fumigated Towns:*  
Fernando Solanas Attacks Establishment**



**Pradip Biswas:** The new massive critical documentary introduces a fierce chapter about damage being done to the Towns and its people in terms of hygienic impact!

**Fernando E. Solanas:** Of course, it does. I have tried to draw huge attention to the agro-based industries which have wrought health hazards at sprawling quarters in Argentine. To see it is to believe it.

**PB:** The way the snappy documentary progress makes living alarming. It also throws a warning for the ruling Clique!! Is it true?

**Solanas:** Chronicling the devastating effects of agribusiness on my homeland, the documentation is sure to make all Argentinians aware of such climate destruction. These protests against pesticides and other harmful

farming methods that have been used in Argentina for several decades, often with the collusion with the government.

**PB:** Shot in a multitude of locations throughout the country, from villages displaced by soy plantations to maternity wards treating malformed babies poisoned by agrochemicals,

*A Journey to Fumigated Towns (Viaje a los Pueblos Fumigados)* offers ample proof that mass

corporate agriculture is the wrong way to go for this land or any land.

**Solanas:** After premiering in the Berlinale Special program, the film could see theatrical play in

Latin America and *pubcaster* pickups in Europe and elsewhere. The documentary re-

ceived applause for exposure of the Govt.' apathy to redress the bio-diversity.

**PB:** You begin your journey in the province of Salta, where tens of thousands of acres of trees have been cleared to make way for soybean plants.

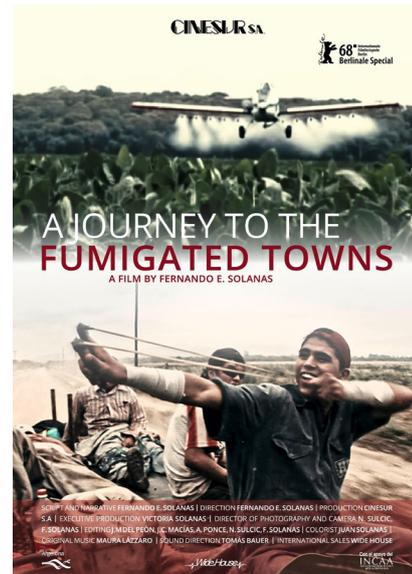
**Solanas:** There is a reason for this: Soybeans are Argentina's leading export; the country provides close to half the world's supply of soybean oil and soy meal production. In order to meet demand, multinationals like Monsanto use highly aggressive methods to maximize profit and soy cultivation, planting transgenic seeds, spraying their crops with tons of pesticides, and forcing local populations to abandon their family farms for the big city.

**PB:** You seem to have tracked the detrimental impact of agribusiness at various levels, speaking with local farmers who have been put out of business, native peoples who can no longer grow food for themselves, doctors who have seen a massive rise in both cancer patients and children born with birth defects.

**Solanas:** Not only that the schoolteachers and parents whose villages have been ravaged by the constant spraying of herbicides like glyphosate have regrouped to make a fresh attack on the Govt.!

**PB:** The documentary seems to have maintained a tone of anger and exasperation at your country's failure to quell what basically amounts to a wide-scale poisoning of its people. You jump from location to location to interview as many victims and experts as possible.

**Solanas:** I have even inserted my-self into the action, getting a blood test that reveals he has abnormally high levels of a toxin used to fumigate crops. But his problems seem minor compared to the scores of malformed babies we see in one harrowing sequence set in a maternity ward, or to those of an indigenous family living like vagrants on what used to be fertile land.



**PB:** This is not the first documentary to deal with the evils of agribusiness—*Food, Inc.*, *The World According to Monsanto* and *Our Daily Bread* are all good examples—but in terms of showing how a single nation has suffered under widespread farming techniques imposed by foreign corporations, *Journey* is a necessary addition to the canon.

**Solanas:** I have not spared efforts to bring into open space where the people are the masters of saying the last word.

**PB:** In the film *Cloud*, we have seen 1600 days of rains impacting Argentina with all cars moving back, a continuous image of protest. It was shown at IFFI, New Delhi in 1998.

**Solanas:** The film was made with an idea of fantasy that showcased the absolute frailty of the ruling regime of Argentina. It received huge applause from Venice.

**PB:** How you think of images in your cinema? Many a time mysterious silence your films do carry makes us a magnetic object; we feel pulled to your dialectic of poetry!

**Solanas:** Images are essential ingredient in my dialectical films or documentaries. Images as employed in my films, films of protest, are structured to make them more realistic, sensitive, and meaningful; they offer stronger edges to my contemplative and innovative films. If you feel, my films pull you to the centre of intention and objectivity, it means the films possess components to provoke you and engage you on the terms I seem to have harnessed in the films. Poetry may also be used dialectically and my film *Tango: Gardel's Music* is one such film that juxtaposes and unifies both on equal measure. It is a difficult task, but I am not afraid of jelling both, mixing both artistically.

**PB:** Do you believe that there is a time lapse in cinema? Many major directors like to target time lapse in their films in order to make it more meaningful!

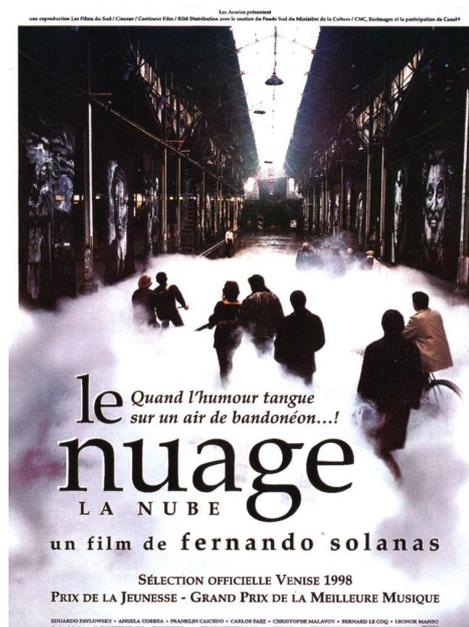
**Solanas:** It needs how you conceive camera position to join images to be effective. Operating the camera along with Nicolas F. Sulcic, we have shot things fast and efficiently, showing little concern for giving you pretty pictures, some footage looked blurred in places; lots of images are de-saturated. Cutting by five credited editors piece dozens of people and places together in a short time span, mak-

ing for a dizzying effect that further underscores the direness of the situation.

**PB:** Are you under Govt. scanner? How do you manage to evade Govt. machination?

**Solanas:** Many times, I did it in the past and still I continue to do so without thinking of bullets of the *carabineers* as I had already received eight bullets in 1991 from the military of Peron.

**PB:** Now you seem to be busy with a video documentary that closes on decade-long presidency of Carlos Menem "*Menemato*". How do you make it an aggressive infiltration into social maladies?



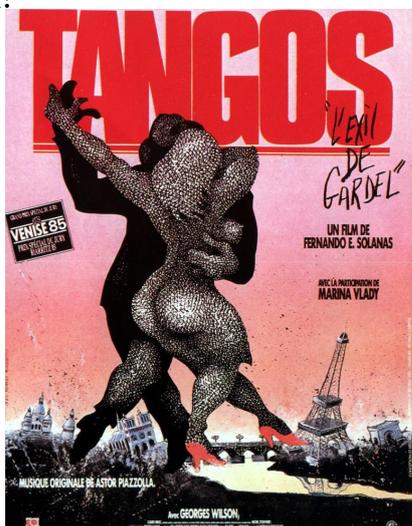
**Solanas:** Yes, I am on the mentioned project to expose Carlos Menem. It captures the aftermath of the decade-long presidency of Carlos Menem, during which colossal corrupt privatisations that crippled the nation's economy.

**PB:** Do you remember the time and year when you brought your film *Journey* to Calcutta

Film Festival during 1994?

**Solanas:** How can I forget those years when I was invited by the Left oriented Govt. of Calcutta three times? It was rare moments to face huge film lovers of the city. We had wonderful experiences of the big city marked by unity and diversity!!

**PB:** I remember how you excoriated 500 years of exploitation of Latin America in the powerful film *Journey*. You had nearly spoken for half an hour about the film and what an interpretation!



**Solanas:** Gracious, thank you so much for retrieving the golden past we spent with Mrinal Sen, my mentor, and you in Calcutta.

### *A Journey to Fumigated Towns:*

*Production company: Cinesur S.A.*

*Director, screenwriter, producer: Fernando E. Solanas*

*Executive producer: Victoria Solanas*

*Directors of photography: Nicolas F. Sulcic,*

*Fernando E. Solanas*

*Editors: Juan C. Macias, Alberto Ponce, Nicolas F. Sulcic, Fernando E. Solanas, Jose Maria del Peon*

*Composer: Mauro Lazzaro*

*Sales: Wide House*

*In Spanish*

*97 minutes*

**Fernando Ezequiel ‘Pino’ Solanas** (born 16 February 1936) is an Argentine film director, screenwriter, and politician. He is also an experienced journalist. He was also part of advertising field. During the '60s and '70s, filmmaker Fernando E. Solanas was an influential figure in the promotion of radical, Leftist Argentine cinema. Before becoming a director, Solanas was involved with theater, music, and law. In 1962, he produced and directed his first film. Solanas was at the forefront of the Grupo Cine Liberación that shook Argentine cinema in the 1970s, developing its social conscience and political voice. He was active in the campaign to support Perón, threatened by right-wing forces in the 1970s, one of his actors was assassinated and he himself was almost kidnapped. Together with Octavio Getino, Solanas wrote the manifesto “Toward a Third Cinema”. The idea of a political Third Cinema, opposed to Hollywood cinema and European auteur cinema, inspired film makers in many so-called developing countries. Solanas went into exile in Paris in 1976, only returning to Argentina with the arrival of democracy in 1983. He continued to make political films and was an outspoken critic of Carlos Menem, the Argentine President. His films include *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces) (1968), *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel* (1985), *Sur* (1988), *El viaje* (1992), *La nube* (1998) and *Memoria del saqueo* (2004), among many others. Since 2013, he has been a National Senator representing the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

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*Mr. Pradip Biswas is a Film Critic and Author based in Kolkata.*