Anarchy in the Republic of the Philippines

Non-Hierarchical Activism in the Archipelago

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Contents

A Spark of the Lamp

This publication is a product of a collaborative effort of various individuals and collectives involved in different activities such as community-based workshops, roundtable-discussions, fora, publications, graffiti, pickets, gigs, and other solidarity actions and campaigns. They are those who you can classify (loosely) as anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and autonomous activists.

Though united through common grounds in various issues, these activists have no single ideological line, much less a program or strategy. The unifying theme for them would be the primacy of engaging in direct action to resolve problems, as well as a common distrust of the state, and a shared pessimism of rigid organizational structures. Activities of these groups are being carried out based on non-hierarchical, non-statist values.

As its initiative, the editors aim that this collection of readings would be a contribution to establish venues and deepen our understanding and appreciation of mutual cooperation and to promote direct participation of communities in decision-making based on horizontalism, and life-style consistent to ecology.

The analysis below is a historical re-reading of the archipelago based on a non-hierarchical and non-statist lens. It is an attempt of the editors to see a shared perspective in history.

Nostalgia

There is evidence that anarchism was already present in the Archipelago long ago. Primitive communities from coastal to upland flourished and utilized an autonomous and decentralized political system that facilitated pro liferation of highly diverse cultures and life-styles.

Primitive social organizations continuously evolved until social stratifications were formed and became institutions. The archipelago had different tribes; they had their own self-identity, and culture and had various socio political organizations. From a simple temporal leadership to Barangganic (an autonomous political unit com monly considered as the earliest form of government). Barangganic was the political structure encountered by the Spaniards when they came to colonize the islands.

Our ancestors did engage in local warfare and hostilities, but not to dominate. They conducted raids, ambushes and conventional warfare but not to establish central power to rule the archipelago in uniformity. Their conflict was due to unsettled debt, revenge, and unresolved territorial disputes.

The Spanish factor

The Spanish forces were defeated by Lapu-Lapu and his warriors in a low-tide battle in Mactan. Lapu-Lapu's victory proved to be temporary because after a series of Spanish expeditions, Luzon, Visayas and many parts of Mindanao were captured and coerced to recognize the colonial centralized system. After which, spontaneous and autonomous resistance ensued which were staged by various tribes from the island groups of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao; it plagued the 300 years of Spanish occupation. Small victories were achieved like those of Tamblot (Bohol), Bancao (Leyte), Sumoroy (Samar), Tapar (Iloilo), Witch (Mangungutud or Mangkukulam) in Gapan (Nueva Ecija). Malong in Pangasinan, Pedro Gumapos (Vigan), Diego and Gabriela Silang (Vigan) Man daya, Basi Revolt (Ilocos), Davao (Caraga, Mindanao) and many more but were quickly subdued.

The incident on the 20th of February 1872 is one of the earliest instances of direct actions in the archipelago. Seven Spanish officers were killed in a mutiny in Cavite Naval Shipyards. It was outrightly stopped and the Spanish authorities ordered the arrest of creoles, mestizos, secular priests, merchants, lawyers and even members of colonial administration.

[Philippine Left]

The National Democratic Front (NDF) became the most influential bloc within the Philippine Left during the Marcos years. It was directly influenced by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), reinforced by its growing armed group (the New People's Army) that was able to form battalions in many strategic regions in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The radicalism displayed by the organizations initiated by the CPP attracted many sectors, primarily the youth.

However, at the eve of Marcos' ouster, the CPP-NPA-NDF and its allied mass organizations, whose primary means of grabbing political power is through armed struggle, was pushed aside by the popular bloodless uprising that was successfully led by the elite opposition that installed the Aquino government.

During the early 90's, the debate within the movement manifested, initially started as a question of tactics, and later developed into fundamental differences in revolutionary theory and strategy. In the mid-90's, the fragmentation of the biggest leftist political bloc commenced and later on turned into open conflict, in the underground party, the armed group, and the mass organizations.

Various strains of leftist political blocs that claim as more authentically Marxist formed after the so-called great debate. Most of them thrived in NGOs and civil society, some organized their own mass organizations, parties and armed groups. The most influential within the authoritarian left is the RA or "Reaffirmist" bloc, the mother organization that retained the name of the CPP and still maintains the largest resources, including the most active armed component until today.

Now, the fragmented left still poke at each other with their usual polemics, and occasional attacks at each other, even violent at times. But the one thing that makes critical activists (including the anarchists) shudder is their recent obsession to electoral politics, justified as a tactic. All of the mainstream left groups are now involved in the party-list, and now they're running tactical alliances with capitalist and elite parties.

Thinking beyond the Left-Right divide

As anarchists, we are radical ecologists — we don't just see human issues as the sole concern. We see the survival of the natural world as necessary to human existence. During primitive times, the natural world was in harmony with human communities. One could argue about the factor of population — the smaller the number the lesser the impact to environment. Or one could suggest that primitive technology was so limited to massively exploit resources and so on.

But one could also assert that intention is more influential to users of the natural habitat. If one's desire is to maintain and sustain the socio-cultural needs of a community, there's no need to over-exploit its resources where they derive their means to survive. If one's intention is to get incentive/profit is another thing. Mainstream economy is designed to achieve growth in an infinite basis through further increasing production and sales.

The very source of raw materials for production is the natural world. These "resources" are finite. The economy that encourages activities that seek to extract massive incentives would only lead to massive exploitation of natural resources and consequentially, human labor (mental & physical). This would mean poverty for many of those who have no control of the means of production, and access to natural resources which are being declared as private property by those in power.

Knowing the potential of humans, a few primitive people armed only with stones and sticks have the ability to wipe out a herd of hoofed mammals. Since they hunt not to acquire wealth and property but to provide needs of their communities, they will take only what they need. A small population alone therefore could not ensure sustainable use of natural resources.

Deriving wisdom from the autonomous politics and non hierarchical social relations of our primitive communities is a process of recreating our future social relationships. The several political exercises in EDSA (as claimed by many as revolutionary acts) proved nothing in terms of addressing critical issues such as poverty, political marginalization, slavery, and resource degradation.

The experience of the authoritarian left in Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Cuba, Russia, Germany, North Korea and other socialist states proved that centralization of power gave privilege to the few who has access to power.

Human beings are just part of the infinitely diverse global ecosystem; we are not above it. Creating a system that is advantageous only to a single stakeholder will only end up coercing, exploiting and extinguishing myriad organisms that essentially occupy space in a whole circle of global ecology.

Green and Black as the New Red

Anarchy is not a rigid ideology, but a social process that is participated directly by the community it would claim to have an influence. This conscious effort against hierarchy and the profit motive will lead to establishment of systems that are designed to accommodate highly diverse interests, views, conceptions and identity in a horizontal manner. It will seek to establish systems for mutual cooperation to facilitate voluntary process of production and collective and direct community management of the natural world, acknowledged as limited resources.

Anarchy is about establishing non-hierarchical social order that is free from poverty, coercion, slavery, patriarchy and lifestyles consistent to ecological systems. An aspiration that is based on our experience and concrete practices of many communities, past and present.

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