

Celebrating Independence Day Anew as Anarchists and Libertarians

The 12th of June and A New Independence

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Contents

The Definition of Independence 3
An Indictment of the Status Quo 4
Liberating from the Yoke of Domination 5
A New Declaration of Independence 5

On the 12th of June, the Philippine Republic will celebrate Independence Day, on the day Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista declared the existence of a free and independent “Republic Filipina” against the colonial government of the Spanish East Indies in the town of Kawit, Cavite in 1898. Myth and legend has surrounded those events, such as the idea that Aguinaldo read the actual declaration on the balcony of his own house, both patently untrue.

However, these stories still circulate, largely because of the prestige and power June 12 holds in the history and consciousness of the people of the Philippines.

Of course, history isn’t as simple though. Looking into Independence Day, one can see how this fact inculcated through years of education and myth-making can easily fall through with the smallest amount of research. Independence hasn’t always been celebrated on June 12 for example. Before Macapagal became president, it was celebrated on July 4, to commemorate the end of the Commonwealth in 1946.

He meant to signify it to highlight the pinnacle of Philippine independence exemplifying the nation’s role in the “first successful national revolution in Asia since the coming of the West, and the Republic to which it gave birth was the first democratic Republic outside of the Western hemisphere.”

Yet a deeper look only presents more questions than answers. If symbolism of the quest for freedom and self-governance is truly the aim of an Independence Day, why shouldn’t the Cry of Balintawak or Pamintan count, since both could be argued to be the first expression of separation during the Katipunan revolts?

Can independence truly be recognized if there were still areas of the country under foreign control? Wouldn’t July 4 be more appropriate, no matter how colonial, since the Republic exercising independence failed and fell during Aguinaldo’s capture at Palanan in 1901? Even so, if the US government continued to impose economic and military influence into the Third Republic and today, can that be truly considered independence?

And this line of questioning can be extended further! Because in many ways, it feels like our independence is constantly under threat, and this isn’t just in terms of nation-states and governments, but our independence as people, having the ability to operate freely, associate with one another, express and actualize our views and beliefs.

Anyone not living under a rock can see that in a climate of increased repression against dissenters, especially in a situation where many dispossessed are having difficulty trying to make ends meet, if not survive, it would be difficult to say we are “free” or “independent”. It’s easy to say that it has lost all meaning, but if so, what does it really mean? And how can we make sure that we can defend it from threats to its existence, and in extension, ours?

The Definition of Independence

Independence is very simple to dissect. It is the state of non-dependence on another entity, having the powers to govern itself and choose its own destiny through their actions. The main connotation of is used to describe territories that gained sovereignty over the land and the people from another entity through war or peace, an example of which is the Philippines.

Another way to use independence is for people, usually in the sense that they are not reliant on another person for their finances or decision-making, and are as such largely free to do as they please with their lives and bodies. The opposite of this kind of independence are children who are under their parent’s or guardian’s care or someone that has “utang na loob” to someone (usually a family member or some other patron.)

In the Philippine languages, “independence” comes in different forms, from panagwaywayas in Ilokano, kati-mawan in Kapampangan, *katimawaan* in Hiligaynon, kasarinlan in Tagalog, kagawasan in Cebuano to name a few, and various localizations of the Spanish “independencia” the political concept. Native translations evoke the sense of outwardness (the “gawas” in kagawasan), the realization of the “self” (“sarili” in kasarinlan), or simply political liberty (“wayawaya”, free in panagwaywayas, or timawa, a pre-colonial freedman status found across the Philippines.)

This configures well with the idea of autonomy in its most personal sense; “auto” meaning self and “nomos” meaning system of laws and customs, to literally mean the condition of creating rules without any outward coercion, but only for the self. While many people in the Philippines would probably know autonomy in its use for decentralized government like in the Bangsamoro, autonomy and autonomism is a concept that has pervaded libertarian socialist and anarchist thought.

Alfredo Bonnano defines workers' autonomy as a result of the struggle for each worker's personal interests through not only a "change in the ownership of the means of production" but a change in how people relate to each other socially and economically, rejecting bureaucracy in the very core of organization. Besides, how can we build a future without oppression, if the organizations that represent ourselves easily replicate the power structures that we aim to abolish? Why not build spaces that reflect the urgency of our needs in a way that respects each other's struggles and actions?

If we allow ourselves to use these concepts as the basis for our understanding of freedom and autonomy, applying it onto the real world shows us a clear picture of how our independence is not only under grave threat, but also constantly violated by the systems that permeate our society.

An Indictment of the Status Quo

The most obvious would be politically. Especially under the Duterte's iron-fist, any significant anti-government sentiment immediately gets red-tagged, with a modern McCarthy following anyone online or in real life with a faceless army of keyboard warriors led by sycophantic lawyers or washed-up journalists.

With all indicators pointing Duterte's 2016 campaign took advantage of social media algorithms to sway the election, it is clear that the influence political agents have on platforms like Facebook and Twitter have turned our freethinking spaces into spectacles of shade-throwing and mudslinging, fueled by revisionism and propaganda. Coupled with impunity for journalists of various shades and perspectives, it is clear that informed and independent thought is deeply threatened.

The on-going civil conflicts enabled by local elites and national politicians alike in Mindanao and NPA-occupied areas give the police and military blanket authority to violate human rights in the guise of anti-terrorism. Not to mention quarantine protocols that to this day have much more in common with a martial law lockdown than policies meant to minimize and eliminate the threat of the virus.

As a result, intense scrutiny is placed on human rights workers, unionists, and activists, to the point that some of them end up as victims of extra-judicial killings or placed under detention for ill-defined crimes. The passage of the Anti-Terror Law in 2020 further practically institutionalized state repression and though the fight rages on in the Supreme Court, it has already been put into use against two Aeta farmers, and used as a threat by redtagger-in-chief Parlade to a journalist reporting legal proceedings.

However, that's not counting the potential financial instability that future Filipino workers have to deal with owing the billions of pesos the government owes to foreign powers, most recently China, which practically enslaves the population to the world markets. While Chinese encroachment on the fishing grounds of the people of the western seaboard, especially Zambales, Duterte continues to act non-confrontational out of "need" even as their imperialist overtures threaten the livelihood of thousands of fisherfolk, and the ecology of the West Philippine Sea.

However, the economic risks of a mismanaged pandemic and a subservient national government pale in comparison to the deterioration of economic freedom for all classes of workers. Industrial workers still have not recovered from the quarantine closures, and those who do still operate on incomplete wages. Filipino agricultural workers, already suffering from poor infrastructure and irrigation, were hardly hit by bottlenecks during the pandemic, even when demand remains practically the same. Informal sector workers, including vendors, online sellers, and distributors, whose job was to facilitate trade between the different spheres of labor had no choice but to find new avenues for their livelihoods, even if it had to contravene quarantine protocols to make the money they need for life.

Innovation and resilience may be admirable traits for us to emulate, but if *diskarte* was the only reason many had food on the table, then something's clearly wrong about how our economics operate.

Not when the wage and wealth gap continues to grow in the country. Not only is there a disparity among rich and poor regions of the country but individually, there are only 0.1% of adult Filipinos owning more than \$1 million while 86.6% of adults have less than 86.6% in 2017 (and surely has increased during the pandemic). Not only is taxation in the Philippines a farce, (what with the unequal payment and the corruption of public funds) but could very well be a scam, seeing how little actually goes to benefiting stakeholders in the fields of health, education, and social services. Meanwhile, the witch hunts and massacres get funded by the millions and billions.

The richer get richer, the poorer get poorer. There is no independence for either exploiter or coerced, for the powerful depend on the powerless to fund their campaigns and luxuries; the dispossessed depend on the haves to exercise the choices and the value they deserve, monitored by bosses and cops, threatened with lay-offs and guns.

Liberating from the Yoke of Domination

It's clear as day that this society is anything but free, and the dispossessed especially are anything but independent. Many people are already keenly and sorely aware of this fact, though the alternatives to the current system are few and far between to find. Within the current statist framework, the only recourse many people have is simply voting for another political party. While different figures seem like breaths of fresh air, nothing really changes overall; just a couple policies and PR tactics. Plus, with the culture of turncoatism (read: a lack of political morals), cliques just play musical chairs over seats in Congress or the Palace in Malacañang.

Even radical and outright revolutionary avenues for change can replicate the problems that cause the structural problems that exist in our society today. Constitutional reform advocates calling for a federal parliamentary republic, though diagnosing the issue of over-centralization and collusion between business and government today, support the repressive institutions and actions of the Duterte presidency and the Philippine state in the same breath.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the larger segment of the Philippine Left, while having a deep understanding of the conditions that govern the dispossessed of the country, tacitly and sometimes openly provide support to key political figures and parties only to be dismayed half an election cycle later. The CPP-NPA, as much an indicator of continuing inequality in rural areas, cannot be excused for even mere allegations of eliminating political rivals, much less outright killings such as what happened to Kieth and Nolvin Absalon.

The key thread that binds all these disparate currents for change together is its reliance of *domination*. Domination means an unequal relationship, in terms of power and in terms of freedom; where one makes the rules, and one obeys. Society under these futures still relies on the unequal power of one class to enforce their will over another. No matter how federal or spend-happy a government is, at the end of the day, they will still pass their laws; use the police and military to secure it, all for the benefit of the class currently in power. Even if we move past the gatekeeping of capitalists and nationalize production, a socialist state is no less as dangerous to the rights of individual workers who refuse to toe the party line.

The same goes for social and cultural domination. The struggles of queer folk, BIPOC, children, women, and disabled continue to exist because of the same attitudes that cause political repression, and exploitation under capitalism. Independence does not exist in a vacuum, and does not simply apply to just one aspect of life, but to every facet of our humanity. Unless this domination is over come, where a class can just simply carry out its interests with minimal to no input from everyone else involved, independence is not an event cemented in the past, though perhaps something over the horizon.

A New Declaration of Independence

In the course of human events however, it is necessary for all of us to form bonds with many different people, whom we are equal in station and condition. Many of our friends, co-workers, neighbors, loved ones, and even sympathetic acquaintances and strangers face the same struggles that we have. Many are silenced, whether within social circles or on the national stage, for simply expressing their truths. The challenges they face, whether in the family, community, workplace, or in the national scale, cannot be denied or ignored, but can easily be resolved if the motives for unequal profit and power are eliminated.

Livelihoods that many people barely make do with can be resolved through the co-operation of laborers within the same trades or same working spaces. The people who know the craft and the environment know the best way to create better working conditions, provide higher wages, and give greater representation and control over the work they do. In the same way, different communities connected by shared local issues can easily decide how best to build infrastructure based on the needs of their area, whether in infrastructure, or utilities, or education and public

services like health and environment. This holds true especially for indigenous peoples who have been stewards of their ancestral lands for centuries and millennia.

Meanwhile, in relationships among different individuals, instead of fostering a culture of intolerance and hatred based on socially constructed barriers like gender, race, and ability to “work,” people treat each other with respect and understanding. Different groups of people connect and associate with each other freely to discuss the struggles they face and act on it according to its necessity and severity. Instead of constant competition in a rat race to who earns the most money or owns the most houses and businesses, it is instead a revolutionary love given out and taken according to need and want. An independence decided by the autonomy of individual decisions and the uncoerced consent of everyone with stake in such affairs.

Every stage in human history, the popular rejection of these oppressions has manifested itself in different ways: civil disobedience, non-violent resistance, armed self-defense, insurrections, and revolutions. It is our right to exercise our freedom, and like other free and independent peoples and movements, whether it is through building institutions to counter the state and capital, or simply having the backs of those in the spaces we occupy and the relationships we build in our lives.

Independence is not some lofty ideal to be carried by those who claim to represent the people on the vague notions of nations and races. It is the reason why we wake up and fight every day, to advance and secure our lives, our fortunes, and our honor as individuals and as a people brought together by mutual care and assistance.

For further reading on power, authority, and domination: *Towards An Anarchist Theory of Power* by Felipe Correa and *Power, Authority and Domination* by Amedeo Bertoleo.

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