

# **Anarchism in the Philippines**

Mindsetbreaker Press

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## **Comrades from the far east on the burgeoning anarchist scene there**

Much is made of the historical connections between anarchism and the Philippines. Not least from the formidable work of Benedict Anderson and his book *Under Three Flags* which documents the relationship between anarchism and anti-colonialism filtered through the life and works of Jose Rizal, one of the leading figures in the Filipino independence struggle in what Anderson describes as “that dense intertwining of anarchist internationalism and radical anti-colonialism”.

The political activist and novelist José Rizal, who was executed in 1896 by the Spanish authorities in the Philippines at the age of 35, along with his contemporary, the pioneering folklorist, labour activist and writer Isabelo de los Reyes were a major influence on anarchist ideas being brought to the islands.

De los Reyes was imprisoned in Manila after the violent uprisings of 1896 and later deported to Spain where he was incarcerated, together with Catalan anarchists, in the infamous Montjuic Castle prison in Barcelona. It was there de los Reyes met and befriended the anarchist Ramon Sempau. On his return to Manila in 1901, now under US occupation, he brought with him books by Proudhon, Marx, Kropotkin, and Malatesta. Shortly after, he organised print workers and successfully held strikes, imbuing them with anarcho-syndicalist ideas that led to the creation of the Union Obrera Democrática (UOD) in 1902. It was the first modern trade union federation in the country and its founding congress adopted the principles of two books – *Life and Works of Karl Marx* and *Among Farmers* by Errico Malatesta, as the political foundation of the movement. At its peak in 1903 the organisation counted with 150 affiliated unions, with around 150,000 members in eight provinces of Luzon. After the UOD staged a massive demonstration, the civil governor put them under police surveillance, branding them as “radicals, subversives and anarchists”.

Since the publication of *Under Three Flags* in 2005 the Philippines has seen an upsurge in anarchist activities. There are groups such as the *As A Whole* collective, anarchists and artists who run an infoshop in Davao City, Mindanao and activities involve holding rallies against corporate exploitation and were part of a successful activist campaign that resulted in a complete ban of aerial pesticide spraying on banana plantations. The group also established a space called *Saydee's Kitchen*, from which they are offering free meals twice a week, feeding up to 100 youth and elderly.

But the latest anarchist project *Mindsetbreaker Press and Distribution* who an underground anarchist publishing and distribution entity based in the Philippines and are looking for support and solidarity in their endeavours. We'll let the *Mindsetbreaker Press* comrades tell you about themselves:

### **Project description**

*Mindsetbreaker Press* operationally started in early 2010 as an individual project that focuses mainly on translating anarchist literature (English text) into local languages that will be more applicable and relevant to the rather complex scenario of political, social and economic currents of the Philippines. As time goes on, the press eventually grew in number after establishing personal collaboration with some friends involved in the anarchist social network and activism. The press is now run by four people specifically working on publishing and distribution campaign besides other existing projects being carried out by members.

Current members of the project were involved in different projects before and presently, individually and collectively. Some run social centre or infoshops, make zine and alternative publications, organizing issue-base radical events and shows, protest and demonstrations, leafleting for campaigns, opening free shop and free food on the streets, forums, networking and hosting informational sites, working with communities (farmers, fisher folks and indigenous people) fight capitalist and state development intrusion (Mining, Freeport, Agribusiness, etc.). These actions had been carried out independent from state intervention, businesses, mainstream media, NGO's and religious institutions.

## Taking a glimpse

Since the country was colonized by western interests; for example 300 years of Spanish occupation, Japan invasion for a while and later American influence, arguably, it might be simple enough to understand as to why the archipelago had ultimately endure such complication that result indifferences of perspectives, priorities and interests among its own population. Moreover, it is a very poor country chained in debt; persuaded within the mockery of mere survival. Poverty rate, famine and corruption are visibly high. Likewise, conservatism and religious influence (i.e. Catholicism) is not so new. So everyday repression by the state (Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police) is rampant targeting petty crimes, outcasts and insurgents in the guise like ; covering terrorism images on the media or straightforwardly branding innocent people to be involved in an armed-party guerrilla groups (Maoist-left) to justify legal murder. In general, some may have seen it as an unprecedented effect due to economic constraints being pushed around and realistically being felt everyday that leads to further injustice and abuse unbearable.

## Aims and goals

The aim of the project is to provide radical ideas on the streets and universities particularly counter- informational and alternative awareness that we feel rich in diversity and open for arguments/discourse whilst give coherence to the practical situation of the locality and time. This comes in paper form through republishing the works of various radical authors we choose to and later hand it out to people in massive amount. Furthermore, the main important goal of the project besides re-publishing the works of various authors; is to support local anarchist writers (individual and collective) who are struggling to circulate their works to different sectors in society;(i.e. students, farmers, indigenous people, fisher folks, vendors, workers (employed or unemployed), squatters, women and men, gays, lesbian,, youth, etc); not limited only to subculture and scenes. Other than that, we pick up few titles written by local comrades we knew and one local writer is currently involved on the project. We hope to establish venues and deepen our understanding about anarchist ideas; hopes, dreams and its practicality not remote only to several people, individual and groups but different sectors of society currently struggling everyday living. This includes us, ourselves not above anyone else.

Few of the local titles cover history and politics about the Philippines base on contemporary anarchist perspectives.

By distributing large amount of anarchist literature on the streets and universities on regular basis is seen as first time in history in the Philippines since obtaining money for print-out is sometimes difficult. Anti-authoritarian ideas never reaches many people of different sectors who are working hard everyday .Basic needs like food on the table are oftentimes the utmost concern for everyone. The present economy will never be useful only usher death and destruction. Every valuable resource that provides life is plundered; monopolized by capital through trade agreements.

## Current activities

After republishing the English version of What is Anarchist Communism, our plan is to circulate the paper to several universities throughout Manila. These are four different universities such as Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP), University of the Philippines (UP) and other progressive schools like Ateneo de Manila and Technological University of the Philippines (TUP). PUP and UP are quiet better known for many years as to having authoritarian leftist concentration; organising to manufacture students into blind submission and authoritarian ideology (Marxist and Maoist). This is always dangerous and absurd aiming to overthrow the existing state to grab power in the guise of proletarian management, sovereignty and nationalism to rule people.

“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”- Gasera Journal

We tend to hand out 1000 copies of published material each university in the hope for students to self-organize themselves and take action against all forms of authority; most especially freshman youth and secondary years were authoritarian left organisers masked in disguised in order to capture their mind. We also hear that there are some organizers enrolled there not by studying but organizing students into such ideological lines.

In addition, we'd begun translating the Alexander Berkman into Tagalog. This is the usual language in the archipelago where many people could able to understand or speak. The tagalog version of Berkman are intended for people who are not comfortable with English most especially large sectors of society mostly the poor and marginalize class..

Next, besides re-publishing foreign literatures, we are very motivated to produce our own local materials and support local writers' base on personal consent before carrying out their works under our project, as an underground anarchist publishing and distribution entity. There are 7 titles finally approved after meeting with people and local writers we knew, one is actually now a member of the project and is a regular voluntary writer.

The few titles being approved includes Gasera Journal (collection of local anarchist writings about history and politics in the Philippines, Indokumentado #1(autonomous ideas, experiences, activism and movement in the archipelago) Anarki: Akin ang buhay ko, Sosyal si Simo at si Sima(anarcho-syndicalist perspective) , Archipelagic Confederation : Alternative political structure beyond representation and state politics, Punkista zine (punk subculture and political) and Mindsetbreaker zine(documentation of different social and ecological struggles, campaigns and actions in the Philippines). Other than that, we will do info tour in different schools along with the titles we carry as the main topic aim to open up discussions and discourses.

As a publishing and distribution entity, we mobilize and publicize literatures through organizing forums and discourses about every topic we carry like history, politics, and anarchism etc. initially aimed at schools. Creating awareness events and literature tables.

We want the project to become long term as possible that will be more specific on publishing and distribution campaign. There is other related stuff we want to work on besides publishing the entire Berkman book like doing info tour in different universities along with the literatures we carry as main topic to discuss about, most especially local writings; essays and articles. Besides, we want to encourage local writers to keep doing what they are doing, even most people sometimes entrapped with the bitterness of time available due to economic conditions.

As an underground press, we are here to openly reach different people and stand our ground not only limited to subculture and scenes. And ultimately become a worthwhile initiative to keep projects running and contribute services to other people, so they can start one; themselves. This might reflect not only limited to ideas but action and building solidarity.

We believe that every issue that affect our lives are interconnected; be it social or ecological catastrophes we have seen today, small scale or large, society or individual. It does not come from us but manifests through domineering hierarchical structures and centralized order; maintained by the state and religion, morality; the spectre of capitalism aimed towards greed and profit and was organized founded and carried out from the ashes of ruthless terror and bloodshed many centuries had passed by that we blindly inherited today.

We believe no borders and wilfully continue fighting against it until it's destruction alongside with sexism, homophobia, racism and other forms of oppression that was created and needs to be challenged. This might come outside our inner conventional wants and desires that we are dealing with everyday to cope up with our ability to interact within society or the question on how we are brought to; by combating such convention inside ourselves.

Mindsetbreaker Press and Distribution  
Email: [mindsetbreakerpress@riseup.net](mailto:mindsetbreakerpress@riseup.net)  
Address: 157 Ilaya E.Mendoza St.  
Buting Pasig City  
Philippines 1600  
[mindsetbreakerpress.blogspot.it](http://mindsetbreakerpress.blogspot.it)

For more information on Saydee's Kitchen initiative: [saydeeskitchen.webs.com](http://saydeeskitchen.webs.com)

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