

RESOLUTELY ADVANCE THE POLITICS OF CHANGE!

Thirty years ago, the military assassinated Macliing Dulag for his leading role in the Kalinga and Bontok peoples' resistance to the Marcos dictatorship's Chico dams project. Obviously, Macliing's martyrdom neither thwarted nor weakened the resistance for it prevailed. The dams were never built, and today, the mighty Chico river continues to flow freely.

At the same time that the Kalinga and Bontok peoples were resisting the construction of the Chico dams, the Tinggian people were engaged in a fierce fight against the Cellophil Resources Corporation, a paper pulp-producing company set up by Marcos crony Herminio Disini. The Tinggian saved 200,000 hectares of pine forest within Abra and along this province's borders with Apayao, Kalinga and the Mountain Province.

Not long after the Marcos dictatorship was ousted, the Ibaloy and Kankanaey peoples of Itogon saved their communities from eviction by Benguet Corporation, which had planned to develop a network of mechanized open-pit and underground bulk mines in seven of their municipality's nine barangays. Barricading the mining locations against the entry of BenguetCorp's men and equipment for as long as three years, the Ibaloy and Kankanaey of Itogon forced the company to limit its operations to one small open pit in Antamok and another similarly sized underground bulk mine in Sangilo

These three historical struggles clearly demonstrate the Cordillera peoples' capacity to assert their rights to ancestral domain and self-determination in the face of state and capitalist power. They were an exercise of people's political power. It is on struggles such as these that our current efforts to advance the politics of change should be founded. The gains and lessons drawn from them must be reaffirmed especially in light of current challenges to our survival. The lessons must guide us in holding high the banner of our political struggle for national democracy and the self-determination of indigenous peoples.

On this 26th Cordillera Day celebration, we reaffirm our commitment to advance the politics of change not only in relation to the nearing elections but towards achieving our freedom from oppression and exploitation.

The Politics of Change

The politics of change is a rejection of the corrupt and rotten political system that dominates Philippine society. Rather than serve the interests of the elite, it serves the majority – the peasants and workers, the rural and urban poor. It promotes the rights of historically marginalized sectors – including indigenous peoples, women, and youth.

The politics of change responds to the problems that beset the public and offers solutions to these.

The politics of change asserts the right of the Filipino people to national sovereignty and patrimony, and that of indigenous peoples to self-determination and ancestral domain. The politics of change empowers the people for the assertion of their basic human rights, and the attainment of a just and lasting peace.

The politics of change works for a progressive, self-reliant economy in contrast to the prevailing export-oriented, import-dependent economic regime. It advocates the defense and nurturance of the environment and natural resources as opposed to the current policy of untrammled industrial extraction and unsustainable capitalist production that bleeds the lands of indigenous peoples dry. The profit-driven capitalist system backed by state laws and policies are the main culprits in the current environmental crisis, which aggravates tenfold the conditions faced by indigenous peoples.

Advancing the Politics of Change to Assert People's Rights

Advancing the politics of change is struggling for just laws and policies on land and other resources.

The Cordillera region is richly endowed with natural resources, but the harnessing of these resources is currently being undertaken neither by its indigenous peoples nor for their benefit. Foreign and local capitalists are plundering indigenous peoples' ancestral lands through large mining and power generation. At present, mining applications cover some 66% of the region's 1.8 million hectares. This is on top of the existing operations of the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company and the Philex Mining Corporation in Benguet. The mining and power corporations have consistently violated the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), but communities have also been able to put up a good fight in Bokod, Benguet; Baay-Licuan, Abra; Balbalan, Kalinga; and Conner, Apayao.

Historically, capitalists and the state have treated the Cordillera region as a resource base. The colonial state and the present one have enforced unjust land laws, implemented unsound policies and imposed destructive projects in large mining, logging and power generation. To suppress community resistance to these, the present state has employed massive militarization and terrorism, resulting in innumerable human rights violations.

The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) has done more harm than good, placing the fate of peoples and persons, territories and properties in the hands of the officers of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) who are incompetent or insensitive, or downright immoral. They have maneuvered around the IPRA's FPIC requirements, degraded traditional institutions of land ownership and natural resource management, undermined traditional structures of leadership and decision-making, and destroyed the unity of families and communities in order to advance the development agenda of the Arroyo government as well as fill their own pockets.

The IPRA and its implementation must be subjected to review by Congress. The IPRA must be amended to prevent abuse of authority by officers of the NCIP. NCIP officers who have wreaked havoc on the lives of indigenous peoples must be brought to justice; at the minimum, they should be charged before the Ombudsman. At the minimum, international standards set by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples must be complied with.

Advancing the politics of change is struggling for life and justice.

Under Arroyo, 1,188 extrajudicial killings and 205 enforced disappearances took place nationwide, from 2001 to 2009, in connection with Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL). OBL is a military campaign to defeat the "local communist movement" and dismantle its "political infrastructure" through the "neutralization" of its leaders and organizers. One of the priority sectors it aims to "clean up" is indigenous peoples.

OBL targets innocent civilians instead of the armed combatants of the revolutionary movement. It has resulted in extra-judicial killings and summary executions, enforced disappearance, the dismemberment of families and general social disturbance throughout the Cordillera, but especially in Kalinga, Abra, the Mountain Province and the two latter provinces' boundaries with Ilocos Sur.

It has taken from us some of our best leaders, spokesmen, writers, and organizers – Pepe Manegdeg, Albert Terredaño and Rafael Markus Bangit, who were all killed extrajudicially; Dr. Chandu Claver, who was forced into exile with the slaying of his wife, Alyce, and subsequent threats to the lives of his children; James Balao, who remains *desaparecido*.

The region remains heavily saturated with military troops – Kalinga and Apayao by the 501st Infantry Brigade, which commands the 21st and 77th Infantry Battalions; the Mountain Province, Ifugao and parts of Benguet by the 502nd, which commands the 45th and 54th Battalions. Town centers, such as Tabuk, Kalinga, are militarized as well as remote villages. Militarization incorporates troop encampment in

residential areas and deployment to houses; vilification of the organizations in which the villagers are members; recruitment of villagers to paramilitary units, often under duress; indiscriminate firing and bombing, and the destruction of economic resources as a result of these.

The military's own documents are clear about the aims of OBL. These include securing the economic interests of the ruling classes especially in mining.

We must face the continued implementation of Oplan Bantay Laya with courage as its deadline for wiping out the revolutionary movement draws near, and the military becomes frantic, more aggressive and more brutal. That deadline coincides with the end of Arroyo's term as President in June 2010.

Advancing the politics of change is struggling for survival.

In Mankayan, Benguet, the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company continues to deny mineworkers economic relief and just wages. Invoking the world financial crisis, Lepanto has adopted a rotation scheme which limits work to only a certain number of days per month. And claiming to have suffered losses, the company has refused to adhere to its Collective Bargaining Agreement with LEU-NAFLU-KMU, the Lepanto Employees Union. It gives the workers partial wages of P4,500 per month when these should be P15,000 per month. The cost of living in the region is P530 per day for a family of six. On top of these, Lepanto has failed to remit the workers' Social Security System and Pag-Ibig fund payments, now amounting to P87 million since April 2007. Many of the workers have not been able to send their children to school since last year.

In the regional urban center of Baguio City, the daily minimum wage is a far cry from the daily cost of living. It is pegged at P235 for the non-agricultural and P222 for the agricultural sectors.

It is from this situation of unbearable economic hardship and political oppression that the Cordillera indigenous peoples must further close ranks to assert their rights and advance the politics of change.

Advancing the Politics of Change in the Elections

It is out of the indigenous peoples' social movement that KATRIBU Partylist has been born. While congressional representation is not the end-all and be-all of the indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination, it is a significant arena in which we can put forward what we want to achieve with the politics of change. The birth of KATRIBU Partylist represents an advancement in the indigenous peoples' movement, and we must ensure its victory in the May 2010 polls along with the other progressive partylists we have been supporting -- Bayan Muna, Gabriela Women's Party, Kabataan, Act and, recently, Akap Bata. We must also support our progressive candidates who have a clear track record of sacrificing their personal interests to serve people and country, and who have exemplary records in the defense of human rights, good governance, transparency and credibility. Foremost among them are Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza, who are both in the senatorial race.

As we do this, we bear in mind that the prevailing elections is a game of numbers and money for the ruling few. The outcome of the election will be definitely at the mercy of big bureaucrat capitalists who have the guns, goons and gold. In the Cordillera provinces of Apayao and Abra, and in the Ilocos region, warlords hold communities in a grip of terror which tends to tighten during elections. We have witnessed how the ruling elite and traditional politicians, and even government agencies like the NCIP, bastardize and corrupt the partylist system, which is intended for marginalized sectors, by setting up their own partylists and assuming representation of the poor as partylist nominees.

We must inform the public of partylists that are posing as representatives of indigenous peoples but are merely taking advantage of the partylist system for their own personal benefit. One is A-IPRA or Agapay ng Indigenous Peoples Rights Alliance, which is clearly a creation of NCIP Commissioner Eugenio Insigne. These pseudo partylists must be exposed and disqualified.

We must also not forget that Arroyo ascended the presidency through massive cheating and electoral fraud by using the Commission on Elections and manipulating people in government posts to get rid of the evidence pointing to her accountability. Now that her term nears its end, Arroyo must not be let off easily. She and her cohorts must be punished for their crimes against the Filipino people.

Why then do we take part of the rotten Philippine elections? Because the politics of change must also take root here, so as not to be monopolized and abused by the few, ruling, traditional politicians. We must therefore understand that achieving our goals from advancing the politics of change is a protracted struggle, and not through the elections alone. Our goals shall only be completely attained when the prevailing reactionary State is changed with one that shall implement substantial democratic reforms, and pursues our national patrimony and sovereignty.

The Challenges of the May 2010 Polls

There is clear danger of electoral fraud and violence, and even failure of elections, because the Arroyo clique wishes to remain in power. Arroyo even has the temerity to file for candidacy for congressional representative in her home province of Pampanga. We must guard our votes and ballots on May 10, especially with the Automated Elections System (AES) that further complicates the elections, making it more controversial and vulnerable to fraud.

In June 2010, OBL II will end. In its desperation to attain its targets, the regime can make the remaining weeks supremely hazardous for all activists and extremely difficult for human rights defenders with heightened state terrorism. We underscore that the AFP and PNP are mandated to serve and protect the people and democratic processes, not the self-serving interests of those in Malacañang or of defense bureaucrats.

In spite of the current political situation we face, the electoral battle also presents us with opportunities to assert our people's rights. One is the promotion of a Cordillera Peoples' Agenda for self-determination, genuine democracy, and economic prosperity. The other is bringing our democratic concerns to Congress through progressive representatives.

What We Want to Achieve

What Cordillera indigenous peoples want to achieve through the politics of change is not isolated from the aspirations of the rest of the Filipino people. As Filipinos, we also suffer from imperialism, bureaucrat capitalism and feudalism, while bearing the brunt of national oppression as indigenous national minorities. We also aspire for genuine freedom and democracy, for a just and lasting peace, and for progress.

Particularly for the Cordillera indigenous peoples, we iterate that indigenous peoples rights can only be fully realized through Genuine Regional Autonomy as the appropriate form of self-determination, so that the following rights of indigenous peoples are realized: territorial integrity of the Cordillera homeland; indigenous peoples' access to, control over, and management of ancestral land and resources; respect for indigenous socio-political structures, cultures and languages; respect for traditional occupations and protection of traditional systems of production; right to FPIC regarding any and all projects or programs entering indigenous peoples' territories; provision of culturally sensitive and appropriate basic social services; respect for peace and order and de-militarization of indigenous peoples' areas.

It is only through the establishment of a truly sovereign and democratic government that these aspirations will be realized, and the rights of the Filipino people as a whole, and of indigenous peoples in particular, will finally be realized. We must carry out our tradition of defense of the ancestral domain and assertion of the right to self-determination to achieve the gains from advancing the politics of change. We must live out our militant tradition. On this 26th Cordillera Day celebration, we further firm up our resolve.

Cordillera Peoples' Alliance for the Defense of Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination, 25 April 2010