

IIRE-Manila Newsletter: October-December 2009

Tuesday 22 December 2009, by [DE JONG Alex](#), [IIRE-Manila](#), [SOLIS Richard](#) (Date first published: 20 December 2009).

**The Newsletter of the
International Institute for Research and Education-Manila, vol. 1 issue 1.**

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Finally, An IIRE in Manila!

Since 1982, the existence of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam (IIR E - Amsterdam) has been instrumental in bringing together activists from all inhabited continents for critical exchanges of thoughts and experiences in the daily struggle for emancipation of all oppressed peoples of the world. The various yearly schools, seminars and discussions organized by the institute have greatly helped in the training and broadening of perspectives of activists, especially the young

ones.

These successes of the IIRE-Amsterdam and the challenges faced by third world activists, particularly the Asian sections, greatly inspired the establishment of an IIRE in Asia, particularly in Manila. The present global economic crisis brought about by the barbaric capitalist system has caused indescribable sufferings to the peoples of the third world, since they are the most vulnerable and unsecured sections of the world against globalization. Thus, the struggle of these peoples for their basic right to live is also directly aimed at crippling the imperialists and capitalists in their respective countries.

On the other hand, the opportunities for reflection and studies in IIRE-Amsterdam for third world activists have become increasingly difficult, financially and technically. Thus, the need to open a more accessible venue for discussions to third world activists, specifically, Asia-Pacific activists, amidst the growing difficulties and challenges, reinforced the necessity of establishing a sister institute in Manila. This is also a way to strengthen the unity and solidarity of the third world activists in order to intensify the struggle for their political and social agenda and for a new internationalism in the face of the worst capitalist crisis in the century.

Now the IIRE-Manila is formally open. In this connection IIRE-Manila invite activists, militants and progressive forces to visit the IIRE-Manila and for possible joint activities and political projects aimed at strengthening solidarity in the spirit of pluralism.

The IIRE-manila building can conveniently accommodate eighteen individuals for a cheaper rate per day. The accommodation rate per day is 13 euros, but negotiable to networks of activists who has a merger budget. The proceeds of this will go to the maintenance of the institute since it is still developing its resource base. Reservations can be made by contacting us at the following: iiremanila iire.org or by calling us at (02) 434-7351.

The institute also is developing its small library at the ground floor to cater activists who would like to make researches and papers.

To further enrich its resource base, the institute is calling for donations in whatever form, like solidarity fund donations, books, publications and other useful materials.

There's A First Time for Everything

By: Alex de Jong, IIRE-Amsterdam

The IIRE-Manila recently concluded its first high-profile activity, the first Asian Global Justice School. The set-up of the school was inspired by the many successful Global Justice School held at the IIRE-Amsterdam.

The IIRE-Manila was set up to facilitate educational sessions similar to those organised by the IIRE-Amsterdam, especially for social justice activists from Asia that often have trouble obtaining visa necessary to attend the schools in Amsterdam. Another aim was to provide a perspective more centered on the Global South.

The 19-day school, which started November 9, was intended to pave the way for general discussions on emerging political and socio-economic trends in Asia. Nineteen participants, the majority of them from the Philippines, attended the school. There were also participants and lecturers from Pakistan, Japan, France, the Netherlands and Denmark. Theoretical discussions on topics like the impact of globalisation on the Global South and changing patterns on migration were combined with visits to different communities on the southern island of Mindanao.

Mindanao – most recently in the news because of the massacre of rivals of the local Ampatuan dynasty – is the poorest region of the Philippines, itself a Third World country. The island is doubly affected by outside exploitation; like other regions of the Philippines it serves as a pool of cheap labour and raw materials – but the island can also be called an internal colony of the Philippine state itself.

Although extremely rich in resources, the local population benefits little from the natural wealth of the environment.

Participants met with representatives of local organisations of peasants and fisherfolk who put in concrete terms what it means for smallscale producers to be pushed aside by capital intensive large scale production. The discussion on the democratic right to self-determination was illustrated with a visit to community of Indigenous People of the Teduray-Lambangian Tribe. Called 'Lumad' in the Philippines, the Indigenous People of Mindanao have been fighting to preserve their way of life - which for the Teduray-Lambangian includes an extremely democratic model of elected leaders and communal property of land - against the encroachment of multinationals that don't hesitate to use force to drive people away so natural resources can be exploited.

The participants also met with members of the first LGBT organisation founded on the island. LGBT's face strong prejudice and discrimination in the country as a whole. Just recently, the authority supervising the elections denied a party formed to represent the LGBT's right to participate, stating that the organisation 'promotes immorality' and is 'a danger to the youth'. Members of the Mindanaon LGBT organisation have been blamed for causing floods by their 'sins against God' and have been the victim of violence.

A common theme in the discussions was how to find ways to work for democracy and social

justice in a context of communal division. The population of Mindanao consists of Indigenous People, Christians and Muslims, groups that have often been at odds with each other. The response of the Philippine government to the demand of the deprived Muslim population for self-determination has been violence and repression. The ongoing fighting between Muslim militants and the government army has cost thousands of lives. Government repression has turned the region into an extremely militarized area and fed the tensions between the different communities. In an era of resurgent communalism and fundamentalism, it was inspiring to meet with activists working to build bridges between the communities and create a shared movement for social justice.

This being the first school organised by the IIRE-Manila and of necessity operating on a tight budget, there were also lessons to be learned by the organizers. Most importantly, the participation from other Asian countries was limited: many interested people could not participate because of time or financial restraints. This is one of the points taken up in the preparation of the second Asian Global Justice School, which is targeted to take place in August of next year.

Beside the fruitful theoretical

discussions and exchange of information, a number of concrete plans to strengthen international solidarity, both between the Global South and north as between different Asian countries also came out of the school. For the IIRE-Manila, the first Asian Global Justice School was a success, a valuable experience and undoubtedly, only the first of many more to come.

Photos:

Participants to the First Asian Global Justice School 2009 having a discussion with the Federation leaders of the Grassroots Women, Fisher folk, Peasants/farm worker Organizations in Lanao del Norte in Mindanao.

Members of the Council of Elders (Timuay) of the Teduray-Lambangian Tribe in Manguindanao during a dialogue with the participants of the First Asian Global Justice School 2009. The dialogue was held in a community in Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Martial Law is the Answer to Another Question

*"The Ampatuans
have been known
to be Arroyo's
warlords and
therefore could
not be genuinely
identified as rebels
otherwise this
move will again
end up on Arroyo's
doorsteps."*

The Quid Pro Quo

The private army and the enormous wealth of the Ampatuans have been arrogantly displayed for the entire world to see since they have had a

quid pro quo relationship with the Arroyo regime. That is the Ampatuans can have the sky as the limit for their wealth and power as long as they can help the Arroyo to stay in power.

The brigade size Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU), the more than battalion size Special Civilian Auxiliary Army (SCAA) and Civilian Volunteers Organization (CVO), were all trained by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) respectively. They are armed with weapons far sophisticated and high powered than AFP and PNP combined armaments but everybody knows even the higher ups of the trainors that these units have been treated by the Ampatuans as their private armies and personal security units whose main tasks were not only to protect the whole clan but also to secure and guard the twenty eight (28) mansions with built-in money vaults in them. These scandalously big and very expensive mansions worth billions of pesos are located throughout the country. In some of these places, they are built in the midst of peoples' shanties as if wanting to present a contrast of heaven and earth or hell depending on one's perspective.

One month ago, such situation seemed untouchable and nobody dared to even try to rock such arrangement. Everybody has known that there is a direct connection of the Ampatuans and Malacañang. The miraculous victory of Mrs Arroyo over the Muslims' idol Fernando Poe Jr in 2004 Presidential Elections providing Commission on Election Commissioner

Garcillano a secured hiding place during the Hello Garci Scandal and the mysterious 12-0 victory of Mrs Arroyo senatorial slate in the province in 2007 elections have been, too glaring to ignore such symbiotic relationship.

The November 23: Quo Vadis?

After the November 23, 2009 infamous Maguindanao Massacre where fifty seven (57) people majority of whom are journalists and lawyers and supporters of a rival clan were brutally murdered and mutilated, the picture which was painted above seemed to turn upside down.

The whole nation and the world have reacted to the gruesome and very inhuman acts of killing the 57 people on the road to file and witness a democratic exercise thru filing of Candidacy to the provincial Commission on Election (COMELEC) office. Everybody believes that act could only be done by monsters and all signs and footprints have sharply pointed to the Ampatuans.

Mrs. Arroyo and Malacañang were put on the spot. They know that they have created these monsters and their inaction (as in the past creating an atmosphere of impunity) would surely point back to their direction and the world especially the country could not forgiven them. Damage control measures like expulsion of the clan from the Ruling Party and arresting or “inviting” one of the monsters would perhaps reassures and lessens the anger of the people. Aside from reassuring the people, Malacañang would want to show that it does not tolerate such act. The main reason for the damage control measure is to buy time and lay down the foundation of creating an

impression of the distancing Mrs. Arroyo from the Ampatuans at the same time thinking of ways to save the Ampatuans and hence saving Mrs Arroyo from possible revelation of the Ampatuans' aces against her.

Martial Law a Solution to Maguindanao Massacre or an Exit Plan?

The declaration of Martial Law in Maguindanao is the best option because it will have reason to arrest and isolate the Ampatuans and to make sure that they can not speak against Arroyo. The Arroyo regime can launch search and seizure activities against the Ampatuan in the guise of looking for guns and military hardware it had provided or sold in the past but actually it is looking and securing the 2004 and 2007 electoral evidences against Arroyo and the Ruling Party.

The problem is: the constitutional justifications of Martial Law, which are invasion and rebellion, are not present in Maguindanao. Ampatuan Jr. had tried to implicate the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and nobody believed him. The Ampatuans have been known to be Arroyo's warlords and therefore could not be genuinely identified as rebels otherwise this move will again end up on Arroyo's doorsteps.

The constitution says the President has to report to a joint session of Congress 48 hours after the declaration of Martial Law. The Congress with a simple majority vote can revoke the declaration of Martial Law. Again this gives Mrs. Arroyo a breathing space - the Congress especially its lower house will unashamedly give Mrs. Arroyo their approval for Maguindanao Martial Law and then they can have their pork barrels which have been withheld up to the present.

The problem of the Arroyos' allies in the lower house is that they have to make the decision to support her which means making the unpopular position not good with

the elections of 2010 coming.

Furthermore Maguindanao is a known stronghold of the MILF and they have been waging rebellion for decades and peace talks have just restarted. This explains the words "except for some places in Maguindanao" Martial Law is effected.

And to put more salt to the wounds of the Ampatuans, the Commission on Audit (COA) has finally seen that the wealth, money in vaults, fleet of luxurious cars and more than two dozens mansions do not correspond to the income of the clan most of whom are politicians. But actually the findings will be used later against the clan if they insist on divulging what they know about Mrs. Arroyo and the Ruling Party in 2004 and 2007 elections respectively.

The November 23 and May 2010 and Beyond

Have all the above mentioned points led to the declaration of Martial Law in Maguindanao? Not so. The gruesome November 23 Massacre was a disaster waiting to happen. Mrs. Arroyo has created the monsters and the monsters have known no limit to crimes they can commit. They have been doing this kind of crime in the past and the only difference was that they were done to smaller number of people and less known entities. The disaster might be for us and maybe for the monsters but as the trend now says it can be another opportunity to answer another question for Mrs. Arroyo - her exit plan.

With Congress secured in her pockets and the Departments

of Justice, National
Defense and Interior and Local
government they can create
situation similar to November 23
event in other parts of the country.
And the Arroyo regime can
depend on people like Teddy
Locsin the divided CBCP/Church
and Bankers to justify its Martial
Law as the last resort or whatever.
And at the end of the day,
many of us have been made to
believe that she is running for
Congress in the Second District
of Pampanga. And looking into
the eyes of Secretaries Puno,
Gonzales and Devenadera one
can say that Mrs. Arroyo and
themselves have more years to
stay put in their respective positions.
Only that they are more
powerful than before.

Martial
Law in Maguindanao is indeed an
answer to another question. And
by the time many of us will know
the answer, Mrs. Arroyo changes
the question. Or lift up the Martial
Law in Maguindanao only to
declare it again in other vote-rich
province in the country. What
matters most is that it has set
the historical precedence.

*Photo: Members of the Young Advocates for Peace
and Solidarity (YAPS) in Cotabato City joined
in a vigil protest to call for Justice to the victims
of the November 23 massacre and against
the Martial Law in Maguindanao.*

By Richard Solis, IIRE-Manila, December 11, 2009

A Rare Broad Left Study-Seminar in the Philippines

Last December 1-2, 2009 a study-seminar

among the Broad Left in the Philippines was conducted at the Balay Kalinaw inside the University of the Philippine Campus. The theme of the study-seminar is "Rebuilding and Revitalizing the Philippine Left: Some Major Considerations". It made use the book of Martha Harnecker- *Rebuilding the Left*, as point of reference for the discussion which provides some degree of relevance to the current situation of the Philippine left, although some disagreed with some points in the book, while, others disagreed also to some points from the individual discussant.

The study-seminar was attended and participated by various Rejectionists and progressive groups in the Philippines, from the underground movements, legal and independent movements. Those who attended are from the Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino (PMP), Marxist Leninist Caucus (MLC), Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Mindanao (RPMM) and Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas (RPMP) dele Cruz group. Other groups such as AKBAYAN, SANLAKAS, Partido ng Manggagawa, Partido Lakas ng Masa, Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya (KPD), PADAYON, Alab Katipunan, Focus on the Global South, Freedom from Debt Coalition, UNURKA, FILDEM, IRDF, among others. Known Left personalities like Dodong and Princess Nemenso were also present during the Study-Seminar. A known figure in the international solidarity left movement from France, Pierre Rousset, was also present and was tasked for the deepening of discussions. The activity was initiated by the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) particularly through the efforts of Tina Ebro.

The forum was divided into four discussion parts with its respective discussants in connection with parts of the book of Harnecker, to wit: Part one, "The Left and the New World" with Walden Bello, Tina Ebro and Milo Tanchuling; part two, "The Crisis of the Party and Why We Need a New Left" with Prof. Ed Tadem, Ed dela Torre, Rasty Deliso and Kiko Isaac; part three, "The New Political Instrument" with Manjet Lopez, Reihana Mohideen, Ronald Llamas, Gina dela Cruz and

Gerry Pasetes; and, part four, "Reform and Revolution: The Bolivarian Revolutionary Process" with Frank Pascual, Ric Reyes, Joel Rocamora and Sonny Melencio. In all discussion parts, Comrade Pierre made the deepening and synthesis and made concrete examples from their experience in building a new left organization in France.

During the 2-day forum, it became apparent that various groups still have different tracks for projecting social change; this despite the fact that all participants adhere to Marxism as the philosophical basis. Even Prof. Ed Tadem, who almost completely criticized all the fundamental principles such as class analysis, democratic centralism, vanguardism, etc. of the Communist Party organization, conclude that those are not anymore relevant in the present context but said that there is a need to go back to basic Marxism to reassess these concepts.

Especially on the second day, after the topics on the "New Political Instrument" and "Reform and Revolution: the Bolivarian Revolutionary Process", almost all the participants spoke with their respective thoughts. Comrades from Mindanao raised the points that ground work and mass work is still the effective way to establish foundation for a "New Political Instrument". One of the participants also explained that the project for the "Transitional Revolutionary Government (TRG)" still probable especially with the possible collaboration from the Magdalo group and other restive members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). One thing that the movement must ensure will be the defense of the gains and victories.

It was raised that a unified broad left is still capable in pursuing the seizure of state political power, however building blocks should first be establish from below through the building of "organs of political power" by a revolutionary mass movement where the masses could exercise democratically the alternative governance. It was clarified that these "organs of political power" does not mean the traditional "provisionary revolutionary government or

PRG” but rather legitimate political units such as the barangay up to the province and national level with due consideration to the legitimate political structure for the Bangsamoro and other national minorities.

Further, it was emphasized the need for the elders of the movement to jointly put their ideological, political and organizational wisdom together into common and objective agenda that will serve as line of march for the broad left especially for the younger generations. Accordingly, formulation and agreeing of protocols in the conduct of the respective organizational projects will eliminate unproductive competition and antagonistic tendencies among the parties and organizations.

The study-seminar was concluded with optimism in the continuing search for the alternative unified left and effort to sustain relationships among the rejectionist groups. Perhaps, the latest activity resurrected the spirit of belongingness among the RJ groups in advancing common political project.

** Being an open, democratic, pluralist and progressive institution, the IIRE-Manila also participated in the Study-Seminar.*

**The IIRE-Manila
"IN THE
SERVICE OF
ALL
PROGRESSIVE
FORCES IN THE
PHILIPPINES, IN ASIA
AND THE WORLD"**

The institute can comfortably accommodate 18 guests in a cheaper rate per day.

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* IIRE-Manila Newsletter for October-December 2009, Volume 1, Issue 1.