

Philippines: Position paper on a socialism 'with local colour'

Wednesday 5 February 2014, by [PLM](#) (Date first published: 24 January 2014).

Introduction

January 24, 2014 — *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* — The following is the English-language translation of a document on bayanihan socialism that was presented at the convention of the Philippines socialist party Partido lakas ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses, PLM) in December 2013.

It is an attempt to project more strongly the socialist character of PLM and at the same time to popularise the ideas of socialism to a mass audience in the Philippines. Lessons were drawn from the Latin American experience, of linking the egalitarian principles of socialism with national and Indigenous historical experiences and traditions. It also flows from the understanding that it's no longer enough to struggle around specific issues, but that there is an urgent need to put forward an alternative vision or possibility, that is socialism, in a way that the masses can understand.

Another important question raised in the paper is the restructuring of the working class, towards contractualisation and the growth of the informal economy and the urban poor, which is an important area for ongoing discussion and assessment.

The draft document is being presented for discussion not only among PLM members, but also to the left and progressive movement, especially targeted at the new forces coming into the struggle. For the PLM these include the urban poor and unemployed workers at the local council or barangay level, as well as those middle-class forces who are being drawn into the struggle against systemic corruption and elite rule based on the political dynasties.

Reihana Mohideen

'Forward, *bayanihang sosyalismo!*' Popularising a socialism 'with local colour'

1. The word *bayanihan* means community assistance or "communitarian" in short. It means the coming together of the entire community to assist a member of the community who needs help. The spirit of *bayanihan* means assistance given voluntarily and without any monetary consideration by a member of the community.

2. *Bayanihan* also means solidarity (actually a more correct term than fraternity, which is based on family and clan). The term *bayanihan* or solidarity is broader compared to family or relatives' helping each other.

3. *Bayanihan* is a term usually used today to mean farmers assisting each other during the planting or harvesting of palay (rice), or in moving a house of a community member (literally carrying the entire house on stilts borne on people's shoulders). This is the common image that comes to mind when one says bayanihan.

4. In the unremitting outbreaks of calamity experienced by the people today, the word bayanihan has become popularly associated to mean mobilising support and assistance for our people in need.

5. In the old times, *bayanihan* (or whatever term was used then) means the communitarian spirit that fuelled people's relationship during the communal period. It was the norm before the feudal days (when the people were grouped around families, clans and the feudal estate). Under Spanish colonial rule in the country, bayanihan was superseded by the polo system, which means compulsory labour (tax-in-kind) given to the Spanish crown and the friars. However, the spirit of *bayanihan* continued as a natural system of assisting each member of the community during planting and harvesting seasons, in the moving of houses, digging of wells, building of irrigation system and other needs of the community.

6. Under the capitalist system, *bayanihan* was replaced by labour that is paid for by money, by competition among the ranks of workers and community members, by individualism, by venerating capital and private property, and in the later period, by continuously privatising what has remained of public properties and services for the common good of the community.

7. Our objective is to promote today the original spirit of *bayanihan*, and to integrate it to our description of the new socialism of the new time.

Solidarian socialism

1. *Bayanihan* socialism is not alien to the spirit of socialism. This is what other socialist thinkers call as "solidarian socialism" (Michael Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*). Solidarian socialism believes that the core of socialism is human development.

2. Solidarian socialism emanates from the explanation by the founder of scientific socialism himself, Karl Marx, who said that what we aim for in the ultimate is a society where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (*Communist Manifesto*). This society will be the antithesis of capitalism or other exploitative system where the development of individual is at the expense of others, or is based in the exploitation and oppression of others.

3. Marx also said that the alternative society to capitalism and other exploitative system is the society of "associated producers", "a society of a society of free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth". (*Grundrisse*)

Socialism in the 21st century

1. *Bayanihan* socialism is the socialism of the 21st century. For us, this is a means to mark socialism with local colour. Bayanihan socialism can be ranked with "Bolivarian socialism" in Venezuela, the "communitarian socialism" in Bolivia, "buen vivir socialism" in Ecuador, and its likes. These are attempts to give local colour to the socialist system based on the particular history and characteristics of the countries concerned. In Venezuela, Bolivarian socialism is the spirit of socialism earlier advanced by their national hero Simeon Bolivar almost in the entire region of Latin America. The communitarian and buen vivir socialism in Bolivia and Ecuador are also based on the solidarity experiences of Indigenous communities there.

2. The socialism of the 20th century, or what is now known the old socialism, has collapsed because of its failure to put the people in the centre of its development. The old socialism focused on the expansion of the productive forces (machinery and the people in production) or the pursuit of material abundance that will provide all the capacity to consume the products of society based on their needs. This emphasises rapid industrialisation that has also led to the depletion of natural resources and the massive destruction of the environment.

3. In the new socialism, the focus is on supporting each other, based on the recognition that national and human development should not be based on the oppression of others. Hence, instead of a community composed of self-oriented individuals and groups based on the family system, the new socialism envisions a society where each individual feels obliged to assist others based on their capacity to support.

4. The goal of old socialism is measured on the volume of material production that keeps abreast with (or aims to surpass) the material production of the capitalist world. Instead of this, the new socialism is measured by the social services and gains that it provides to the people, including decent housing, free health care, free education, free public transport, electricity, water, food and other people's needs. These also require the empowerment and mobilisation of the people in every aspect of implementing and expanding the social programs.

5. Bolivarian socialism is being advanced through the formation of social missions (Misyones) at the community level. The Misyones organise and mobilise tens of thousands of people to decide on and attend to their own needs in their own communities. These include the Misyon Robinson, Ribas and Sucre aimed at eradicating illiteracy and to ensure higher level of education for the population; Misyon Mercal to distribute cheap rice, food and basic products in the community; Misyon Barrio Adentro to build comprehensive community health care; and many others.

6. Bolivarian socialism also calls for the building of democratic, participatory and protagonistic (proactive, changes initiated through "affirmative actions") society. This is a manner of stressing another major difference between the new socialism and the old one.

7. Under the old socialism, instead of a society where there is genuine democracy, the system is characterised by totalitarianism and anti-democratic tendencies in many aspects and issues (Stalinism has become an anti-democratic norm pursued not only in the Soviet Union but in many socialist countries). Instead of a participatory and protagonistic socialism, the old socialism has become bureaucratic, state-centred, staid and reactive.

Bayanihan socialism

1. *Bayanihan* socialism aligns itself to the new socialism, the socialism of the 21st century. It reaffirms the importance of class struggle and the leading role of the working class in liberating society. Included among the working class is the broad and increasing ranks of the urban poor and the so-called "informal sectors" of society (the non-industrial sectors). The broad ranks of the urban poor and the informal sectors are a more recent phenomenon brought about the decline and decay of the capitalist system. Those constituting the working class stake their fate to the termination of the barbaric capitalist system and the establishment of a free socialist society. The *Communist Manifesto* referred to them as the broad ranks of the proletariat, the broad section of the population who have nothing to lose in the struggle for a new system but the chains of slavery that bind them.

2. *Bayanihan* socialism stands for the advance of all social and human rights of the people.

2.1. One of its pillars is women's liberation. The colonisation of society and the imposition of class

rule overthrew mother's right in the old society. This, according to Friedrich Engels (*Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*), signals the "world historic defeat of the female sex".

This was also the case in the Philippines. The concept of gender equality already existed in Filipino culture and the Filipino woman in pre-Hispanic times was proof of this. Most women before the Spanish colonisation had decision-making powers in the community side by side with the men. They played an important, even central, role in economic activities. Women worked in farms on agricultural and other duties, were in charge of weaving, making pottery, or trading their own products. They were also political leaders in the community, with the same rights and privileges of the males. A popular example is the "babaylan". Even today the name is associated with strength and power. Most babaylans in pre-Hispanic times were women.

Bayanihan socialism promotes the women's liberation movement, the feminist movement and the movement for gender equality. This includes the movement to defend and extend the rights of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender).

2.2. A central pillar of *Bayanihan* socialism is the preservation of the environment and the ecology, which is of crucial importance today because of the wanton destruction of the planet due to the untrammelled greed of the capitalist system. The abolition of imperialist domination and the establishment of a system that protects and preserves the ecology, while responding to the needs of the people (also called eco-socialism) is a major foundation of *Bayanihan* socialism.

2.3. Another pillar of *Bayanihan* socialism is the advancement of the rights of the Indigenous people. It also recognises the right to self-determination of the oppressed and exploited nation and the minority, including their right to national liberation and independence.

3. *Bayanihan* socialism is inclusive and non-sectarian. It relates to all other movements and forces that are advancing the needs of humanity in varying aspects and areas. *Bayanihan* socialism believes that the future socialist society will base itself on the gains and achievements of the society over the years and only the rotten ways and systems shall be discarded.

4. *Bayanihan* socialism therefore has a natural link to the past and continuing struggles waged by the masses to liberate the country and the people. The new socialism will not only be tempered by the international experience of the working class in its struggle to build socialism, but it will include the experiences of struggle of our own heroes and martyrs which represent the continuing march of humanity towards liberation.

4.1. Ranked among those whom we get inspiration from for the new society are the heroes and martyrs - women and men - of the Philippines from Lapu-lapu, Andres Bonifacio, Jose Rizal, Gabriela Silang, Tandang Sora, the heroes and martyrs of the 1896 Revolution; the heroes and martyrs of the Philippine War Against Imperialism; those who founded the first socialist movement in the Philippines during the time of Isabelo delos Reyes; the worker leaders of the trade union movement who founded the first communist movement in the Philippines, such as Crisanto Evangelista and his comrades; the peasant leaders and guerrillas of the Hukbalahap and the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan; and the young men and women who fought against the Marcos dictatorship; and their likes.

4.2. On the international front, we view as leaders of socialism those who founded the ideas and philosophy of scientific socialism (Marx and Engels); the Russian Bolsheviks under Lenin; the socialist leaders of Europe, such as Rosa Luxemburg and her comrades; the analytical and critical socialists like Antonio Gramsci and others; the Cuban revolutionaries and today, the new generation of socialists who are raising the banner of socialism in the 21st century in many countries in Latin America.

5. *Bayanihan* socialism should also draw distinction from the “SocDem” type of socialism or the type being promoted by social-democratic groups, which merely aim to reform capitalism and the bourgeois state. This type of thinking is the foundation of opportunistic politics as represented by the socdem groups and its continuing collaboration with every ruling “*trapo*” (traditional politician) leader or party in the country.

6. *Bayanihan* socialism believes that the capitalist system is inherently barbaric and will not be reformed by merely appealing to the morality and decency of the so-called “reforming bourgeoisie” in the country. *Bayanihan* socialism believes that the current state and its instruments (executive, Congress, judiciary and others) have been perfected by the elite classes to suit their rule and cannot be reformed by merely installing a number of representatives from the people. They have to be replaced by alternative institutions (such as the People’s Congress, and people’s assemblies at the barangay, municipality, city and provincial levels) that will represent the political power of the masses, and the self-organisation of the masses outside the institutions controlled and dominated by the *trapos* and the political dynasties or political clans in the country.

Popular socialism

1. The launching of *Bayanihan* socialism is also a means to provide a popular discourse and projection of socialism in the country. In many countries, socialism has been vilified as an evil, defunct or alien system. In the Philippines, the most vilified term is “communism” due to a long history of subjection to anti-communist and anti-socialist hysteria launched by imperialist governments and their puppets in the country. But the bad connotations associated with communism also includes the flawed character and the errors made by many communist parties in many parts of the world. There is more opening in renewing the term socialism and re-establishing the socialist movement in the Philippines rather than reviving the term communism associated with sectarian and Stalinist practices of communist parties here and abroad.

2. In the early surge of the socialist movement during the early part of the 19th century (1840s onwards), there was a need for more theoretical exposition of socialism. This is because the more widespread proponents of socialism at that time were grouped under so-called utopian socialism, a socialism that was based mainly on logic and reasoning, without much scientific or material foundation. Friedrich Engels himself put “theoretical struggle” as one arena of struggles that socialists had to put up to advance socialism. It was up to Karl Marx and Engels to propagate socialism under concrete and scientific bases, both in terms of the class who will be its prime mover (the “leading class”), the movement that has to be built and some concrete measures to initiate socialist transformation.

3. The socialist movement has gone through a long period of theoretical struggle to clarify its aims and methods in the advancing socialism. And there was also a longer period where the working class and the oppressed masses spearheaded the socialist movement and later won the first socialist states. This has been followed by a period of collapse and the dissolution of the first-established socialist societies (“actually existing socialism”). And now, the socialist movement has risen once again, has renewed itself, and is advancing in Latin America under the aegis of the new leaders, mass movements and governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and others. The socialist rising in Latin America cannot be detached from the experiences shared by Cuba, which has greatly influenced the socialist projects in the neighbouring countries.

4. On the other hand, it is apt to call global capitalism today as barbarism, the prediction made by Rosa Luxemburg on the fate of this system more than 90 years ago. We are now experiencing under capitalism an unending and unrelenting economic and political crises where the only law is “each to his own” and “survival of the fittest”. We are also experiencing climate havoc and a planetary deluge

that threatens to lead to planetary obliteration due to capitalism's unlimited and remorseless destruction of ecology and environment.

5. Under this situation, Bayanihan socialism believes that in renewing socialism, the focus is not mainly on the theoretical level to explain the supremacy of the socialist system, but on the need to popularise socialism in order to mobilise the largest number of people under the single idea that the only solution to capitalist barbarism is the establishment of socialism in the Philippines and in the world today.

Partido lakas ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses, PLM)

P.S.

* <http://links.org.au/node/3679>