

On Mass Movement and Alliance Work: Lessons and the Way Forward

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First of all I wish to commend the organizers of this meeting in their efforts to gather Left and progressive forces. I view this meeting as an attempt to put on track the efforts of those who still believe in genuine revolutionary change in our society. May this small contribution of mine help serve such a purpose.

Allow me to enumerate the following points that encapsulate our assessment of the Left's experience in mass movement and alliance work and our views on the way forward.

1. The recent experiences and lessons of the progressive and revolutionary forces in the country could not but underscore the centrality of the revolutionary mass movement (with the revolutionary working class at the forefront and core) in the overall strategy for social change. Missed opportunities in the anti-dictatorship struggle and the ensuing confusion after EDSA 1 stemmed from a mechanical view of the dialectical relationship of different forms of struggle, in which in any given time the armed struggle is the main form and all other forms are secondary. Such fallacy, as we all know, is rooted in a dogmatic fixation on a vulgarized Maoist people's war strategy where the mass movement is deprived of any opportunity to develop on its own so as to prevent it from “undermining” the stage-by-stage development of the armed struggle in the countryside.
2. The people's uprisings during EDSA 1 and 2 (notwithstanding their nature, political content and leadership) are testimonies to the potential of developing the mass movement to its fullest, whether for tactical democratic reforms or for ultimate revolutionary change.
3. While we believe in the centrality of the revolutionary mass movement in politicizing, organizing and mobilizing the mass of workers and other basic sectors and patriotic allies, revolutionaries must acknowledge and abide to the development of the mass movement and its transformation into other numerous forms of struggle in attaining genuine or revolutionary social change.
4. Simple logic dictates that revolutionaries should always be ready to use all available means in its arsenal for the revolution to be pushed forward to its victorious conclusion. This is especially true for armed struggle, if the armed might of the state and ruling elite is to be ultimately challenged and if the people should not be rendered defenseless.
5. At the same time, revolutionaries should always be closely observant and responsive to the concrete dynamics and development of the people's movement and mass struggles who are the real manufacturers of tactics that are only being synthesized and systematized by the vanguard party. Let's cast aside rigid subjectivist formulations and “blueprinting” of the direction of the revolutionary struggle.

6. The deepening crisis of the ruling system will definitely trigger spontaneous mass actions and movements. It is the role of progressive and revolutionary forces to give direction to these spontaneous actions or movements by raising the political consciousness of the masses, putting forward the correct political calls, and eventually leading these actions and movements to the path of genuine or revolutionary change. In reality, the revolutionary mass movement cannot do without the element of mass spontaneity especially during the crucial periods of its march to victory.

7. Such deepening crisis of the ruling system also heightens the contradictions and splits within the ruling elite, to such an extent as to defy their own bourgeois rule of contesting the seat of state power (as seen in Martial Law, EDSA 1 and 2, rightist coup attempts during Aquino's reign, the May 1, 2001 attempted siege of Malacanang, Oakwood mutiny, etc.) Through these, (coupled with numerous crises that have no foreseeable solutions), the ruling system is self-destructing.

The objective conditions are ripe for the advance of the revolution but the subjective forces are not yet ready or in a position to seize power. This is precisely because of errors committed by the Left that swung from a catastrophic default in EDSA 1 to a right opportunist error in EDSA 2.

8. All of us here know of our lessons in EDSA 1, but we still differ in how we understand our lessons from EDSA 2. Starkly enough, in EDSA 2, the Left merely served as an adjunct of the rival elite faction that led the people's uprising cum military defection. There were even those who had entertained the illusion of "power sharing" with the Arroyo regime, finding themselves afterwards with not even a junior position in the government bureaucracy. Indeed the Left has gained for itself such a bad reputation or role in the "game plan" of elite factions - short of being mercenaries ready to provide the warm bodies in mobilizations or the "civilian counterpart" to any rightist takeover a.k.a. "regime change."

9. It is about time that the left learn its lessons well from these experiences. It has to persevere in its revolutionary task of creating a political alternative for the masses - a third pole to both warring factions of the elite. A political alternative embodying the people's democratic sentiments on the given issue (e.g. anti-dictatorship in EDSA 1 and anti-corruption in EDSA 2) but at the same time raising the analysis and political calls for genuine change in the ruling system. After all, there is a growing sentiment among the people that in any of the EDSA uprisings, their lot has not improved but has only worsened, reflecting a loss of faith on EDSA-type uprisings led by the elite.

10. As stated earlier, the ruling system is self destructing - an objective condition suitable for the advance of the revolution. In order for the subjective forces to be in a position to seize such an opportunity, the Left and other progressive forces must get their act together. Given a fragmented Left where ideological differences still exist, a minimum basis of political unity could be outlined at present in the framework of creating a political alternative or a third pole to the warring factions of the elite. The viability of such an alliance would of course depend on the openness of each one to the project, even if everyone independently strives to build its own strength and forces in any which way along the revolutionary path.

11. To be able to pursue this track on steady ground, the need for a revolutionary united front could be considered as a timely project. This could be initiated through bilateral or trilateral talks between and among revolutionary forces that are open to the project and where mutual trust and confidence is strived for by at least observing ethics (no rumor mongering, intrigues, unfounded accusations, etc.) in relating with each other.

12. And finally, let's decisively shed off every negative vestige of the past brought about by the grave distortions in the ideological, political, organizational and military spheres. Let's earnestly get rid of the plague that is sectarianism that resulted in arrogance and a crude style and method of work that

only alienates the Left from the people and its allies. And ultimately, let's effectively distance and differentiate ourselves from scoundrels, scabs and political chameleons.

P.S.

* Gina dela Cruz is from Alab Katipunan.