

# Lack of confidence not lack of food

Wednesday 23 July 2008, by [Partido Manggagawa](#) (Date first published: 17 July 2008).

In an *Inquirer* news story last July 12 entitled “Where have all the protesters gone?,” [reproduced below] Carol Araullo of Bayan proffered the amusing explanation that hunger is keeping rallyists away and that fare to protest sites are too expensive. That is an utterly ahistorical assessment of the situation and a patently incorrect judgment of the state of consciousness of the Filipinos. It even contradicts their idol Joma Sison’s belief that poverty and hunger provide the fertile ground for revolution. However, Joma’s theory of permanent crisis is a similarly unscientific analysis of Philippine society.

That Filipinos are not participating in their tens or hundreds of thousands in protests despite runaway inflation and unemployment can only be explained by how their recent political experience have shaped their present social consciousness. Two people power uprisings have not brought positive change in our society in spite of high expectations. And since the eruption of anti-Erap protests, the nation has seen a decade of non-stop rallies that have also not resulted in benefits to the lives of Filipinos. Thus political experience has taught the people that neither uprisings nor rallies will deliver material gains. Filipinos, even the workers and the poor, have lost confidence in the effectiveness of collective action to achieve their demands. It is lack of confidence in protest not lack of food and fare that explains the seeming apathy.

The grinding poverty of the people and the deepening crisis of the system are ironically pulling Filipinos into passivity instead of pushing them to activism, as common sense dictates. Instead of collective struggle, individual effort is the option. Workers do not earn enough but instead of waging strikes, they work overtime. People cannot find work but instead of joining protests, they seek jobs abroad. Corruption empties the nation’s coffers but falls short of sparking outrage. The embers of discontent smolder but fails to erupt into flames of protests because it is dampened by a disbelief in the power of collective struggle.

Militants are partly to blame for this contradictory development in the consciousness of the people. For too long already activists have launched protests just for propaganda and worse, for mere projection. We have become experts in making media gimmicks out of the heroic acts of a few rallyists. But in that effort, we have alienated the very people that are our constituency for we have made protests ends in themselves and not a means to an end.

Protests have ceased to be vehicles to attain the demands of the masses. We have initiated rally after rally on the burning issues of the people but we hardly achieved anything that will alleviate their destitution. Activists have shouted themselves hoarse bemoaning low wages, high prices, electricity costs, oil prices, corruption in government and hundreds of other issues but we have not achieved anything substantial about these demands. Even worse, after years of struggle, all we have to amass are defeat upon defeat, and failure after failure.

But in the very problem lies the solution. In order to bring back the people’s confidence in the potency of collective struggle, militants must show that mass action delivers the goods. Yet activists cannot do that by simply preaching to the people about collective action. Instead we must teach the masses through real-life examples of victorious struggles.

Militants must reorient their practice and concentrate on advancing struggles with the principal aim of winning the urgent demands of the people. We must do our homework seriously in order to accumulate victories in our campaigns and in the process rebuild the constituency of the mass movement. In that way we can cut through the Gordian knot of the people's apathy and let free again the spontaneous militancy that Filipinos have once upon a time revealed after the terror of martial law was broken.

Of course, militants must continue the strategic advocacy for social change but such will only become a material force when it is embraced by the masses in their millions. And activists can do it—as long as we shift to new tactics appropriate to the current conjuncture. Sometimes the shortest path to the objective is not a straight line but a zigzag route.

**By the Partido ng Manggagawa**

**July 18, 2008**

---

### **Where have all the protesters gone?**

MANILA, Philippines—Hunger is keeping protesters away from the streets, a leader of the militant group Bayan (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, or New Nationalist Alliance) said.

As angry as they are with the government and want to express this through rallies and demonstrations, activists have to earn a living, Bayan chair Carol Araullo said.

"They will not go to the rallies, because the fare is expensive," Araullo said. "If they will not work, they will not earn. Even if they are suffering, they manage to stay calm."

She said ousting President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo might not happen "although the people are mad."

On Friday, dozens of protesters scuffled with guards at the headquarters of Petron Corp., the country's biggest oil company.

But the head of military intelligence on Friday ruled out the possibility of riots breaking out because of the rising prices of food and fuel.

Brig. Gen. Romeo Prestoza, chief of Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP), said authorities were prepared for street protests over inflation, but added he did not expect violence and rioting as had happened in some parts of the world.

Prestoza said leftwing groups were using the high prices of food and fuel as a propaganda tool against the government, and allayed fears of a breakdown in law and order.

"Based on our culture, it's unlikely," he said of violence over high prices. "Filipinos are a mature people. The situation would already be extreme if looting and riots break out because of lack of food."

The ISAFP, in a directive issued by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in early June and released

only this week, has been ordered to “provide timely intelligence assessment of political and security developments related to the oil price issue.”

Prestoza said that so far no antigovernment groups or personalities had tried to exploit public outrage over inflation, except for what he called “noisy” militant groups.

The militants are the only ones openly protesting but they “only talk and talk without offering any solutions” to the problem, Prestoza said in a phone interview.

Prestoza said ISAFP teams tasked to carry out Arroyo’s order had been attending seminars with the Department of Agriculture and Department of Energy to understand the finer details of the food and energy crisis.

### **Watching TV or praying**

Araullo, who was interviewed in Baguio City on the sidelines of a forum on the economic crisis, organized by the Interfaith Gathering for Truth and Accountability and Tongtongan Ti Umili on Wednesday, said the poor who were suffering from the unabated increases in fuel, oil and food prices preferred to just endure the hardship.

“We have a saying that we have to curl up to fit the short blanket. But until when?” she said.

Filipinos try to escape the unpleasant conditions brought on by the economic crisis either by watching entertainment shows on television or just praying, Araullo said.

Gasoline prices have risen by about one-third since the start of the year and consumers have been demanding abolition of the value-added tax (VAT) on oil, which adds 12 percent to the effective price of petroleum products.

On Friday, dozens of members of the League of Filipino Students pelted the Petron headquarters in the Makati business district with used oil wrapped in small plastic bags during a protest, triggering a scuffle with private security guards.

A team of antiriot police stepped in to separate the two groups. There were no arrests and no injuries reported.

“In the coming weeks, there will be civil unrest,” Andrew Zarate, a spokesperson for the Anakbayan party-list group, told reporters.

“The crisis will push people to come out, protest, make noise and express their anger against the government,” he said.

### **Black Friday**

Despite the announcement of a P1.00 per liter rollback in fuel prices, Bayan went ahead with its Black Friday protest action and noise barrage.

“The rollback is definitely not enough, not when oil companies are even threatening to increase prices by one lump sum of P7 per liter. The rollback is a calibrated move to lull the public into complacency before the big P7 per liter whammy,” said Bayan secretary general Renato M. Reyes Jr.

“Our call is still for the removal of the value-added tax on oil and power and the scrapping of the Oil Deregulation Law. Piecemeal rollbacks may provide relief today but with VAT and the deregulation law still in place, oil prices are sure to get higher in a matter of time,” he said.

On Thursday, about 1,000 students from the University of the Philippines, Baguio, walked out of their classes to protest the increases in tuition and prices of oil and rice. They also called for the ouster of President Arroyo.

Araullo urged people to join protest rallies, because they have “nothing to lose.”

“With the extreme crisis that we are experiencing now, the poor should protest,” she said.

Reyes told reporters, “We have to continue with the protests. It is the only way to fight back against abusive pricing and oppressive taxation.”

**By Desiree Caluza, Nikko Dizon, Jerome Aning**

**Philippine Daily Inquirer**

First Posted 01:38:00 07/12/2008