



'When one falls down, many rise up.'

- Memetta Aninao, a community leader of Barangay Talabayog

July 22, 2017

The past two days, the Anakbayan-USA summer exposure team integrated with the farmer and peasant community of Barangay Talabayog as part of an international solidarity mission to fight against the land grabbing and resulting displacement by corporations against this community and those surrounding.

Asturias Corporation, a mining corporation, is responsible for the demolition of property, the land grabbing, and displacement of peasant families in Talabayog and surrounding barangays. There are two military checkpoints that police the community, continuing the militarized repression and human rights violations under the name of Asturias. And in the last year, the military checkpoints have increased in number of armed men policing the area.

The community has its own community defense team of 14 people but the military checkpoints have increased their numbers in the past year, now having 20 armed guards total. The armed guards are mostly retired AFP/PNP officers, showing the collusion between corporate and military and government forces. Even in the event of the international solidarity mission, as kasamas and organizers coming in solidarity to support the resistance of the Talabayog farmers and peasants, the private guards under Asturias held up kasamas traveling to Talabayog and was denying one kasama entry. The kasamas pushed the jeepney through despite the heavy repression and policing dealt in that very moment and were able to come and work in solidarity with the kasamas and community members of Talabayog.

We went from house to house on a fact-finding mission to gather information and data for Karapatan, a Filipino grassroots human rights organization, to understand the human rights situation of the barangay, especially as Asturias has increased militarization and violent harassment against the community.

Just recently, on June 3, 2017, a community leader Angelito 'Lito' Casalla was murdered by Asturias private military because of his leadership in organizing farmers and peasants in Talabayog. Some stories farmers shared with kasamas during the fact-finding mission were homes being broken into, letters threatening eviction if they did not leave their land in a certain number of days and cancelling land certificates granted to them, even under CASER (Comprehensive Agreement on Socioeconomic Reform), an agreement drafted and pushed by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines to

push for genuine socioeconomic and land reform in the Philippines. During my homestay, a farmer's daughter told us: "We may have a simple life, but we're happy. We have our land. We live off it. We're happy here." If these families are to leave the land that sustains them, they will only be relocated to areas that are likely to have no land, no water, and no electricity.

The biggest threat to the three basic problems of US imperialism, bureaucrat capitalism, and feudalism in the Philippines is a self-sufficient people that can live off the land they till. That the community has faced threats of violence for not leaving their land, are offered menial sums of money for the land that sustains themselves, their communities, and those surrounding, that two military checkpoints with armed officers continue to become bigger and more militarized, that a community leader has been murdered for organizing the struggle for human rights for farmers, and that Asturias denies the land certificates granted to these farmers and denies legal agrarian reforms such as CASER highlight the absolute impunity corporations exercises over the people.

As a member of Anakbayan New York, hearing the farmers' stories reminds me of the letters of eviction sent to black and brown working-class, migrant communities living in apartments, with their conditions left neglected by landlords and housing agencies responsible for their upkeep. I think of atrocities like the Bronx 140, in which the New York Police Department (NYPD) made mass (140) petty arrests/trumped charges on black youth living in affordable housing projects. And under New York City housing law, people with a criminal record/record of criminal offense cannot return to their affordable housing and if they do, their whole family units will be evicted from their housing--a basic human right owed to all peoples. From New York to the Talabayog, the broadest, poorest masses are criminalized, exploited, and displaced by landlords and bureaucrat capitalists for profit.

We stand alongside the farmers and peasants of the Talabayog community and across the Philippines in their struggle for land and the right to live off what they till. The bureaucrat capitalist and landlord comprador classes of the Philippines, the 1%, oppress the broad masses, with the farmers and peasants making up three quarters of Philippine society. We understand that the bureaucrat capitalists and feudal landlords are only puppets of US imperialism to further its agenda of military, economic, and cultural control of the Philippines as tourism, mining, and other multinational industries are used to destroy the lives and livelihoods of the Filipino people. We understand that parliamentary struggle is not enough. It is not enough to appeal to governments and justice systems for people's rights and their land, and that it is a revolution led by the broad masses for their lives and their land that will lead to true liberation. And we know our work as overseas compatriots in the U.S. is to return to the belly of the beast, agitated and ready to fight the center of U.S. imperialism from within as it wages its wars on our people back home.

Reflection by Nikki Pagulayan
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