

PEOPLE POWER IN THE PHILIPPINES

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This paper documents five instances of effective nonviolent resistance, or people's power, which took place in various parts of the Philippines during the 1970s. It also discusses the factors that contributed to the success of these mobilizations and confrontations, and asserts that even before the 1986 February Revolution, Filipinos could liberate themselves from the most oppressive conditions if they have the courage to unite, the determination to act, the perseverance to struggle together.

People power is based on the concept that ordinary people can stand up and fight the forces of oppression by organizing themselves and relying on their unity and numerical superiority. Power grows not only out of the barrel of a gun, but also out of people's organizations.

This paper is an initial attempt to document the tradition of people power in the Philippines. It discusses some of the mobilizations undertaken by ordinary people against the powerful government of Ferdinand Marcos in the decade of the 1970s. These mobilizations and confrontations, many of which took place under martial law conditions, were effective, militant and non-violent in character. While these instances, arbitrarily chosen for this paper, do not exhaust all the cases of non-violent resistance in the 1970s, they show that people power was alive in different parts of the country before the 1986 February Revolution in Manila.

The paper consists of two parts. The first describes some of these effective, militant and non-violent confrontations that took place in the 1970s; the second discusses the factors that contributed to the success of these undertakings. More specifically, the second part will discuss the roles and contributions of different players in making these mobilizations popular, effective, militant and non-violent in character.

People Power in the 1970s: Selected Cases

In the early seventies, the Philippines witnessed a wave of protests and demonstrations

The injustices were perceived as rooted in the social structure that perpetuated the control of economic and political resources in the hands of a few.

Zone One Tondo Organization

On 21 September 1972, then President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and arrested all leaders of progressive organizations. Rallies, protests, demonstrations, mass actions and mobilizations were banned by presidential fiat. One organization which could not be muzzled was the Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO).

On 17 November 1972, five thousand members of the urban poor peoples' organization Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO)¹ marched to the presidential palace, Malacañang, in defiance of the ban on marches and demonstrations. Their action was provoked by attempts of government wrecking crews backed by a platoon of marines to demolish their homes.² This was the first mass action that occurred after the declaration of martial law.

The march sent the military on red alert. Hundreds of troops were rushed to Malacañang and several hundreds more were positioned in strategic places in the city to prevent the marchers from advancing. The people were ordered to stop and disperse by Gen. Prospero Olivas, METROCOM (Metropolitan Command) commander. The people stopped, unable to against the mounting injustices across the land.

move past the phalanx of heavily armed troops, but refused to disperse. This caused a big traffic jam in the city. On orders from Mr. Marcos, the leaders of the marchers were brought to Malacañang. The people refused to disperse until their leaders were safely home from the presidential palace.

Mr. Marcos ordered a halt to the demolitions in Tondo Foreshore. An observer of the negotiations between the President and the leaders of the urban poor peoples' organization noted;

... at Malacañang, they (the leaders) parried the President's jabs with grace and humour, upheld their people's right to land and livelihood, won their major demands including a stop to demolitions until a relocation site was ready, pinned the president to a written pledge, and on the whole carried the 45-minute discussion with aplomb and dignity of people who knew their worth . . . four years of smaller confrontation and negotiations had made these "squatters" fitting adversary to the ruler of the land. As a news report put it, the most important achievement was the 'establishment of the legality, power, credibility, daring and leadership of ZOTO *without a show or threat of violence* (underscoring mine).³

One of the smaller confrontations engaged in by ZOTO was the occupation of an unused government compound in Parola, Tondo. On 29 March 1987, hundreds of Tondo residents rose at the break of dawn and invaded the unused land. The invasion took the form of a procession. After the singing and the praying, people built their humble shacks. A Roman Catholic priest, a Protestant minister and an Aglipayan priest then proceeded to bless the houses. The new village was named after Andres Bonifacio, the revolutionary worker leader from Tondo who started the revolt against Spanish colonialism in 1896.⁴

ZOTO also took on the World Bank. Because of ZOTO's prestige and power, World Bank officials negotiated with Tondo's leaders regarding the funding of the construction of the international port and the improvement of Tondo Foreshore. Sometime in February 1974, World Bank officials, meeting with the leaders in a small Roman Catholic chapel in Tondo,

agreed to an "on-site" development of the Foreshore area and the establishment of a 450-hectare relocation site in an adjacent area. This agreement spelled the difference between large-scale demolition with resettlement in far-flung places and selective demolition with selective resettlement, in a place near the peoples' sources of livelihood.

Barrio Alaska

The Tondo urban poor were not alone in their problems and in their struggle. In Cebu City, the center of the Visayas islands, people from barrio Alaska defended their homes from demolition by forming human barricades against demolition teams and soldiers.⁶ Women and children stood at the frontlines while the menfolk stayed inside the houses. Between September and October 1973, the people repulsed several attempts to drive them away from their homes. A weapon used with devastating effect by the people was the "shit bomb". Human feces were placed in thin and small plastic bags, hurled, and upon contact with the target, burst open. Needless to say, the demolition teams and the soldiers retreated in consternation and disarray.

The courage of the people was not born overnight. Their leaders recounted how they fought attempts to eject them from their homes:

Our first activity as an organization was occupation of the Register of Deeds Office on 12 April 1972. Our object was to secure copies of the titles to the Alaska properties. Because requests we had made earlier had failed to elicit any response, we decided to go *en masse*.

At around 9:00 a.m., some two hundred of us, our children tagging along, equipped with food and drink for a protracted stay, converged on the Capitol building and entered the Register of Deeds office. Our main intention was to prevent the administration of any other business until the request was granted, and we milled around the desks, congregated around the telephones when these rang, and generally made a lot of noise.

The Director first refused to accede to our request, explaining that the files were locked and the worker in charge of the key was absent. Undeterred, we shouted that we had brought along a

crowbar and would open the cabinet ourselves. The files were then opened.

Our second major activity was the march to the American consulate. This was preceded by a letter . . . complaining about the presence of armed men in the area . . . Our demonstration was set to coincide with the ambassadors' first official visit to Cebu City.

. to press for the final settlement of the case, we directed our efforts towards the City Hall. On 10 July, in preparation for a sit-in, we brought along our children as well as mats, blankets, cooking pots and other utensils to attend the session at City Hall (to discuss expropriation of the land).

Sabang People's Community Organization

If the Alaska residents in Cebu City had an American expatriate for an enemy, the urban poor in Legaspi City, the major port city in the Bicol region, had no less than a branch of the military, the Philippine Coast Guard for a nemesis. The residents of Sabang, composed mostly of stevedores and fishermen, were being ejected from their domiciles because the Philippine Coast Guard needed the land for its regional headquarters. The mayor of Legaspi City had earlier asked the people to vacate the land. According to him, he was powerless to defend the people under martial law conditions where the military reigned supreme. But in a series of moves that entailed some political footwork, the Sabang People's Community Organization (SAPCO) stopped the Coast Guard dead on its tracks.⁸

The mood of the mobilizations was captured by one of the SAPCO leaders in his report:

. . . we brought a letter to the Coast Guard office on May 9, 1975. Most of the stevedores stopped working and joined us. The Coast Guard officer who had previously ordered us to vacate the area was in the office. He was alarmed that there were so many of us. His face changed and turned pale. We felt the truth of the saying that in unity lies the strength of the poor. Our letter contained the following:

1. We would not leave Sabang unless there was a relocation site.
2. The relocation site must have roads, electricity water, playground for our children and other needed facilities.
3. The relocation site must be near our places of work.

4. All relocation expenses, including housing, must be shouldered by them (the Coast Guard or the government).⁹

Neither the city government nor the Coast Guard could comply with the peoples' demands. SAPCO continued to occupy Sabang.

The Manobos of the Cagayan-Bukidnon Border

Not all of the mass mobilizations, occurred in urban areas. In the mountains somewhere in the Cagayan-Bukidnon border in Mindanao, the Manobos fought a logging company which had deprived them of access to their forests. The logging company had acquired a logging concession from the government and had prevented this ethnic minority group from cutting trees needed for fuel and home repairs. The Manobos responded to this curtailment by cutting a huge tree which fell and blocked the only bridge that led out of the mountains. Twenty trucks loaded with logs were trapped. Behind the felled tree, the Manobos, armed with spears and arrows, stood guard. One driver was allowed to exit and go on foot to bring back the manager who, needless to say, agreed to lift the ban in exchange for the 20 trucks.¹⁰

Chico River Project

A more dramatic confrontation occurred in the mountain province of Northern Luzon. The fierce Bontoc and Kalinga tribes fought and stopped the Marcos regime and the World Bank from constructing a hydroelectric dam that would have resulted in the flooding and destruction of their ancestral lands. One author made the observation that this resistance was one of the very few successful ones in the Third World against the World bank.¹¹

The Chico River Project was undertaken by the Philippine government through the National Power Corporation (NPC) with the collaboration of the Lohmeyer International, a West German consulting firm. The project was supposed to dam the Chico river for purposes of generating electricity for national development and saving the country from the

energy crisis. The project would submerge and wipe out 16 Kalinga and three Bontoc barrios with a population of 8,000 people.¹²

One of the strategies adopted to halt the dam project was to prevent government engineers from making surveys of proposed dam locations. Markers that were laid on the ground were removed as fast as they were placed. The engineers were tailed by warriors carrying wicked looking spears, enough to create fear among the surveyors.¹³

Engineering equipment in campsites were silently taken away by these ethnic warriors in the dead of the night and deposited at the barracks of the Philippine constabulary, several miles away. This action was designed to prevent work from continuing, and to prevent the government from accusing the people as thieves. But more than this, it was meant to convey the message that should government personnel persist in their work, the warriors could easily enter the campsites at night and slit the formers' throats.¹⁴

A variation of this tactic was to let the women advance semi-nude towards the "enemy". When their enemy ran, the men took the equipment and carried these down from the mountains to the constabulary barracks. When the enemy persisted, the women engaged them in wrestling.

The NPC did not take this lying down. Survey teams returned, this time accompanied by military escorts. An organizer recounted these developments:

... It (the NPC) did not look like a paper tiger anymore. It was a real tiger, talked like one and acted like one. No less than the NORESCOM Commander, Brig. Gen. Tranquilino Paranis, appeared on the scene to inform the people that the survey for the Pasil and Chico rivers would push through whether the people liked it or not. Here, the General addressed the people in a manner befitting a typical military officer ordering his subordinates. The general seemed to have forgotten the fact that he had civilian audiences . . . the General . . . remarked: If you do not reform yourselves, I will reform you. Besides, who are you to oppose the President's wish? In response, the people shot back: when we want to conduct business with the master of the house, we do not deal with him through his servant. Since then, the

General never called for a meeting. And he did not appear either when the people called for one.¹⁵

The situation reached extreme polarization. The government, which had already spent millions to start the project was determined to push through while the people, fighting for the survival of their culture and their future, were determined to the last man to pit their spears against the enemy's armalites. After a protracted struggle of mobilizations and nerves, a battle that attracted international attention and support for the Bontoc and Kalinga peoples, the Marcos regime and the World Bank suspended operations in 1978 and placed a ten-year moratorium on the project. This provided a graceful exit for the government and the Bank. It was a victory for the people.

People Power Success Factors

This section discusses the factors that contributed to the success and effectivity of the non-violent mass actions undertaken in the decade of the seventies. More specifically, it will discuss the role and contributions of the people, the organizers and Church persons in making these mobilizations and confrontations effective and non-violent.

Peoples' Participation

Numbers were a key factor in the success of the mass mobilizations. Hundreds of determined people crowding offices, marching in the streets, or facing their tormentors in the negotiation table forced government authorities, who were equally determined to keep the facade of law and order intact, to act on the problems at hand. Numbers generated the physical and psychological pressure on the target system.

Moreover, there was a popular character to the mass actions. Men, women and children participated in varying degrees in the planning and implementation of strategies. The women in particular played critical roles. They stood in the frontlines facing soldiers. They acted as spokespersons when the menfolk were either in jail under preventive detention by the mili-

tary, or at work trying to eke out a living for their families. Children contributed by joining mobilizations and by crying or making noises at the appropriate moments.¹⁶

Numbers, too, made a difference when the military tried to muzzle the peoples' organizations through arrests, incarceration or intimidation. There were just not enough facilities to jail every Tom, Dick or Harry who joined and participated in the mass actions. Soldiers could not fire on hapless and defenseless women and children in the barricades. In one instance in Cebu City, people stormed and clambered up army trucks begging soldiers to arrest them and take them together with their leaders who were being arrested. In Legaspi City, people sat down and blocked the path of a military jeep ferrying an arrested leader of the people's organizations. Peoples' participation and vigilance made the military more cautious in handling situations involving organized actions. As Jose Rizal once wrote, there were no tyrants when there were no slaves.

The experiences of the people validated the axiom that the power of the poor lie in their numbers. The powerful and the rich had the guns, goons and gold to protect their interests and further their ambitions but the poor, if united, could count on their numbers for their defence. After all, the poor constituted the overwhelming majority in the Philippines.¹⁷ As the Tondo leaders aptly put it: "*Nasa pagkakaisa ang lakas, nasa pakikibaka ang tagumpay.*" ("In unity we shall find strength, through struggle we shall achieve victory.")

Participation in the mass mobilizations and confrontations built up the peoples' confidence in themselves and their ability to control their own destiny. For so long, the poor had been made to believe that they were dumb, ignorant and incapable of effecting meaningful changes in their lives and in their environment. The rich and the educated were supposed to be the patrons of the poor. The success of the mass actions erased the fear of confronting powerful authority figures and developed a new sense of meaning and power in the lives of these ordinary people. This process of awakening or politicalization where people realized that in

the act of transforming the world, they were transforming themselves, led to the further strengthening and consolidation of the people's organizations.

The Organizer Factor

The presence of trained organizers who assisted the people in planning and implementing non-violent strategies was another key factor in the success and effectiveness of the mass actions. The organizers helped build the peoples' capability to diagnose problems and formulate strategic and tactical solutions, to confront and negotiate with their oppressors who were oftentimes government authorities, to mobilize resources to back up plans, to evaluate their actions in order to learn from their strengths and weaknesses, and to understand how their problems related to the bigger national issues of the day.

The organizer taught about organization and mobilization as people organized and mobilized. The actual confrontations and conflict situations were the classrooms and the laboratory settings. The organizer taught people, in socratic fashion, how to handle effective and systematic meetings on the job. Prior to mobilizations, intensive role playing sessions were held to rehearse the spokespersons of the issues at stake. After mobilizations, reflection sessions were held to glean lessons and insights from experiences; lessons regarding strengthening of organizational skills, and insights related to the political forces that affected or impeded the attainment of organizational objectives.¹⁸

The organizers were not the leaders of the organization: they did not occupy elective positions; they did not speak for, negotiate on behalf of, or represent the people. They were more like technocrats and facilitators, helping the leaders and people craft and fine tune their organization to engage their enemies effectively.

The organizer played a very active role in the mass actions. He persuaded, agitated, suggested, analyzed, challenged; the one thing which he was not permitted to do was take over the decision-making from the people. The decision was a matter of principle and practicality. It was the

organizing credo that oppressed people should make up their own minds regarding their own liberation. It was also the experience that decisions which were not wholeheartedly made by the people ended up to nothing as soon as the organizer was not around to check the implementation.

Tactics

One of the key functions of the organizer was to assist the people in developing effective non-violent tactics to win their battles. In the real world of power politics, no battles were won, no concessions were given or taken without some form of pressure tactics. The objective of the tactics employed was to pressure, neutralize, or disorganize the "enemy" into negotiating or capitulating.

Tactics that worked were those that fell outside the experience of the enemy but were within the experience of the people. The "shit bombs" used in Cebu City were very effective in repulsing demolition teams and soldiers without loss of human lives. Had the people resorted to molotov bombs, an advice given by student radicals, the military would have coped with this in a trained and systematic fashion, violence being within the experience of the enemy. By not fighting the "enemy" according to his book of rules, the people went outside his experience and disorganized him. Furthermore, buying gasoline for enough molotov bombs was simply beyond the reach of the poor people of Alaska. Because of the poor sewerage conditions, a typical situation in the slums of Third-World countries, human waste was not in short supply.

The art of devising tactics entailed avoiding violence while simultaneously maintaining militant pressure on an "enemy" prone to violence. In lining up women and children instead of men to face soldiers in barricades, the concern was to avoid a potentially bloody confrontation between angry workers and nervous soldiers.

Tactics were designed within the context of a strategy aimed at hitting the pocket, image or both of the enemy. Felling a tree and blocking a bridge to stop 20 logging trucks

meant a loss of millions of pesos to the logging firm if the logs missed a ship bound for Japan. The manager was forced to negotiate and capitulate to a group of ethnic minorities wearing g-strings. Why didn't he bring in the military to escort his trucks? He could have, but he was not stupid. He knew that the military would not always be around to protect his trucks. In this case, his trucks would be vulnerable to sabotage at any point in those long stretches of mountain roads. Like a good manager, he knew the bottom line.

Fighting ejections or hydroelectric damment poking holes at an image which the government had painstakingly created of itself internationally and nationally: that of a new and compassionate society, or that of a smiling martial law regime. The confrontations were meant to let the "enemy" live up to his own book or rules and pronouncements.

One example of a tactic employed to let the "enemy" live up to his image took place in Legaspi City. The Sabang residents, upon learning that the Papal Nuncio was in town, went en masse to a reception held in his honor and asked him to handcarry their letter to the Pope. The people also requested all the priests present to read their letter during Sunday masses. The letter contained a proclamation of the 'the peoples' allegiance to Rome', a description of the plight of the Pope's spiritual children in Sabang, an indirect denunciation of the mayor for his inability to help his constituents, and an appeal for papal intervention.

The letter angered the mayor. His image and his honor as a good catholic was at stake in the eyes of official christendom. He countered with an open letter to the people explaining his program of assistance for the poor and the needy. A copy of the letter was sent to the Pope in Vatican.

The objective of hitting the mayor publicly was to paralyze him from ordering the city's engineering department to send demolition teams to Sabang. The Coast Guard needed the land for its headquarters but it only had boats and neither personnel nor

equipment for clearing Sabang of the "squatters". If the mayor had to prove himself a good Catholic in the eyes of the public and the Church, he had to negotiate and take into consideration the "reasonable" demands of the Sabang residents.¹⁹

With the mayor on the defensive, the people mobilized. In a dramatic confrontation that occurred on June 26, 1975, the people succeeded in obtaining a written pledge from the mayor that he would desist from ordering the demolition of their homes in Sabang.

A different approach was used in the Chico River case. The initial organizing strategy adopted to halt the construction of the hydro-electric dam was to project publicly the threat of another Mindanao: the Igorot people, like their Moslem counterparts in Mindanao, saw they would not hesitate to wage a war of attrition to defend their ancestral lands. The organizer noted:

This (the threat) sounded like war-mongering punishable by a presidential decree. At a time of martial law, this was like walking a tightrope. But it was the only available course of action, short of violence, to gain ground in a losing battle. Besides, the peoples' threat was a reality. It would have been a disservice to one's country if the impending reality of 'another Mindanao' was not truthfully communicated to the government.²⁰

To bring home this deadly reality to the government, a conference was organized in Manila attended by 140 tribal elders. The place for the conference had to be carefully chosen. For maximum effect, Manila was chosen because it was within the hearing and seeing distance of the "enemy". The gong and the G-string would be news in Manila but not in Baguio or the Mountain Province.

The strategy was anchored on a historical prejudice against the Igorot people. Because of their fierce and effective resistance to Spanish colonialism, the Igorots had been painted as savages and headhunters, an image that has survived in the modern day. Projecting the Igorots as saving warriors capable of creating "another Mindanao", ready to launch a head-hunting rampage if provoked, and bringing these headhunters down from the mountains

to Manila was intended to create news and strike fear into the "enemy".

The offshoot of the "war mongering" tactic was tremendous. On May 22, 1975, exactly 10 days after the conference, no less than the Executive Secretary flew to Bontoc to get a first hand view of the situation. He then issued instructions to the NPC to suspend operations in the area.²¹

The strategy adopted took the social and historical context into consideration. The "threat" strategy would not have worked if another group of people were involved, say the Benguet. According to the organizer, everybody would have laughed if the Benguet, a peace-loving people, were projected as capable of creating another Mindanao. Stereotypes were also used in gaining public support. Noted the organizer-

... Somehow, colonialism has presented a distorted view of the Igorots, and this distorted view has helped in some ways in the organizing process. To most people, the Igorot is a savage, as well as, a priceless link to the past. To fight the Igorot "enemy" therefore, all that has to be done is to exploit the enemy's prejudices by reminding him that the Igorot is, indeed, a headhunter. Likewise, all that one has to do to get support is to project the Igorot for the Tasaday, Aeta, Negrito for that matter) as a valuable anthropological clue to the past. Mention that his rice terraces, his G-strings and his bodong are threatened with extinction and everybody will come to the rescue. The choice of words, however, is important. The word 'Igorot' like the word moro has some derogatory connotation to most people. While one may use these to scare the enemy, one should be more careful in using it to gain favor. On the dam issue, it was no coincidence during the drive for public sympathy that the term Kalingas and Bontocs were used.²²

The organizer had correctly assessed, and events had proven him right, that if ever a dam would be built in Chico, it would be an area where the people had failed to sustain the fear inflicted upon the enemy. "This is saying, by way of example, that the government will not build any dam in Bontoc because of the "enemy's" realization that to do so would be to ignite a social dynamite."²³

These examples illustrated the need for knowing the resources and weaknesses of the

"enemy" in devising strategies and tactics. This knowledge enabled the organizer to know how far the people could go before breaking the "enemy", or how far not to go to court defeat or disaster. The organizer likewise had to have a physical feel of the area to know what resources were available and to have a psychological feel of the people to be able to relate the concepts and tactics of organizing to their experience. In short, he had to be integrated with the people. This meant living with them, sharing their food and their lifestyle as well as their hardships.

Church Support

Church support was another critical factor in the success of the organizing efforts in the Philippines. Progressive bishops, priests, nuns, ministers and laypersons rendered technical, moral and financial support to the organizers and leaders of the peoples' organizations. Parishes were provided to organizers as bases to operate from. Introduced as church workers, organizers gained instant credibility and legitimacy in the communities. Existing church grassroots networks assisted organizers in expanding their contacts and in mobilizing the people.

In the mountains of Bukidnon in Mindanao, the organizers were assisted by the Rev. Vincent Cullen, an American Jesuit missionary who had worked with the Manobos for many years. In the Mountain Provinces of Northern Luzon, Bishop Francisco Claver, himself a Bontoc, came out in opposition to the dam project and fully supported the organizing efforts among the Bontocs and the Kalingas.

The church "cover" also gave initial "space" to organizers from military harassment. As the organizing effort was underway in Legaspi, leaders were arrested by the police for holding a meeting one night without a supposed permit. The influential parish priest approached his bishop who, in turn, called the military commander to a meeting. The commander apologized for the behavior of his men and ordered the release of the detained leaders. Because the Church had power through its prestige

and national organization, the military and martial law authorities were careful not to antagonize church leaders. This same bishops issued identification cards to organizers operating in his diocese.²⁴

Another important "cover" came from the bishop of the urban poor who also happened to be the designated military vicar of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. This bishop headed an organization named "Share and Care Apostolate for Poor Settlers". In situations of conflict, he would act as negotiator or facilitator between the people and the military or would lobby for the release of leaders or organizers whenever they were arrested. In turn, the organizers, who operated within SCAPS gave teeth and prestige to the bishop's organization.

Church support did not grow overnight for the organizing efforts to build people power. It started with a few parish priests calling in organizers to assist in critical situations. While many church leaders were for non-violence, they were wary of the confrontational and militant approach used in the organizing process. Time, plus the abuses of the Marcos regime and the success of some of the peoples' organizations, convinced a sizable number of religious leaders to support the organizing process all the way. In 1978, a group of Asian bishops came out in full support of organizing people for power:

Conflict is common where there are competing interests. Social action work often faces the reality of conflict. We want to stress two points: conflict is not necessarily violence nor it is opposed to Christian charity. Secondly, conflict is often necessary as a means to attain true dialogue with people in authority. The poor do not achieve this unless they have shown that they are no longer servile and afraid.²⁵

Funding was provided to organizers by a Catholic international agency, MISEREOR, and a Protestant one, the Bread for the World through the Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Organization (PECCO), an organization that specialized in the training of community organizers.²⁶ Modest salaries were provided to organizers who worked full-time

on the job. Leaders of people's organizations were not funded. It was PECCO's policy to let the peoples' organizations source for their own funds.

Priests also provided the theological rationale for the radical mass actions. They assured the people that land was created by God for all men and not just for a few and that it was God's will that no Filipino should be a squatter in his own country. They gave the blessings and the assurances that fighting oppression was not a sin but was in fact a fulfillment of the people's Christian duty of loving one's neighbor and freeing the 'enemy' from the sin of oppression. This thinking was echoed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, who noted that the oppressors who oppress, exploit and rape by virtue of their power cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that sprang from their weakness of the oppressed would be sufficiently strong to free them both.²⁷

Concluding Notes

The Marcos government wanted the Tondo Foreshore lands for commercial purposes, the Bontoc-Kalinga areas for purported national development purposes, and the Sabang strip for military purposes. The American expatriate in Cebu, emboldened by a Marcos decision to let foreigners own land in the Philippines, laid claim to the Alaska lands while the logging company whose owners were Marcos cronies believed that it had the sole right to exploit the forests and the lands in the Cagayan-Bukidnon border. In all cases except the last, the military was involved or called in to eject people from their lands.

People power put a stop to these forces of oppression unleashed by the regime of Ferdi-

nand Marcos. By relying on mass participation in the confrontations that ensued and by employing non-violent strategies and tactics, the people succeeded in neutralizing and stopping the "enemy."

The courage and determination of the people in collectively fighting for their rights, the assistance of organizers in peoples' organization building, the support of some elements of the influential Catholic Church — all these factors combined to produce a unique situation of effective non-violent outcomes in the tense confrontations that occurred under martial law conditions. Had there been an insufficient mix of these factors, the outcomes could have been either a bloody confrontation or the demobilization and defeat of the peoples' organizations. Both situations would have led to the triumph of the forces of oppression.

The cases discussed in this paper showed that people power was alive in different parts of the country before the 1986 February People Power Revolution in Manila. There was a tradition of effective non-violent resistance in the decade of the 1970s in the Philippines. The people of Tondo, Alaska, and Sabang, the Bontocs, Kalingas and Manobos all gave substance to the concept of people power in the Philippines: people without economic and political clout could win against the mighty and powerful by organizing and relying on their unity and numerical superiority. Power, indeed, grew, not only out of the barrel of the gun but also out of people's organizations.

But the real significance of people power in the 1970s was its message to other Filipinos. People Power gave the hope that under the most oppressive conditions, Filipinos could liberate and free themselves if they had the courage to unite, the determination to act, and the perseverance to struggle together.

Notes

The author, a doctoral student at Cornell University, participated directly and indirectly in these events described in this paper as a field officer of the Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Orga-

nization (PECCO), a group committed to the building of people power in the Philippines. The author was also community organizer in Tondo, headed an organizing team in Bicol, and later served as a national consultant to groups operating in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

¹ Zone One is an estimated 56 hectares situated at the south end of Tondo Foreshoreland which is a narrow slip of landfill then estimated at 110 to 130 hectares. ZOTO was the first militant organization established in the Foreshore area, followed by two others in the central and northern end of Tondo. Tondo Foreshoreland populated by 40,000 people was reported to be the biggest squatter colony in Southeast Asia.

² After the declaration of martial law, there was a concerted effort to beautify Metro Manila by forcibly relocating "squatters" to the distant fringes of the City. In Tondo, the government wanted to lease the Foreshore lands to international firms. An international port, funded by the World Bank, was to be built in the southern end of Tondo.

³ Honculada, J. "Case Study: ZOTO and the Twice Told Story of Phil. CO." Mimeographed copy, p.8

⁴ For a detailed account, see Fernandez, J. *Organizing People for Power, Conflict and Participation*. Manila:CEU, 1974. Unpublished masteral thesis.

⁵ The parish priest, Fr. Luigi Cocquio, an Italian missionary, supported the organizing efforts in Tondo. He was later deported by martial law authorities.

⁶ Alaska is a strip of foreshore land, eleven hectares in area, along the southern periphery of Cebu City. People had lived there since the 1940s, when the area was no more than a clearing. The population grew over the years. After the declaration of martial law, an American expatriate showed up in the area with a title to the land. The people were ordered to move out.

⁷ Alaska Beach Residents Association (ABRA). "A Squatter Community and Its Problem of Land Ownership," pp. 2-4. Mimeographed.

⁸ F. Fernandez, "A.C.O. History." Mimeographed copy. p.5.

⁹ SAPCO. "Ang Problema Manonongod Sa Daga," p. 2. Mimeographed. Text above translated from Bicol.

¹⁰ The case was reported orally to the author in 1976 by Teresita Banaynal, then regional coordinator of organizing teams in Mindanao. Two Manobo organizers confirmed the oral report.

¹¹ Walden, Bello. *The Development Debacle*. San Francisco: Institute for Food Policy, 1982.

¹² J. Ngolaban, "Notes on the Chico River Organizing," pp. 4-5. Unpublished manuscript.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁶ An Instance where women and children played major roles was the fight of the Alaska residents with a city government agency. The latter had refused to install running water facilities in Alaska on the grounds that the people were squatters. Whereupon, the women and children mobilized and brought their laundry for washing in the laboratories of the agency office. The military was called in. The officer in-charge said in dismay that he could not arrest the people since there was no law against doing their laundries.

¹⁷ For a discussion of Filipino organizers' perception of People Power, see J. Fernandez, "Towards a More Developed Community Organizing Philosophy." Mimeographed, 1979.

¹⁸ For a discussion of organizing methodologies, see Mary Hollnsteiner and others. "Development from the Bottom-Up: Mobilizing the Rural Poor for Self-Development." A country report submitted to FAO for the Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, Rome. April, 1979. pp. 12-29.

¹⁹ From the author's fieldnotes, July, 1975:

²⁰ Ngolaban, J. op. cit. p. 10.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

²² *Ibid*, p. 13.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 14.

²⁴ The organizers' ID cards identified them as St. Anthony's Apostles of Mercy. When asked by the bishop why the name was adopted, the team leader said that St. Anthony was the patron saint of lost objects and that the job of organizing was to restore the lost dignity of the poor. When asked later by another priest why "Apostoles of Mercy," the leader answered that whatever organizing was underway, the "enemy" would say "have mercy."

²⁵ BISA IV, Manila, 1978.

²⁶ PECCO was a loose and highly decentralized organization that operated under different names in different regions. It was composed of a board of directors and an organizing staff. Administrative policies were the concern of the board while organizing strategies were left to the staff.

²⁷ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1973. p. 27.

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