Safehouse Infoshop
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June 2, 2020

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We have witnessed the government respond to the health crisis with military and police might. Over 30,000 people were arrested and detained, while those estimated to be affected of the actual virus only amounts to less than number. Many were detained for non-violent acts. Some were beaten up for not wearing masks. Others were shot dead, with the president's grace, for mere disobedience. Demolitions continued. And despite strict security measures in the streets, human rights activist were gunned down.

Detention is better than cure.

This might have been the mantra of the state during this pandemic. As early as January of 2020, there were suggestions to deploy a travel ban to avoid the spread the virus in the archipelago. But as the president and the health secretary claimed, their priority during those months was tourism, the economy, and diplomatic relations. Four months after the first cases were documented, there is still no plan for nationwide mass testing, despite the billions they have received from declaring emergency powers, and the billions they acquired from foreign debt which we will pay for in the future.

Consistently, the government announced confusing guidelines. First they announced that people should stock up supplies, then, they announced dole outs and scheduled trips to the markets. On all instances, mass of people rushed to groceries and dole out sites, risked higher chances of infection. Subsequently, government loyalists started blaming the poor for "spreading the virus", when the virus should have been controlled months ago.

This incompetency in handling the pandemic has been too obvious. And weeks before the quarantine ends, the so called *Anti-Terrorism Bill* was approved in the Senate quite very timely. The Bill has been criticised for its vague definitions of what "terrorism" is. Critics called it the "Terror Bill" as it threatens to violate basic human and constitutional rights.

Though the bill claims that it will "uphold basic rights" and it will not proscribe "advocacy, protests, dissent, stoppage of work, industrial and mass actions" to be terroristic acts, the bill, when examined, contains obvious loop holes and vague definitions. For instance, any serious damage to government or private facility is proscribed as terroristic, as long as the government ascribe it as intending to promote fear and destabilization. As well as joining rallies which they deem to be "a serious risk to public safety". The breach of privacy of persons which they "suspect" as terrorists is also entertained in the bill. Playing the republican mindset, this is a clear violation of the constitutional right of a person's innocence until there is proof of guilt in front of a fair trial. The only thing that a military or police personnel needs is an order from the Court of Appeals to "secretly" begin using technologies to breach one's private affairs. But come to think of it, if they can do surveillance "secretly", does the CA have the means to know if any personnel have been breaking the law? In section 19, it states that the personnel in charge must report to the CA if there are any violations done during surveillance and interrogation. Now, would a military or police personnel really incriminate himself or his colleagues? Especially now when it is common knowledge that the police and

military are capable of planting evidences. Here we are reminded of the shoot-out between the police and a military veteran, when the police took the bag of the shot military personnel when it was not their job to do so. Eye-witnesses never saw any gun, but after the police took his bag, brought it inside the police car, there suddenly appeared a gun in the bag, later proven to be planted.

In this kind of state, everyone can be a terrorist, given that evidences are planted. This was also said to be a common tactic during their celebrated drug-war campaign. Over 30,000 small fish drug-users and pushers were killed. Only a handful of rich dealers were killed, or rather silenced, mostly former *compadres* of the president.

It seems that playing with names and definitions is a useful tactic of this administration. They have won the sympathy of quite a number of supporters by tagging every persons related drug use and distribution as "addicts", when in the medical world, drug addicts are different from rare users, occasional users and drug dependents, among others.

This tactic can now be used with anyone who criticizes the government. By putting all their critics to the "Terrorist" category, they can easily deny them of their rights, even when they have not done any crimes at all. Meeting with friends and colleagues can be proscribed as either "conspiring, proposing, inciting" to acts of so-called terrorism. Even the act of making "speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems and banners" can be considered as terroristic, because terrorism for them is criticism of this already damaged system. Pointing out the obvious defects of the government, for them, is terrorism.

It is ironic that they proscribe as terrorism any violence and damage to the government when it is the government which have developed systematized violence. With their allegiance or subservience to corporations, they have used violence to steal lands from indigenous communities in far flung areas and from indigent communities in the cities. To rephrase John Zersan: violence against the upper class is crime, and violence by the upper class against the

lower class of people is law. In this archipelago, the people pay the state to serve and protect the elites and the state itself.

Sadly, the government is still not for the people it claims to serve, as it had been most of its existence. The government has put themselves in a platform where they can not be touched or held accountable by the people. And this is what the Terror bill tries to solidify. The 19 senators and the congressmen who voted for the approval of the bill do not represent the people. Neither do the congressmen who are railroading for its approval in the congress. They have distinguished themselves from the people. They do not walk or commute in the streets, so how can they represent those who do this everyday? We can only vote for leaders but we can not tell them what to do after they establish their positions. We do not think that the people who voted for these so-called leaders were aware that they can be tagged by these politicians as terrorists. They did not know that the taxes they pay everyday can be used to buy bullets and bombs against them. Representative democracy has never been about democracy. And people in power know that very well.

Historically, the term "terrorist" refers to people who use violence and threats to make people follow them. It was initially attributed to states and governments which use violence to iterate authority. In this era when the state officials act as warlords, protecting and benefiting only themselves, can we say that nothing much has changed?