

Against the State and the Market, Push Back the Marcos-Duterte Axis of Evil!

A Statement on the participation of some anarchists in the 2022 Elections

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Since the Philippine Assembly was established by the Americans in 1902, the election has always been designed to be a playing field for local political dynasties and local oligarchs. It was meant to keep the local political dynasties on top of the power hierarchy, whilst the colonists benefited in return. With the steady participation of a significant number of voters from the masses, this field legitimizes the authority of the wealthy and powerful until today.

To say the least, Philippine elections do not give enough agency to the common people. The voters have no other option but to pick a representative that would decide for them what is good and necessary in the form of laws and policies that will be applied to them. Usually these representatives are those who are wealthy and live very differently from the masses so it's very rare that they actually represent the true interest of the regular citizen. Having said this, it is easy to dismiss Philippine electoral politics as the playground of the elite and thus useless to the common man.

For libertarians and anarchist groups, voter abstentionism is the usual response to electoral politics. The election is a farce anyway so why even engage in it at all? While this is a legitimate act of symbolic protest, it is yet unproven how effective it is as a tactic. With the steady and recently growing number of voters at each polls, especially under the creeping authoritarian populism in the country today, voter participation could make or break the defense of the meager democratic safe spaces available to anarchists and other activists alike.

This text is a collaborative work that aims to examine the state of electoral politics in the archipelago and the worsening populist authoritarianism operating therein. Also, by discerning our different positions from the positions of local anarchist milieus about the upcoming national elections, the text also aims to initiate a discourse on anarchist intervention in electoral politics and beyond.

The Philippine Electoral Politics

Electoral politics in the archipelago of the so-called Philippines is personality-based and grounded upon money. Ever since it was established, it has been the playground of landed elites and political dynasties that push for their self-interest over the common good of the people. Politicians must invest a huge sum of money for their campaigns aiming to popularize their personal appeal to win the masses over. Not having enough campaign money or campaign machinery reach can be grounds for disqualification. It doesn't matter whether they have a concrete platform to offer or if their promises are all but empty. As long as they stick to the formula, that is to capture the voters by popularity and spectacular extravaganza, or vote buying, the win is almost always guaranteed. Therefore, the Philippine election is usually a question of who has the deepest pocket, who will most likely prioritize a return of invested campaign funds upon winning, or who's deepest in some billionaire's pocket and will therefore forward their (the billionaire's) interest over those of the populace. One way or the other the common folk is fucked.

The irony here rests on the idea that the supposed representatives of the masses seem to live in a totally different reality from their constituents. This is especially true to the scions of political families who have always lived affluent and comfortable lives totally cut away from the poverty and daily struggle that millions of Filipinos have to face.

Thus, for the cynical, it doesn't matter who wins in the elections because the results will always be the same anyway. The leaders cannot represent the people being led. This holds true most of the time and is thus a valid point. Sadly, even this cynicism towards electoral politics still favors those who currently hold power.

Wealthy politicians, with their unquenchable thirst for more power and their desire to preserve the status quo, actually benefit from the abstentionism of critical citizens. In fact, if these politicians could do away with elections and guarantee their stay in power without spending a single dime for campaigns every 3–6 years, abolishing the elections altogether would be in their interest and perhaps would be the ultimate goal for the greediest of these wealthy politicians.

Fifty-one years ago, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. did exactly that. He shutdown the institutions of “democracy” and centralized the decision-making powers under a conjugal dictatorship with his wife Imelda that benefited their allied oligarchs and cronies. Indeed, taking control of and guaranteeing authority is convenient this way. No more political rivals from the same wealthy class to keep you on guard. The great plunder was unlimited until the Marcoses were deposed during the 1987 People Power in EDSA. Yet, the impact of Marcos’ plunder is still felt until today. And so the saying goes, nothing lasts forever but the consequences of the Marcos plunder.

Now, post-EDSA politics promised a return to democracy and prosperity. Yet, it appears that post-Marcos administrations were unable to deliver such promises. The Presidential decrees (PD 2029 and 2030) signed by Marcos which paved the way for the privatization of government-owned and controlled companies, was only carried on by Aquino and the succeeding administrations. After EDSA, the subsequent administrations continued to prioritize neoliberal policies by privatizing public services such as water, telco, and education, etc. Oil prices went out of hand as Oil Deregulation became law in 1998.

In terms of education, it appears that the de-Marcosification of Philippine society didn’t really occur. Marcos’ enablers like the Enriles, Viratas, Benitez, and also the Cojuangcos were never tried, not to mention persecuted. The education system failed in educating the next generation, even missing out on textbooks containing Marcos propaganda.

Moreover, despite the electoral reforms initiated by civil society organizations and the Church, we are back to where the cycle begins. Today, the country still has P12 trillion of debt to pay. The Aquino administration could have canceled the Marcos debt because a supposed revolution already took place, but it chose to honor the dictator’s agreement with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Middle class demography has declined and the lower class population increased. The poverty and unemployment rate has skyrocketed unproportionately. People were desperate.

Because of this, morality and education became their least priority. This is a tendency which the middle class had the privilege of criticizing, which led them to a sense of moral superiority.

Moral Superiority

For a democracy that is grounded upon the politics of money, winning the elections is but a means to an end. It is a means for rivaling political dynasties and their respective allied oligarchies to secure their share of the great plundering. Philippine elections, seen this way, is nothing more but a free market competition for kleptocrats – a process consistent with neoliberalism.

As the money flows endlessly during election time, the economically marginalized, desperate for whatever opportunities available, are an easy target for exploitation. Wealthy politicians would prey upon the largest voting population by making the poor perennially dependent with voter-earned money during election time.

However, rather than understanding the roots of this predatory-prey relation, the middle-class viewed the poor as evil and gullible. From their moralistic perspective, it is the gullibility of the poor that is causing this problem. Furthermore, the poor are blamed for the frustrations of achieving the ideals of the upper and middle-class, that is liberal democracy. This perspective pushes the poor to further marginalization and de-politicization.

It is apt to use the term “moral superiority” to illustrate this resentment of the middle-class towards the poor. And this *moral superiority* of the resentful liberal ideology accompanied by neoliberal economic policies has only pushed the poor towards the *crowd* of populism.

Let us unpack the notion of the *crowd* to further grasp the meaning behind a populism that is mediated by media technologies, and why the marginalized are drawn into this.

Social historian Vicente Rafael in his cultural analysis of the cellphone and the crowd — two important elements behind the people’s uprising in 2001 (also known as EDSA 2 that ousted Estrada), argued that the cellphone was not at all radical. Although it was a tool that helped gather people, mak-

ing EDSA 2 historical, he claimed that it was the gathering of the crowd that made the potential for radicality. Rafael defined the crowd here as a subjectivity that is devoid of any social identity; because everyone else is the same as viewed from the horizontal visual plane. And, its power lies; first, in the capacity to overwhelm the imposed physical boundaries that define social identities; and, lastly, it is a site that articulates its fantasies and circulates messages. In this sense, Rafael further argued that the crowd is a kind of medium and technology itself and not simply as an effect of technological devices.

With that said, it is now easy to understand that the crowd — as a medium and technology — can be a placeholder for a certain political interest and can be utilized to depoliticize the other. The EDSA 2 uprising that was participated by a crowd which articulated a middle-class political interest and fantasies that de-politicized the poor is an example of this case.

The urban poor of Metro Manila has been perennially de-politicized by neoliberal development and policies. At the time Estrada was ousted, most of the poor didn't have access to cellphones. The accessible media technology available for them was only television, radio, and print.

The urban poor identify themselves with Joseph Estrada — a former action star who is portrayed in movies as a hero to the downtrodden. Estrada capitalized on this popular image to win the frustrations of the masses. Eventually, this made him a president by a landslide in the 1998 elections. So, when the urban poor saw EDSA 2 on television and their idol being mugshot for a criminal case of corruption, they have identified the arrest of their idol to their experience of de-politicization and incarceration. It escalated to anger and eventually led to an uprising known as EDSA 3 to the surprise of different spectrums of the Left. Although the uprising failed to bring Estrada back to power, the urban poor crowd — seen by the middle-class as an “apocalyptic crowd” — will manifest differently in the future. Many factions of the elite, however, will harness this crowd for their benefit leading to the emergence of authoritarian populism.

The Populist Turn Part 1

Predatory politicians saw the advantage of the populist turn for their self-interest. They further develop it by expanding the populist crowd to a multiclass mass base that now includes the emergent lower middle-class who have their own brand of moral superiority, expressed through the false reasoning that *poverty should not be an excuse for drug addiction*. Later, this type of moral superiority will justify the casualties of the bloody War on Drugs.

Furthermore, the usage of new media tools accessible to the emergent lower middle-class and anti-elite stances (foul mouthing and slurs) befitting the urban poor crowd, helped pave the way for a new populism that is outrightly authoritarian. Youtube and Facebook's lack of control over unfiltered (fake) news has also helped fan the flames of this emergent populism.

Rodrigo Duterte was a former Mayor and autocrat from Davao province. In 2016 he swept the presidential elections with his populist slogan “Change is Coming!” This was a promise which also might have influenced the mainstream Left to support his candidacy. Later, the mainstream Left (National Democratic Movement), during Duterte's first year of power, was offered to join the cabinet in which they agreed to. The concession made the Duterte government appear “progressive.”

But from his popularity and high approval ratings, mostly from the die-hard supporters in the lower middle-class, Duterte started killing and incarcerating suspected drug addicts in his War on Drugs, targeting the poor. The death toll has amounted to at least 30,000 and still counting. He devalued human rights, and became notorious for red-tagging journalists and critics — including the mainstream Left who would be discharged later on from the cabinet. He polarized the population, attacked his rival oligarchies and political opponents only to give favor to his own network of allied oligarchies and political clienteles. He militarized the Filipino people in his approach to the Covid-19 pandemic. And, as usual, he plundered the country big time — the Pharmally scam was just a tip of the iceberg. Note

that since he assumed power, he never opened his Statement of Assets and Liabilities (SALN) to the public.

Duterte's encompassing support from his die-hard mass base to political clientele-patron networks and the military galvanized his seat to power. Unlike his other populist predecessor — Erap Estrada, he was able to quickly overcome the factions of the elite and its allied military men that helped oust his populist predecessor from power.

Duterte's publicity tactics were so successful that the term DDS, which was originally known to stand for Davao Death Squad (his personal paramilitary force in Davao as Mayor) was redefined and repopularized to stand as a name for his Internet troll army — the Duterte Die-hard Supporters. In cyber security, the DDS trolls fit in the category of online threat actors who are known for engaging in *Hybrid Warfare*. Their type of attacks in this sense were to diminish the credibility of mainstream media with massive disinformation and cyber harassment to journalists.

Now, it is said that the Marcoses were among the biggest clientele-patrons for Rodrigo Duterte's ascendancy to power. The possibility of a hero's burial at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (Cemetery for Heroes) for the late dictator was believed to be among the realized concessions of this clientele-patron relations between Marcos and Duterte.

The Populist Turn Part 2: Marcoses Return to Power

Predatory politicians are devoid of ethical and honest principles. This quality makes them erratic in their political alliances with clientele-patrons. The only permanent thing for predatory politicians is their commitment to greed and self-interest. This explains why most members of the Congress shifted to Duterte's party PDP-Laban when he won. Also, this explains why the known Duterte enabler politicians such as Ping Lacson, Tito Sotto, and Manny Pacquiao suddenly shifted to becoming "oppositions" as the national elections grew near.

When the Marcoses decided to let Marcos Jr. run for presidency in the coming 2022 national elections, the Dutertes supported it by making concessions to have a tandem with Rodrigo Duterte's daughter — Sara Duterte. However, the Marcos-Duterte tandem is not new, as *Iglesia ni Cristo* — a right-wing religious sect, had already campaigned and pledged block-voting for the Rodrigo Duterte-Marcos Jr. tandem back in 2016.

Given the current state of political affairs having an allied fascist as president, this is a favorable condition for the Marcos comeback. To understand the context better, it is important to point out that the Marcoses have already been planning to come back to power since they were deposed in the 1986 People Power (also known as EDSA 1).

In an investigative report by Rappler, there was an attempt in the early 90s by Imelda Marcos to run for president under the graces of her husband's party, the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* party. She got only 15% of the votes, tying for fifth place with Senator Jovito Salonga.¹ However, later on with their persistence, the Marcoses will get the gubernatorial, congressional, and senatorial seats.

Using the bulk of ill-gotten wealth they took from the Filipino people, it is not impossible for the Marcoses to achieve this. Even though part of this money, amounting to \$650 million, has already been confirmed as ill-gotten by the Philippine Supreme Court in 2003, since the amount is double the legitimate income they have earned during the time, billions of US dollars are said to be still under their possession through undeclared Swiss bank accounts and real estate property in the US.²

¹ See Mendoza, Gemma. *Networked propaganda: How the Marcoses are using social media to reclaim Malacañang*, *rappler.com*, Date: 20 November 2019, Source: [rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/245290-marcos-networked-propaganda-social-media](https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/245290-marcos-networked-propaganda-social-media)

² See Rappler.com, *FALSE: Wealth of Marcos family from 'hard work,' and 'not from public funds'* Date: 30 September 2019, Source: [rappler.com/newsbreak/fact-check/240528-wealth-marcos-family-accumulated-filipino-taxes/](https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/fact-check/240528-wealth-marcos-family-accumulated-filipino-taxes/)

The unclaimed ill-gotten money that is in the hands of the Marcoses is believed to be funding their return to power. Part of this money could be funding the networked propaganda online. The investment in networked propaganda by the Marcoses is highly sophisticated. Their social engineering infrastructure is effective enough to instill a revisionist history popularizing a Marcos cult of personality among the de-politicized crowd.

In a research team headed by Gemma Bagayauwa-Mendoza, they have uncovered a large number of social media accounts and pages mostly from Facebook and Youtube. From these giant social media platforms, the Marcos networked propaganda thrives. The usual content they peddle is the glorification of the Marcos dictatorship, erasing its human rights atrocities and replacing it with a conspiracy theory favorite to many — the *Tallano* gold and *Maharlika* kingdom — linking it to the popularization of the Marcos cult of personality. Most of the user accounts peddling these contents, according to the research team, were created in 2010 and peaked during the years leading towards the 2016 elections³. Until today it kept on expanding and with the help of known influencers, the amplification was ramped up in time for the Marcos Jr. electoral campaign.

Curious as to why the Marcos disinformation campaign and historical revisionist contents were effective and popular among the targeted crowd, sociologist Arnold Alamon from the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology has conducted a study. From the study, Alamon claimed that, “You can see parallelisms in the way people embrace certain half-truths, lies, or even outright false information because it makes sense to them; because it gives meaning to their reality.”⁴ Given the hopeless state of reality we are in, it is indeed convincing to believe in the false idea that the Philippines was once a “revered country” under the Marcoses. This false yet hopeful reality makes sense to the victims of disinformation because it gives hope and meaning to their frustrations against the present dismal condition.

The dependents of Marcos networked propaganda are mostly coming from a generation that experienced the failed promises of post-Marcos EDSA. These are the social classes and generations that strongly felt de-politicization caused by liberalism and its neoliberal economic policies that thrived continuously since the Marcos dictatorship until the post-Marcos regimes. Many of them were Estrada supporters and later would also become Duterte supporters. And, true indeed, as claimed by the sociologist Walden Bello, “What destroyed the EDSA project and paved the way for Duterte was the deadly combination of an elite monopoly of the electoral system and neoliberal economic policies with the priority placed on foreign debt repayment imposed by Washington.”⁵

It is the elitism of Philippine politics backed by neoliberalism that pushed the poor masses to further marginalization, and ironically it is the same elitism from the factions of the wealthy that are exploiting the frustrations of the poor. The weaponization of the Internet and the altering of history are exemplary to such exploitation to achieve the greedy ends of wealthy politician families at the expense of the poor masses.

Thus, the Marcos-Duterte tandem, as Imee Marcos has claimed, is indeed, “...a match made in heaven. The Marcoses control the North and the Duterte’s control the South.”⁶ Together with the unity of plunderers rallying behind them (Estrada, Arroyo, Enrile, Revilla, etc.), the ordinary people’s lives and everybody’s future is at stake. This context is what makes the desire to defeat them in the upcoming elections so important.

³ See Bagayauwa-Mendoza, Gemma. *Deep dive into the Marcos networked propaganda*, *rappler.com*. Date: 18 February 2020, Source: r3.rappler.com/move-ph/plus/252085-members-briefing-marcos-networked-propaganda

⁴ See Tantuco, Vernise. *YouTube networks spread propaganda on Marcoses, Martial Law – study*, *rappler.com*. Date: 7 December 2021, Source: rappler.com/technology/social-media/study-says-youtube-networks-spread-propaganda-marcos-martial-law

⁵ See Bello, Walden. *Rodrigo Duterte: A Fascist Original*, *fpif.org*. Date: 6 January 2017, Source: fpif.org/rodrigo-duterte-fascist-original

⁶ Quoted directly from Walden Bello’s speech at the people’s proclamation rally of the Leody-Walden tandem, titled “*Towards a Socialist and Democratic Future*” Date: 30 November 2021

However, given the state of Philippine electoral politics and the dystopian situation we are facing today, how do the progressive groups intervene? Particularly the libertarian and anarchist groups, how will they push back the impending threat to our lives and future? How are we going to keep our friends and loved ones safe from impunity favored by the Marcos-Duterte tandem? Will the usual voter abstentionism make an impact? And, how will direct action play a role in this context?

Anarchist Electoral Discourse

Anarchists from around the world are very much opposed to state elections. Local anarchists in the country are nothing different. Anarchists see voting as a political practice that should not be encouraged. The argument behind this is simply because representative democracy is a farce. Voters do not have any real agency, and the masses are only given a limited choice to elect personalities rather than engage with decisions that affect daily life.

Alternatively, anarchists see *direct action* as the best method to get things done. Direct action refers to bypassing the middle-men and institutions like the state. To understand clearly what direct action means, let us break down the meaning of politics. Politics is nothing but decision-making. However, politics is a special kind of decision-making because one decides together with the consensus/dissensus of the other. But, depending upon the manner of how everyone arrived at a decision is a question of the political model. So, what types of political models are available? Well, there are many and the choices depend on one's ideological belief. For example, if everyone decided in a non-hierarchical way, then it's a libertarian type of political model. The political model in this example is a libertarian type of direct action. Thus, compared to the politics of representative democracy expressed by state elections — an ideological domain of liberal democracy, the libertarian direct action is far better. But, it is usually only effective when the decision-making units are small and decentralized.

Setting up a community food pantries for everyone to share, DIY coverage of important news, and taking care of each other when the state social welfare is absent; all of these require decision-making that is effectively best with the application of libertarian direct action. Direct action in a sense proves, and sometimes assumes, the call for the obsolescence of state institutions and authorities that decide over us.

The anarchist groups from the Local Autonomous Network (LAN) were the first to initiate a direct action against electoral politics in the form of anti-elections campaigning. Although, in the past this campaign was a prominent part of the mainstream Left during the dictator-initiated snap elections — the *Kilusang Boycott* of the 80s comes to mind.⁷ Nowadays, it is the local anarchist groups that occupy this campaign. The campaign slogans, however, are similar with those anarchists from North America like, “We won't sign them a blank cheque,” and “Our dreams will never fit in their ballot boxes.” LAN's intensive campaigning against elections has reached most comrades in the cities and provinces. In the form of articles in books like *BOBoto ba ako?*(2016) and zines like *Dis-elect*(2016), and also, a podcast by *Tagay Collective* in 2019, they talked intensively about voter abstentionism as the core action behind their anti-elections campaign.

From the campaigning, the impact seems not to be gaining any weight. The voters still remain within the accepted number. Given that condition, LAN refuses to rethink their position or initiate a discourse to subvert electoral politics in another way and or influence the voters. On the contrary, some of them would simply brush off their shoulders and say that their anti-election efforts should be kept the same, which is to intervene with electoral politics symbolically through voter abstention. It is frustrating to see that LAN keeps the dogma of voter abstentionism.

⁷ See Hedman, Eva-Lotta E. “BEYOND BOYCOTT: THE PHILIPPINE LEFT AND ELECTORAL POLITICS AFTER 1986.” *The Revolution Falters: The Left in Philippine Politics after 1986*, edited by Patricio N. Abinales, 1st ed., Cornell University Press, 1996, pp. 83–109, [jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1tqx6x1.7](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1tqx6x1.7). Accessed 22 Apr. 2022.

Recently, despite the Covid-19 situation, the turnout of registered voters according to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) was expected to exceed the previous polls.⁸ And, surprisingly, the largest registered voter demographic by age is coming from the young population, who were previously suspected of being apathetic. The big turnout of young voters is historic and if combined with other voters, they can either push us back to the dark ages or keep our safe spaces to sustain our struggle for a hopeful future.

For the similar reason above, many anarchists in North America do not see voter abstention as an absolute response to elections. For instance, the campaigns in the US and Canada like the, “Don’t Just Vote — get active!” and “PunkVoter,” although both are not mutually exclusive, these campaigns do not necessarily lead to abstentionism, although they view it as a legitimate decision. What’s clear is that these movements say that voting is not the highest point of political action⁹.

Another anarchist milieu that calls themselves the second milieu and represented by the distro *Bandilang Itim* (BI) — translated as black flag, has published a text just in time for the upcoming elections. Titled “*Theses on Halalan 2022*” and signed collectively as konTRAPolitiko; the text, as they claim, is a collective expression of anger against politicians. This anger is expressed in an anthology of insights towards the elections.

To summarize, the anthology acknowledges the Marcos-Duterte tandem as a real threat. But, at the same time it also acknowledges that attacking the threat only gains sympathy to the threat actor. It also claimed that the Leni-Kiko opposition is a trick to revert back to the pre-Duterte liberalism (also known as the Righteous Path) to keep the neoliberal status quo, which had de-politicized the poor crowd pushing them to populism in the first place.

Moreover, while the anthology implied that the mainstream Left was already bankrupt, the vitality of the alternative left in the initiative to intervene with electoral politics on the other hand is seen as suspect. Although they are pessimistic about the alternative left winning the elections — due to the Leody-Walden campaign not being popular enough, they still see its participation as a threat to social movements losing agency in case it wins state power, reminiscent of the experiences in Latin America.

The anthology concluded without offering any hope but to let the dismal condition accelerate until the “state’s antagonism [...] become increasingly untenable.”¹⁰ And only this way, it further concluded that, the solidarity between the de-politicized “ambiguous others” will finally stand united in enacting radical change.

The accelerationist conclusion of konTRAPolitiko in regards to the frustration and disenchantment with politicians expressed in the anthology resonates with the similar frustrations expressed in the antipolitics¹¹ of right-wing extremists. The only difference, however, is that the transgression of right-wing antipolitics against politicians and the state is expressed in the call for the substitution of politics with economy, making democracy less valuable than the market. And this is precisely what the Marcos-Duterte tandem is veering towards — to devalue democracy and the rule of law in favor of the market and their self-interest. If we allow this to happen, the state will no longer be accountable for any atrocities because the impunity will shift to market violence. And given the fact that the climate temperature

⁸ See Baclig, Cristina Eloisa. *By the numbers: More voters in 2022 than in previous polls*, *newsinfo.inquirer.net*, Date: 7 April 2022, Source: newsinfo.inquirer.net/1579736/by-the-numbers-more-voters-in-2022-than-in-previous-polls

⁹ See Lakoff, Aron. *The Case For An Anarchist Approach To Electoral Politics*, *readpassage.com*, Date: 13 September 2021, Source: eadpassage.com/the-case-for-an-anarchist-approach-to-electoral-politics/

¹⁰ See KonTRAPolitiko. *Thesis 19: We need not a “unified opposition,” we need autonomous struggle*, “*Theses on Halalan 2022*”, *bandilangitim.xyz*. Date: 22 March 2022, Source: bandilangitim.xyz/library/kontrapolitiko-theses-on-halalan-2022-en

¹¹ Antipolitics is a terminology that was first coined in 1990 by the anthropologist James Ferguson in his study of development projects that mostly de-politicized the subjects of development in the Third World. To Ferguson, “development apparatuses” were post-second world war extensions of colonial rule; and alternately this apparatus is termed by Ferguson as an anti-politics machine.

The term antipolitics, later on, became a currency in the scholarship on the de-politicization and politicization of austerity. And today it is popularly used in capturing the perceived ills of liberal democracies, also a key concept to examine — most typically — political disenchantment and mistrust of politicians from both the right-wing and left-wing political spectrum. See Beveridge and Featherstone. *Introduction: Anti-politics, austerity and spaces of politicization*, *journals.sagepub.com*. Date: 8 April 2021, Source: journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/23996544211004188

continues to rise, the untenability of market violence will only lead us to planetary destruction and our eventual extinction.

Push Back and Stand Our Ground Now!

Against the market and the state, one has to demand the impossible. We need to push back the Marcos-Duterte “axis of evil.”¹² There’s no other time for such demand but now! Especially when politicians who have been found guilty of stealing from the public coffers are colluding with each other in the guise of national unity. Never has it been clearer that we are being ruled by the very enemies of the people than now, when they themselves chose to stand side by side, united in their common interest to deceive the people even further.

How do we as anarchists respond to this? We, the authors, suggest that in parallel with direct action initiatives that are already happening on the ground, we should also participate in the 2022 elections to reject the biggest threat yet to our life and freedom.

However, let it be clear that our participation does not mean that we believe that the elections will solve all our problems. Also, we are aware that there is nothing radical with our chosen tactic. We only say that this particular election is very crucial in securing that we can push back populist authoritarianism in the country and stand our ground to defend the meager safe spaces available to us. With the existing choices of candidates who we believe we can ally with, it is possible to push back the impending threat if only to give us more breathing space to continue conducting direct action initiatives. That is why despite decades of voter abstention, we choose to participate now. This decision should not stop us from aspiring for a more anarchistic future or stop us in engaging in more prefigurative practices of politics within our immediate communities.

In this light, though, we would like to be clear with one thing. We would like to call out so-called “punks” and “anarchists” who support the fascist candidates. It is true that they have the freedom to support any candidate, but we view support for fascists as a failure of discourse within the anarchist circles. We detest them of their misuse of choice even though some comrades claim that we should respect them in the name of diversity. No, we do not compromise in the face of fascism. Because, as we know, fascism given enough resources destroys diversity. No, we are not friends with fascists!

With that said, our participation in the coming elections does not put our hopes entirely on the politicians. There is no illusion with electoral politics but a tactical move to stand our ground from the impending challenge of fascism, and at the same time take advantage of the electoral platform to articulate together with the de-politicized masses the demand for a better life and anti-authoritarian future. Even if our chosen candidates win, that should not stop us from criticizing politicians and their decisions that affect us everyday — they are public servants anyway and it’s apt to hold them accountable. Also, it would be ideal to see the political rigor that we see now in people during the electoral campaigns to continue even after the elections have ended. We’d like to see participation not just on May 9th but also everyday, every year, in every issue. And, yes we love to extend this vitality in parallel with our direct action initiatives to push back further the fascists and advance the struggle for equality, freedom, justice, and the preservation of our planet.

Now, we would like to highlight that we, the authors, do not necessarily agree among ourselves which particular candidate to support, as some of us gear towards more principled labor leaders and environmentalists from the alternative left. While some of us, as a defined tactic, prefer a candidate who is more experienced in public-service (not necessarily in politicking), who is also more popular and viable to go against the biggest enemy. Despite the difference, we stand in solidarity with each other to push back the impending threat to our freedom and life.

¹² A term borrowed from Walden Bello describing the team-up of convicted plunderers in Philippine politics. See Smith, Ashley. *Taking on the Philippine axis of evil: An interview with Walden Bello*. Date: 10 February 2022, Source: links.org.au/taking-on-the-philippines-axis-of-evil-interview-with-walden-bello

If we are to push back the Marcos-Duterte tandem in the polls, the voters' choice should only just be either Leni-Kiko or Leody-Walden. We can not go with the other candidates who were enablers of the Duterte regime of impunity. We can only support those who were vocal against the return of dictatorship from the beginning and those who could go beyond just defeating the Marcos-Duterte tandem.

We hold ourselves responsible for whatever result these actions may cause. However, those who do not wish to participate shouldn't also be in the illusion that they are free from the burden. Because, those who abstain are complicit. Furthermore, despite our non-participation in the practice of elections, all of us pay taxes everyday anyway. With or without our consent we pay taxes everytime we buy our basic needs and luxuries in the form of extended value added tax (EVAT). Even if we don't vote, we still legitimize the state by paying taxes nonetheless. The tax we pay is people's money that may be used for either public services or atrocities. We would rather choose who we give our money to than just stand aside and let populism give this position to fascist rulers. In that way, we also do not "sign blank cheques."

Considering the on-going tax-trap, if anarchists are open to engage in a productive discourse to reframe our mindset towards electoral politics, we would like to synthesize our position with that of the voter abstentionism by LAN and the radical cynicism of konTRAPolitiko. And we suggest that we explore the call to boycott or abolish the paying of taxes. Because the abolishing of paying taxes will provide a more felt result than symbolic voter abstention and theoretical transgressions. Societal asceticism, even apathy, is an illusion in a tax-paying society. Neither is an autonomous life, especially if our money is used for abuse and we choose to back off from that truth.

As a closing statement, we would like to reiterate that we, the authors, are only united in the perspective that the impending threat to our freedom and life (represented by Marcos-Duterte tandem) should be pushed back, hence our tactical decision to participate in the 2022 elections. We agree that the political situation in the archipelago is crucial and does not only affect us, but also how the world views politics in general, and that dictators and free-people alike are watching.

We are thankful that anarchism provides the space for us to speak out about what we deem is tactical and practical. We hope that anarchists elsewhere consider the validity of our stand in relation to the context we are in. We thank you for patiently reading our analysis and our stand. As much as anarchist comrades can criticize us, we can also observe them. Because to us, 2022 is also a test for anarchists in the archipelago: will we stay true to the traditions of abstention of the global anarchist groups, or will we participate in an election, which may be statist in essence, but is crucial nonetheless in the defense of activism, freedom, and life?

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Para sa pagpapalawig ng kaisipan ng kalayaan



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