

Vae victis

raj

April 2026

In 2019, during the first Trump administration, Will van Spronsen went up an ICE facility in Washington state. Animated with righteous fury and a rifle, he knew he had to do something. “*Detention camps are an abomination. I’m not standing by. I really shouldn’t have to say any more than this. (...) Thank you for the honor of having me in your midst*”, he wrote to his friends in advance. He knew he was going to die. And he did. He would be the first to fall trying to fight back on ICE’s atrocities.

Tortuguita was murdered by the police in 2024. They were part of a protest against the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, aka “*Cop City*”; a \$90 million police training facility in Atlanta, Georgia’s Welaunee Forest. They were an anarchist and a forest defender. After their death—and through an AP article misgendering them—the APD claimed they were shooting at the police, framing the incident as an understandable (lol) matter of self defense. Independent autopsy reports showed that Tortuguita’s end was more gruesome than what was told: they were shot 14 times in the hands and face, maybe even while they were sitting.

Among those who remember them (mostly the American anarchist movement) Van Spronsen is hailed today as a martyr; Tortuguita’s death was slammed as an unconscionable crime. Today, ICE’s operations have expanded to draconian levels while killing *more* people in the process, with all the outrage that it can muster. Meanwhile, Cop City just opened last year. Hell, Cop Cities are expanding all across the US.

The massacre in Negros 2026, honestly speaking, hadn’t inspired the same outrage in me compared to what happened in Mendiola 2025. This one is more... ambivalent. But I can’t help but feel cynical.

This was hot off the heels of the news about a Fil-Am (I forgot her name) caught in the hills by the AFP while with the New People’s Army. The National Democrats’ expressed outrage over the incident felt misplaced, framing her as an innocent who simply was trying to do an “immersion” trip. Photos showed she had a rifle on her hand, alongside webbing equipment.

Did she want to be a soldier? Hell if I know. I think she wanted to. Romance is a powerful thing. It drives you to do things. Otherwise, we wouldn’t even be living the way we do today. But what I saw from that whole affair was a willingness, an intention to *fight*. My problem is when we stop considering the downsides of that willingness. We’re all in our rights to make choices, however petty or drastic they are. But we *have to* live with the understanding that our decisions will have ramifications. The moment you hold a gun with the intent to harm, you implicitly accept the possibility of death hanging above your head. Especially dealing with a force well known for their utter brutality.

I don’t condemn her for deciding to live the way she lives. More than enough people do that to these folks. Perhaps she *did* weigh her options. I don’t know how her life, much less how her mind works. It would’ve been crazy if she spoke out as an adamant revolutionary; calling her custody as hostage by the enemy, writing in secret a guerilla’s poem animated by the calls of *dulce et decorum est pro populo mori*.

Had she been met a with a worse fate under the AFP’s flash hidlers, would her death have been cause for outrage or a “red salute”?

Soon after the news broke out (but well after the vitriol was underway), the CPP’s wrote a statement of Alyssa Alano and RJ Ledesma as being “non-combatants” in the first place.

People I’ve talked to kept insisting that whether or not they are never mattered; a victim of the state is a victim nonetheless. I feel like it *does*. Power accords brutality to those who are active threats to it. The Man fucks us over, yes; but there’s a great chasm of difference between the trudging layman and the political prisoner, the provoker and the bystander. That doesn’t make either suffering any better

or worse, but it matters because people who *are* willingly involved have brought ruin to those who shouldn't have had it.

It's been running around Filipino left-wing spaces for a while now that the National Democratic movement as a whole had not been kind to the most vulnerable of its members. Its rank and file are made to work for no pay, its youth organizations had been the subject of countless sexual assault scandals where its perpetrators are actively being protected by leadership. Guided still by elders stuck in Cold War romanticism and abetted by a culture of Churchlike devotion and righteousness, there appears, at best, utter negligence accorded to the people who aren't useful enough for them. The *struggle* matters, *you* don't.

The military is rightfully called out for the massacre. But at this point, with all the horrors they've committed, all the blood and tears they've provoked all these years, well before the victims or even any one of us here today were even born, it almost comes off as unsurprising. Is it any okay? Not at all. But this is where we're at; the armed forces, like all armed forces, must be treated as an expected hazard at this point. This comes off not only as an atrocity of an uncaring (at worst, malicious!) system, but also the Party disregarding the safety of the very people who adore what they stand for. And now *they* get to parade the dead as martyrs? Waving their names around as another line in the Party's long list of the State's depravity and heartlessness?

When their time comes, then, will they make excuses for the terror?

It's crazy how both the hundreds of kids and graffiti artists put in the slammer over the Mendiola Riots last year and the nineteen killed in the hills this month are given the same kind of vitriol.

I had an argument with my father about those arrested in Mendiola. I was livid that it happened. If circumstances were different, I would've been there as well. The utter violence the MPD responded with. The dead bystander. The fear, uncertainty and grief it all caused; it was Hong Kong 2019 coming to our shores. I never expected anything beyond black-bloc protest romanticism on my part; I was only pleasantly surprised that popular anger was actually displaying itself as *anger*.

Looking back, I should've expected how it unfolded. This is the city's first proper politically-charged riot in decades. Street fights of this level are unusual by Filipino standards. Naturally, these kids weren't prepared, much less ready for what they were getting into; but the police definitely were. A friend was talking to one of the kids. They wanted to be a cop. *Not anymore*, they said.

What piqued me wasn't the treatment the 200 got, really. It was the spitefulness that people had for these kids. The so-called unwashed, useful idiots of Duterte, outside saboteurs trying to delegitimize the anti-corruption movement (lol), mindless hooligans with nothing but burning tires on their brain, shitfaced junkies with nothing to do. The spite was infuriating because it denied the rioters their political *agency*. What really did it for me was my father *agreeing with it*.

But there's something that I remember from that while I was thinking about all of this. He said that if they were truly justified in doing all of this, they should stand by what they did. "*Dapat panindigan mo.*"

Tad much to ask those kids for, though, don't it?

Grim it is to die without your consent, grimmer it is to have your corpse be spat on for it.

Alyssa and RJ's "exoneration" hadn't stopped the outpour of gloating, of course, but that is something I've felt always been there, with or without murder. It's like reading the NYT comments section talking about Palestinians. I always wonder if the corned beef posters themselves, and all the people like them all over the world, have the guts to that kind of violence and murder. Probably not. Somehow it gets me thinking about how the Urban Filipino sees the radical when it comes to these things, propaganda be damned.

These days, the people hate the rallyist, the tree-hugger, the demagogue and the freedom fighter. This is normalcy today. God is not with us, and he has turned his children against us as well. What now? It's hard to not see the current state of things and not sense that the general public despises you for wanting something better than now, the same way as you do. This is the caveat of the militant. You're desperate to answer the call of a world you see broken, but the people who live in it *just fucking hate you*.

At this point, it is what it is. Curse of partisan politics, I suppose. You are tainted by the sin of being on the opposite side. I don't even know if it's worth the trouble of constantly trying to justify yourself to the world every time something happens. There's also the long-term matter of defeat; in spite of all the troubles you've gotten yourself into to at least affect something, to stop something bad from blooming in this world, you're just run over and the hell we're in burns on hotter over your bones. That's perhaps the grimmest fate.

But either way, they're still suffering. All of us are. How can I still find compassion for them? In what way can I express it? Nobody deserves to suffer in any way or shape, despite everything we've done to one another. Yet still here we are; moreover there are those who think we deserve all of what they think is coming to us, and more. Perhaps this logic of *deserving* is the most pressing question, at least for me.

I may have a sort of an answer in mind. But it's too early to tell, and perhaps I'm not the right person to say it. Not in the face of the aggrieved and the indignant. What I can say is this: may the dead find better lives beyond this one, and may they find peace in it.

It's late, I need to stop writing

Bandilang Itim
Magkaugnay ang ating Pakikibaka
Towards Anarchy in the Archipelago
Para sa pagpapalawig ng kaisipan ng kalayaan



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