

## **Organizing for Change in Contentious Times: Three Stories**

### **Story One**

Looking back on life at age 85, one theme has pervaded my thinking and action over the years. How do you bring social change in contentious times? The last century has been a time of constant turmoil. We have lived through a period of phenomenal population growth and with it the consequent struggle for living space in all its forms. This larger picture translates into the tensions we have faced in the places we have lived. This has shown itself in people's lives, in the fight for a place to live, in the search for a decent living, and in the scramble for a job to provide for that living. In my last fifty years I can recall three situations in which I have been part of struggles to achieve these human necessities.

The first of these remembrances was from our time in Manila in the Philippines. When our family arrived in Manila in March 1957, the scars of World War II were still evident. Manila was one of the most destroyed cities in the Pacific war. In driving out the Japanese army from Manila, the U.S. heavy bombardment left much destruction. Soon after the Pacific victory, in 1946 the U.S. granted the former Philippine Commonwealth independence. The Philippine government had its freedom but also inherited the rebuilding of the war torn cities and countryside.

In Manila there was the obvious issue of living space. One of the more obvious realities of Manila was the huge issue of the squatter population. Both town and rural people had flooded into Manila after World War II, putting overwhelming pressure on living space. The ruined condition of housing in the city forced the incoming peoples to build wherever there was available space. Since most of the migrants were the rural poor, they used any building material at hand: cardboard, G.I. sheets, old lumber, the loose bricks and cement blocks left over from ruined buildings. The most dramatic assemblage of squatter shacks was to be found on the Manila Foreshoreland. The open space on the reclaimed tidal land was one of the first places the migrants occupied in the aftermath of the war. The adjacent

inter-island docks provided the jobs for many of the Foreshoreland residents.

In the early 1960s, government authorities, both national and in Manila, in a fit of urban development, began tearing down the war ruins and reclaiming the land where many of the squatters had lived for 20 years. The government's early plan was to relocate the squatters to Sapang Palay, a rural area 40 miles north of Manila. Here the squatters were to be given a parcel of land on which to build and grow subsistence crops. This was the first misjudgement of government authorities. The squatters they were removing had left the farms for the city with the hopes of becoming urban people. They saw the city as a place they could upscale their skills and make a living. Many of those who were being relocated had jobs in the city and had chosen to live in temporary squatter conditions to save on rent and use whatever income they saved to provide for other necessities.

The second miscalculation of the government was to underestimate the size of the squatter community and its resistance to forcible removal. The Manila Foreshoreland residents were estimated to number between 180,000 to 200,000 people, one of the largest squatter communities in Asia. The few thousand people relocated to Sapang Palay was a small dent in the size of the squatter community. Many of those who had been moved to Sapang Palay were soon back in the city reestablishing themselves. Some had even begun second families, returning on weekends to their Sapang Palay stake, while working or hustling to keep things going in Manila.

A third misjudgement of the government authorities, was their lack of foresight in recognizing that the desire of the squatters to make a life in the city, if given a chance, was one of the best basis for making urban citizens out of rural migrants. It was on this ground that the effort of the churches moved into a program of community organizing.

The central issue of the squatters was acquiring the land on which they were squatting, or land reasonably located for living close to work opportunities in the city. They had been encouraged in this pursuit by assurances they had from previous administrations. After the war when some immigrants were moved from their temporary residence in Torres High School in Tondo to

North Harbor, some of the residents were given lot permits issued under Valeriano Fugoso, the mayor of Manila in the late 40s. During the Magsaysay administration the North Harbor residents were furthered encouraged by the passage of Rep. Act 1597 in June, 1956 which said that the Tondo foreshore land would be subdivided and distributed to bona-fide residents. In June 1959, under the Garcia administration, Rep. Act 3794 expanded the land to be subdivided to include Barrio Magsaysay. The Act also set aside 100 meters of foreshore land for development of piers and warehouses. In June 1963, the Macapagal administration passed Rep. Act 3794 which provided P300,000 for subdividing and allocating lots in Barrio Magsaysay. All of these government actions had provided the grounds for the residents of the Tondo Foreshoreland to believe the land was available for resident housing.

During these early years in Manila our family had become active at the Ellinwood Malate Church in old downtown area of Manila. It was the largest United Church of Christ congregation in the national U.C.C.P. The church's ministry extended to many different language groups in the Philippines. One of those language groups was from the Bicol region in the southern region of Luzon. Many of the Bicolono people had settled in the North Harbor area of Tondo where the men worked as stevedores on the docks. Ellinwood Malate congregation in serving that community had built a chapel in 1959 in the midst of the North Harbor residents. Part of the urban-industrial ministry to which we had been called in the Philippines, was to develop new ministries to the immigrant groups arriving into Manila. In the light of this ministry, the Ellinwood Malate congregation carried out a full ministry of worship and social service with a medical clinic, a kindergarten and a mother's class directed at the immediate needs of the people.

Growing pressure was being exerted by government authorities in the early 1960s to deal with the growing squatter community in the Manila area. Suddenly in December 1963 Manila Mayor Villegas evicted squatter residents in the Intramuros area and in some areas of the North Harbor. The Mayor's plan called for the squatters to be relocated to land in Sapang Palay forty kilometers north of Manila.

When the North Harbor people were relocated to Sapang Palay, Ellinwood-Malate congregation called for a response by the national church. The

national church responded, through our Committee on Industrial Life and Vocations, to call for the help of Church World Service. With the help of Robert Seiler, the Philippines coordinator of C.W.S., land was acquired in Sapang Palay and an Interchurch Community Center was built for the former residents of Intramuros and North Harbor. The interchurch center provided a pre-school and child-feeding program, a youth recreation program, and a community development program centered on gardening. However, it soon became apparent that the people who were using the community center were drifting back to Manila. There was no work in the rural area of Sapang Palay. People were without income. The men in the family returned to find work in Manila, some returning on weekends, some to begin new families back in the city.

The fear of further squatter relocations laid the ground for the building of a squatter resistance movement. This movement had the help of the religious community. Those Roman Catholic sisters in the social service institutions and the national United Church of Christ's Committee on Industrial Life and Vocations saw that the problem of the squatters needed to be solved in the city. Both the Roman Catholic sister's orders and the Protestants involved in programs in Tondo recognized that they had to work together to find a solution.

Henry Aguilan, a U.C.C.P. pastor assigned by the Committee on Industrial Life and Vocations to North Harbor, had encouraged the organization of a women's and youth groups in the area. In July 1967, the various groups meeting at the U.C.C.P. North Harbor chapel organized themselves into the Mabuhay Community Organization. Work continued in the North Harbor area to hold off further squatter evictions. By September 1969, work in the region had proceeded between Roman Catholic and Protestant church representatives in the area to create the Philippine Ecumenical Council on Community Organization (PECCO). Five Roman Catholics and five Protestants made up the Council. Fr. Denis Murphy, S.J. and myself were the two Americans on the Council. Through the efforts of PECCO, Herbert White, a community organization trainer from the United States was contracted to aid in the training of Filipino community organizers. Herb White, a Presbyterian pastor, had been active in the FIGHT organizing campaign in Rochester, N.Y. During the process, representatives of the

Tondo Foreshoreland people were active participants in the enlisting of the community organizing trainer.

The next step called for both the Roman Catholic priests and sisters and the Protestant clergy involved in the PECCO to draw together the residents of the Tondo foreshoreland to assess the organizations that already existed in the area. At this point the geography of the foreshoreland became a problem. The major communities were separated by a major road and a large Public Highways compound. Each community had their own group of organizations. How do you bring separate organizations and their leaders together in one common cause?

Here the land was the issue. All of the squatter residents were uptight about their status on the Foreshoreland. The pastors, priests and the sisters received a quick response from the queries. Among the groups they worked with – the Roman Catholic sisters in Barrio Magsaysay and the Rev. Henry Aguilan in North Harbor and Vitas, Tondo. The conversations were catalytic. The leaders and the people agreed to come together to discuss their common problems. Out of these conversations a confederation of foreshoreland organizations was created. It was first called the Council of Tondo Foreshore Land Community Organizations. Its first move was to present the demands of the CTFCO to President Marcos on his birthday, September 11<sup>th</sup>.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1969, a procession of 5,000 marched, in a torrential rain, the six kilometers to the Malacanang, the presidential palace. Marcos greeted them from his high veranda in the Malacanang, but did not meet with the squatters representatives. Instead Marcos appointed his Executive Secretary Maceda to meet with the CTFCO representatives to discuss their demands. The discussions led to promises which went nowhere. But the occasion provided the necessary energy for PECCO to move the more than sixty separate organizations in the CTFCO into one community organization, Zone One Tondo Temporary Organization.

In November 1970, the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Philippines provided the occasion for bringing the people of the Tondo Foreshoreland together to make a presentation to the Pope, The Pope's visit to Tondo, as a symbol of

his commitment to the poor, gave the Zone One Tondo Temporary Organization the opportunity to present a short manifesto to the Pope requesting his support for their efforts on the Foreshoreland. Trinidad Herrera, chairwoman of ZOTTO, read these words:

“We, the representatives of the Zone One Tondo Temporary Organization, representing forty thousand people from Dulo Putting Bato, Slip Zero, Fugoso, and North Harbor of Tondo, Manila, Philippines present this manifesto to his Holiness Pope Paul VI. We hope he would use his heart to enlighten the government.

We have been given empty promises from administration to administration regarding our struggle to own the land that we have been occupying. We have decided to continue our fight for the following reasons:

First, the livelihood of the people is within the area;

Second, the people have discovered, occupied, and made improvements in the area for more than twenty years; and.

Third, the people are already organized to beautify and modernize the area for tourist attraction and commercial purposes.

Therefore, we fervently pray that His Holiness, Pope Paul VI will restore our faith which we have lost in our government. Hereby, we ask His Holiness his special blessing towards the realization of our twenty years of hard struggles in the acquisition of the land where our homes are established. ”

The Pope received their words graciously and promised the support of the Roman Catholic Church on their behalf. This action solidified the nascent ZOTTO organization.

The organization gained further confidence by a \$ 10,000 grant from Misereor, the German Catholic Bishops’ Relief Organization. Typhoon Yoling had preceded Pope Paul’s visit to the Philippines and had inflicted extensive damage to the Tondo Foreshoreland. The money from Misereor was used for galvanized iron sheets to replace roofs which had been blown off houses in the Foreshoreland. ZOTTO, through its area leaders, was the channel used for distributing help in the Zone One area.

By 1971, the leadership of ZOTTO was ready to move from its temporary status to a full-fledged community organization. A convention was held bringing together the various organizations on the Foreshoreland, a constitution was written and an election held to provide leadership to the new ZOTO. Trinidad Herrera was elected to lead the organization. She was a central figure in the organization and proved an energetic leader.

The backgrounds of some of the early leadership was indicative of the nature of the ZOTO organization. David Balondo, 41, vice-president of ZOTO was married with four children. He had finished eight years of schooling and was a fisherman by profession. He chaired the Land Committee and conducted ZOTO negotiations with Mayor Villegas, President Marcos and the Director of Public Works Delena, Mrs. Felicidad Samones, 40, is a widow with three children. She ran a sari-sari store in the area and was vice-president of ZOTO for women. She led the procession to greet Pope Paul when he came to Tondo. Mr. Felix Ubana, 42, was married with eight children. He came to Manila from Leyte island where he could find no work. He owned a sari-sari store in the area and was chairman of the ZOTO organizing convention.

The early committee structure of ZOTO covered all the essential issues of the people. A committee on land continued the fight for land rights; a committee on economic advancement was responsible for making small loans to resident's business enterprises; a committee on job placement searched out job opportunities; and a committee on disaster relief oversaw the distribution of aid in times of natural disaster.

When David Balondo's land committee discovered that the government was building a warehouse in the Farola Compound in the midst of the Foreshoreland, it immediately mapped out lots and streets in an area adjacent to the Farola Compound. In February 1971 the people of ZOTO occupied the area staking out their lots as previously planned. The action was to call the public's attention to the long struggle the people of the Tondo Foreshoreland had faced in negotiating with the government for a reasonable resettlement scheme. Robert Davidson, recently elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the UPUSA., was in the Philippines at the time and had opportunity to discuss the action with ZOTO.

ZOTO took action again in July 1971. This time in connection with the former National Waterworks and Sewerage Administration lot adjacent to Slip Zero. The government had given the lot to the People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC) for the building of a condominium apartment building. ZOTO saw this move as a direct challenge to their rights to the Tondo land. The rent for an apartment in the planned condominium was well beyond the means of the people of ZOTO. The people of ZOTO occupied the compound on the evening before the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday. The occupation came to an abrupt end when in late July, METROCOM troopers were sent in to tear down the makeshift houses of the people. A second attempt to occupy the compound was made by ZOTO in early September. Again the METROCOM was called in to remove the people bodily from the compound. This time ZOTO resorted to a picket line to stop work on the condominium building.

The persistence of the people of ZOTO finally paid off. The General Manager Santiago of the PHHC finally agreed to meet with the ZOTO leadership. In the agreement reached with the PHHC, the PHHC manager agreed to facilitate the land titling of the Tondo Foreshoreland in accordance with the law. The agreement also saw as first priority in occupation of relocation sites on the Foreshoreland, those people affected by public works improvements in the area.

On the basis of the agreements reached with the PHHC, the leadership of ZOTO began to pursue the possibility of funding for their housing plans. A Protestant development agency in West Germany was the first to respond to a request from ZOTO for funding of projects related to the plans for land ownership and housing. After a visit by a representative of the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe of West Germany in November 1971, the agency responded favorably with its intention to grant \$ 1 million for Tondo housing pending minor stipulations.

In late 1971, at the same time as these negotiations were underway, ZOTO discovered a government plan for the development of an international port affecting the Tondo land under discussion. A major part of the land occupied by ZOTO members was being planned for warehouses, containerized

shipping facilities and factories. The plan was being financed by a loan from the West German government.

In January 1972, the officers of ZOTO met with the West German Ambassador to the Philippines pointing out the conflict which the West German government's loan to the Philippine government for the international port had with the proposed offer by the German Protestant Central Agency for Development Aid for housing in the area. The German Ambassador reported the conflict to the Bonn government. The West German government sent a delegation to confer with the ZOTO leadership. The West German government delayed their plans for support of the Manila Harbor Development plan until the land and housing issues could be amicably settled. In the early part of 1971 the political situation in Philippines had grown intense. The student left had grown more vocal and more anti-Marcos. Students at the Diliman Campus of the University of the Philippines, in support of a jeepney drivers' strike block the entrance to the University. A U.P. professor, enraged by the student action shoots a student, who dies three days later. The students respond by organizing the Diliman Commune. Our son Scott, a freshman at the University, was not able to attend classes. The police enter the scene to remove the students and reopen the University. Scott, in the uncertainty of the University of the Philippines situation, decides to continue his education in the U.S. at the College of Wooster. Anti-Marcos criticism and resistance by the students continued into 1972.

By the summer of 1972 our family, now grown to five children, and a call to become Director of the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society in Chicago, returned to the United States. Daughter Kathryn, the second oldest of our children, remained behind to finish her last semester of high school in Manila. On September 21, 1972, President Marcos declared martial law and moved toward authoritarian rule in the Philippines. Within the first week of martial law the Marcos government raids the ZOTO headquarters and arrests the leadership of ZOTO. Several Asians in community organization training at ZOTO were detained and sent home.

In the next twenty-four years, under Marcos's authoritarian rule, ZOTO leadership was continually under surveillance. During this period Trinidad

Herrera was arrested, tortured, released but remained constant in her loyalty to the ZOTO cause. The larger urban-industrial mission movement brought her and the other ZOTO leader's condition to the attention of U.S. government and the world religious community. Ultimately both the leaders in the U.S. government and in global religious organizations interceded on behalf of the ZOTO leadership and the people of the Tondo Foreshoreland. ZOTO survived the hard years of the Marcos regime and in 2011, on its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, ZOTO still exists as a vital organization. ZOTO has expanded its work to include some 182 related organizations present in fourteen relocation sites in Metro Manila and surrounding areas.

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