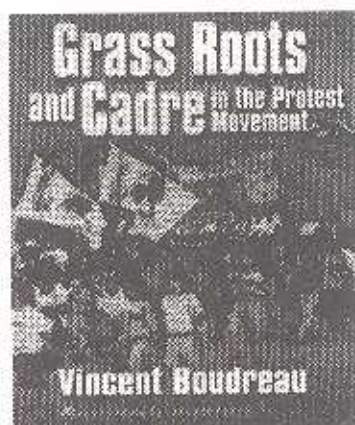


## Book Review

## Grassroots Organizing and Organizations

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Boudreau, Vincent. *Grass Roots and Cadre in the Protest Movement*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001. 239 pp.

Vincent Boudreau in his important new book *Grass Roots and Cadre in the Protest Movement* makes a refreshingly original contribution to the literature on revolutionary consciousness and social change. Can provincial communities come together against social oppressions and injustices without outside assistance from an educated intellectual class of urban leaders? What is the interplay between parochial communities and an organized urban political party that is socialist and nationalist in scope?

Vincent Boudreau answers these two time honored questions with a story that comes not from the point of

view of the poor this time, but from that of their leaders and organizers because, he explains, "these men and women are most responsible for shepherding their grassroots associations into an alliance with the socialists, and most sensitive, in consequence, to the contrasting pulls of local obligations, on the one hand, and national socialist responsibility, on the other" (pg. 13). Boudreau's work adds another untold layer to that of creative and post-Marxist scholars (J. Scott, P. Worsley, E. Wolfe, among many more) who trace their beginnings to Marx, Lenin, and Lukacs. They have, substantially, argued that a revolutionary class consciousness, of and for itself, has to be brought into parochial-based communities by an urban revolutionary intellectual class (e.g., by BISIG leaders). However, Althusser (1971, ad passim), Luxemburg (in Bottomore 1983, 81), and Worsley (1984, 94) have argued as convincingly, that

revolutionary thinkers and leaders must learn theory with the masses. "For if theory enables us to understand the laws of history, it is not intellectuals, nor even theoreticians, it is the masses who make history" (Althusser 1971, 20). These are tough questions with no easy answers that have long occupied scholars interested in solving the problems of poverty. In fact, these quandaries have to be always untangled anew through engaged and participatory fieldwork not only in the communities of the poorest of the poor but with the cadre who work with them. Boudreau has steadfastly juggled both ends; his work makes a good contribution to understanding the deeper complexities involved in bringing popular struggles into a nationalist (and, internationalist) movement for wider social and structural change.

Vincent Boudreau combines meticulous scholarship with rugged fieldwork to give us a close look at how BISIG, a national socialist organization, recruited three grassroots associations (UMALUN, DIWA, and KASAMA) during a critical juncture in Philippine history. The years 1986 to 1988 marked a time of hope and transition across the nation. The Marcos dictatorship had been dismantled by an actively non-violent peoples' power revolution that served to give inspiration to people struggling against tyranny, oppression, and injustices around the world. The indigenous Left, a broad coalition of radical Christians and Muslims, socialists and communists, is credited for helping to pave the way for this mass revolution. BISIG organizers were most busy organizing countless demonstrations and engaging in political meetings and study groups that portended to bring real genuine social change. Their relationship with the grassroots associations with whom they worked was bonded. But, the political atmosphere of the country turned corrupt after Cory Aquino was assumed into office and, against her will, or not, the old rich, among them her relatives, and military officers, notably Marcos' cronies, got hold of the reigns of power. And, the Left faltered and began to doubt itself. This exerted an inordinate strain on the relationship between the grassroots groups and the socialists. It is this story, the stuff of high adventure, that Boudreau writes about in rich and vivid detail.

Boudreau's study is praiseworthy. It is supported with a rich store of detailed data collected first hand through participatory fieldwork and interviews with the key players involved in BISIG and contingent organizations of ACES (Association for Community Education), UMALUN (Alliance of the Urban Poor), DIWA (The Collective Formed by Those Who

Refuse to be Enslaved), and KASAMA (The Federation of People's Organizations). He delimits his study to focus only on some of the problems that urban cadres face in organizing disparate groups into a unified movement. He, substantially, argues that different populations may not only disagree between themselves in terms of their ideological orientations and self-perceived goals, but they may hold visions of social change that are very much at odds with the prevailing socialist vision. This potential for divisiveness between "revolutionary" partners is significant because the direction of socialism is, constantly, and invariably, being changed by these kinds of tensions. Boudreau emphasizes that "the interaction of distinct alliance partners against the backdrop of changing political conditions produces both the character of collective praxis and the degree of mobilization" (p. 85). This is an important point and one that, until now, has been given little attention in the literature.

This is one of the very first books to be written on the inside operations of a national socialist movement in the Philippines, no student interested in the nuts and bolts of organizational life, politics, and social movement theory can afford to miss this thoroughly researched book on the rise and decline of BISIG and three grassroots associations in the 1980s. ●

### References

- Altusser, Louis (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Bottomore, Tom, ed., (1983) *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Worsley, Peter (1984) *The Three Worlds, Culture and World Development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.