

My First Ties with the UP Third World Studies Center

It was at the early stage of the popular movement against the Marcos dictatorship when first heard about the Third World Studies Center of U.P. Diliman.

I was the Executive Secretary of the Mindanao – Sulu Pastoral Conference Secretariat (MSPCS), based in Davao City. The Secretariat was put up by the MSPC in 1971 to facilitate the coordination of the pastoral programs of the dioceses of Mindanao-Sulu.

Six years later, the Conference appointed me to head the 25-person Secretariat. Considering the repercussions of “the signs of the times,” and the Church’s call “to make a preferential option for the poor, deprived and the oppressed,” the Secretariat was tasked to set in place a program to promote human rights, justice and peace.

In 1978, we set up our Research, Documentation and Publication Desk within the Secretariat. Considering financial and personnel constraints, not to mention the grave risks of going out to the field, we could only do limited research on the burning issues affecting Mindanaoans. We began investigation into the expansion of agribusiness plantations and the resulting dislocations of peasant communities, the incursion of development projects in the lumads ancestral domain with PANAMIN’s blessings, the extent of the people’s resistance against authoritarian rule and the ensuing human rights violations and the like.

We needed partners who shared the same concern; we prayed that we could have such partners. One day, Randy David and Ed Tadem knocked on our office door. They were to be an answer to that prayer. They told us about the Third World Studies Center’s interest in doing research in Mindanao, specifically on the expansion of agribusiness plantations. They heard about us and wondered if we were interested in forging a partnership. This was one of those events during the long years of martial law that we will always remember, that, out of the blue, comrades would appear and solidarity action would be given birth.

Immediately after our first discussion with Randy and Ed, we established the partnership. The research on the banana industry began and various research papers and slide productions (one is the classic *The Struggle of*

Generations) would come out of this alternative source. Soon enough, the Maryknoll and Mennonite missionaries joined us. In a little while, we were able to establish a network of Mindanaoan individuals and legal institutions, including many Social Action Centers and came out with joint collaborative efforts.

In January 1979, this network gave birth to the Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao or AFRIM. The rest is history.

On your anniversary, heartfelt congratulations!

Karl Gaspar, CSsR