

Constraints and Potentials for Just Transition in the Jeepney Modernization Program

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Abstract

Jeepney drivers and operators, who are informal transport workers, have commonly perceived the modernization program called PUVMP as a phaseout of their livelihood. The paper reviews the rationale for the jeepney modernization program using the lens of just transition which posits that, through social dialogue and decent work, workers will not be left behind in the changes needed in response to climate change, traffic congestion and industry formalization. However, the design and implementation of the modernization program—frequently enforced in a securitized fashion—shows it to be discriminatory. Using document review, key informant interviews and participant observation undertaken during the pandemic, the paper interrogates the experience of groups which nonetheless have critically engaged with the government in order to reveal the possibilities and limits of fighting for just transition within a discriminatory modernization.

Keywords: Jeepney operators and drivers, informal transport workers, PUVMP, just transition, climate change

Introduction

Before, during, and after the pandemic, the jeepney sector has been threatened by the implementation of a Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP). Conceived as a means of climate change mitigation, the PUVMP was also described as a way to rationalize public transportation in response to traffic congestion and air pollution. However, from the very start, jeepney drivers and operators have perceived the PUVMP as anti-poor and a phaseout of their livelihood. Through determined resistance by jeepney organizations, mainly

in the form of strikes, the realization of the PUVMP has been pushed back and delayed since it was first proposed more than a decade ago.

The modernization plan envisaged in the middle of 2017 mandated a three-year transition for all public utility vehicles, not just public utility jeepneys (PUJs). But President Rodrigo Duterte attempted to ram through the phaseout of jeepneys by January 1, 2018 and infamously stated that he had no qualms seeing jeepney drivers and operators die of hunger (Ranada, 2017). Yet Duterte's administration was also forced to retreat in the face of opposition by jeepney groups. The pandemic interrupted the timeline for the PUVMP but also led to an abrupt ban on jeepneys on the roads. Under the new administration of Bong Bong Marcos, Jr. the government threatened to push through, after several extensions of the deadline as a result of resistance by jeepney groups, with canceling the franchises of individual jeepney operators who will not consolidate into corporations or cooperatives by the end of April 2024 as a final cut-off date (Yu, 2024b). Yet the deadline passed with government agencies wavering between enforcing the cancellation of franchises and opening up to suggestions to allow more time for consolidation (Taguines, 2024; Yu, 2024c). Recently, the Senate (2024) passed a resolution calling for the suspension of the PUVMP, now called the Public Transportation Modernization Program (PTMP). The executive promptly countered that the PTMP will continue despite the resolution (Cabrera, 2024). These events reveal the enduring contestation around the modernization program, and therefore the relevance of assessing the strategies that affected informal jeepney workers have undertaken in response.

This paper aims to critically assess the jeepney modernization program using the lens of just transition. According to the United Nations (UN) Climate Change News (2023, para. 3), "A just transition means transforming the economy and economic system in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities

and leaving no one behind.” The paper relied on key informant interviews and participant observation undertaken in 2021 to 2022 for its primary data. These highlight the experience of groups which have critically engaged with the government in its push to modernize the public transportation in the Philippines. By highlighting the experiences of these groups, this paper aims to address a gap in the broader discussion on jeepney modernization; a discussion which has been largely dominated by the government. The paper also employed document and policy reviews in its assessment.

This paper is divided into four main sections. The first section critically reviews the rationale for the jeepney modernization program as a response to climate change, traffic congestion and industry formalization. This is followed by a discussion on just transition as the theoretical framework of the study. Thirdly, the paper describes the experiences of various transport groups in dealing with the government’s push for modernization; their strategies, opportunities for further action and the limits of engaging with the government. The paper ends by returning to the concept of just transition and an argument that the design and implementation of the modernization program—frequently enforced in a securitized fashion—is discriminatory and unjust.

Informality in the Jeepney Sector

Long seen as a cultural symbol of the country, jeepneys are a local design and adaptation of leftover US military jeeps during the Second World War. About 40 million person-trips per day or 40% of commuter traffic is carried by jeepneys (Mariano, n.d.; Mettke et al., 2016).

There is no accurate accounting of the total number of PUJs. Estimates vary widely: 180,000 jeeps (Mariano et al., 2019), 240,000 (Pontawe & Napalang, 2018), 250,000 (Mettke et al., 2016) or 300,000 (Mendoza, 2021). In Metro Manila, there are more than 700 registered jeepney routes and 55,000 jeepneys operating (Mariano et al., 2019). Another

estimate puts it at 73,000 (Mendoza, 2021). In comparison, there are 250 routes, 5,776 franchises and 7,350 PUJ units in the province of Cebu (World Bank, n.d.). Metro Cebu is the second biggest metropolis after Metro Manila.

The PUJ sector in Metro Manila is highly fragmented: 80% of operators own just one jeepney while the average operator owns 1.3 vehicles (Mariano et al., 2019). The PUJs in Cebu are as fragmented as in Manila: a jeepney operator owns an average of 1.5 units. About 90% of all franchises only have one unit. There are two units for 8% of jeepney operators, and there are more than two units for only 2% of the total franchise owners (World Bank, n.d.). No doubt, this pattern is repeated nationwide.

The owners of jeepneys, called operators, are evidently among the self-employed poor. Many operators are also drivers themselves. Operators engage drivers on informal arrangements called the boundary system. In this setup, drivers pay a fixed daily amount—called the boundary—to the owner for operating the jeepney. Any income above the boundary is the driver's share. According to Pontawe and Napalang (2018), the boundary of an operator is anywhere from PHP 800 to PHP 1,100 while the driver's take is from PHP 500 to PHP 800. While the operator is assured of the daily boundary, the driver's income is dependent on the vagaries of congestion, weather and volume of commuters. However, even the operator's livelihood is vulnerable since the jeepney unit can be broken or otherwise not usable. Unmistakably, both jeepney operators and drivers are workers in the informal economy.

Rationale for Jeepney Modernization

Climate mitigation and industry formalization are both major reasons for modernization of the public transportation sector. Among the key aims are the control and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, rapid motorization, and shift to car usage. Other objectives are to have a formal and quality public transport system. This would be achieved

through higher capacity vehicles, fleet consolidation, improved service, and operational efficiency. Over the long-term, the vision is the electrification of public transportation (Mariano, n.d.).

To quantify the scale of the problems that the PUVMP is meant to solve, some key statistics are relevant. Transportation, both public and private, produces 28% to 35% of greenhouse gas emissions (Tiu, 2021; Fortaleza, 2019; ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2014; Mariano, n.d.). According to some sources, transport is the second highest greenhouse gas emitter (Tiu, 2021; Fortaleza, 2019) while other sources claim it is the third (Climate Action Tracker, 2020).

As for air pollution, transport as a whole contributes 65% of the total (ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2014). This makes the sector the biggest source of air pollution (Tiu, 2021; Fortaleza, 2019; Mariano, n.d.). Since 1987, most of the National Capital Region has registered greater than normal air pollution (ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2014).

The cost of congestion in the National Capital Region is USD 24 billion per year or 10% of GDP as of 2017. Opportunity cost, health, and fuel are included in this estimate. This figure was 46% higher than just three years earlier (Mariano, n.d.). In 2023, Metro Manila had the world's worst traffic for a metropolitan area (Yu, 2024a).

Finally, fleet consolidation was envisaged as a solution to fragmentation in the jeepney sector. Consolidation was planned on three levels. First, through regulation to reduce the number of operators. Second, to decrease the number of franchises on the basis of a one route-one franchise principle. And third, to cut the number of public transport fleets by shifting to higher-capacity vehicles (Mariano, n.d.). In this way, it is projected that there will be 11,000 or 22% less jeepney units. Further, the decline would deepen to 42,000 units or 78% in 2026 (Mettke et al., 2016).

Government planners argue that fragmentation leads to extreme on-street competition whose negative outcomes are inefficiency, congestion, unsafe streets, and difficulty to regulate (Mariano, n.d.). While PUJs have a reputation for causing traffic and pollution, the facts paint a different picture. About 80% of all trips in Metro Manila are carried by PUVs but buses and jeepneys only occupy 17% of the road space. In terms of carrying capacity, jeepneys and buses are more efficient. Thus, PUVs are not the main culprit in traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and air pollution (ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2014).

Jeepneys emitted 15% of the total greenhouse gas emissions for transport in 2015 (Mariano, n.d.). In contrast, Mettke et al. (2016) asserted that jeepneys are the biggest contributor to emissions among transport. This allegation is hard to sustain. Private vehicles outnumber public utility vehicles by a huge margin. There are 2.5 million vehicles in the National Capital Region, of which only 73,000 are jeeps. Meanwhile there are 300,000 jeeps out of some 13 million vehicles nationwide (Mendoza, 2021). Thus, informal jeepney workers are victims of othering.

Contradictions of Jeepney Modernization

The first modern jeepneys started operating in 2018 while some 500 units were plying 30 routes in over six regions by November 2019. Out of this number, 208 modern jeepneys were in 10 routes in the National Capital Region. Nationwide, more than 80 routes and 2,500 units were allocated provisional franchises to operate (Mariano et al., 2019).

Mariano et al. (2019) concluded that modern jeepney operators and drivers would attain higher incomes as a result of the higher capacity and longer operation hours. The better incomes were also a consequence of the shift from a boundary system to wage employment. Nonetheless, the study also found that the costly modern jeepneys, including bigger overheads, was an onerous burden. The substantial overheads were a consequence of fleet

management, formal organization as cooperative or corporation, and workers' benefits. Still, economies of scale were expected to result in cheaper procurement of parts and servicing of maintenance. Further, rates of return over the longer term of 15 years and over were better (Mariano et al., 2019).

There is no question that modern jeepneys are very expensive. Different types of modern jeepneys have varying prices: PHP 950,000 for an e-jeepney, PHP 1.1 million for a Euro-4 diesel jeepney, PHP 1.8 million for a Euro-4 diesel minibus, and PHP 4.5 million for a Euro-4 bus (Mettke et al., 2016). As of late, the price of the modern jeepney had risen to PHP 1.4 to 3 million, according to the Department of Transportation (DOTr) (Bautista & Moya, 2023). A modern jeepney has add-ons that traditional units certainly do not have: GPS, WiFi, EPS, and cameras. Out of the total cost of a modern jeepney, the government will subsidize PHP 210,000 or PHP 280,000 depending on the type of vehicle (Dela Cruz, 2023). Thus, the expected monthly amortization is evidently exorbitant for lowly jeepney operators and drivers who are informal workers.

Securing the finances to replace 180,000 jeepneys is a major hurdle as current credit facilities are only enough for 1,400 units and there are only commitments from the government for 14,000 new units (Mariano et al., 2019). Another problem is that traditional jeepneys are bound to be displaced wholesale when modern jeepneys are deployed on existing routes not just on new lines.

Jeepney Woes During the Pandemic

The depth of the crisis suffered by jeepney drivers and operators during the pandemic was revealed in tragic scenes of them begging on the streets due to months of inability to earn a living. Inevitably this led to a silent pandemic—because it was unacknowledged by the jeepney drivers and operators—of mental health problems (Velasco, 2023).

On March 16, 2020, the first imposition of the so-called enhanced community quarantine in Metro Manila shut down all forms of public transportation. This affected an estimated 121,405 PUVs, of which 50,072 are PUJs. The more relaxed general community quarantine on June 1, 2020, allowed some PUVs such as city buses, point-to-point buses, taxis, ride hailing apps and shuttles to operate at half capacity. Traditional jeepneys were still banned (Just Transition to a Modernized PUV Sector bill, 2020).

On June 22, 2020, PUJs complying with the rules on PUVMP were allowed to operate. Around 6,000 traditional PUJs were allowed to ply some routes by July 3, 2020. But with a stricter modified enhanced community quarantine imposed by August 4, 2020, the operating PUJs were down to a little less than 1,000 units. A conservative estimate reveals that PUJ operators and drivers lost PHP 2 billion while public transportation workers as a whole lost PHP 5 billion in that period (Just Transition to a Modernized PUV Sector bill, 2020).

In response to the public transportation crisis affecting both commuters and workers amidst the pandemic, the group Move As One Coalition was formed. It is a broad alliance of 140 organizations and more than 77,000 individuals advocating for a safer, more humane, and more inclusive public transportation system in the Philippines (Bendaña et al., 2021). As public transport advocates, its main demand is reform of public transportation and promotion of people's mobility.

Discriminatory Modernization not Just Transition

Just transition was born as a concept by trade unions which were grappling with the seeming contradiction between protecting jobs and protecting nature. The proponents of just transition asserted that the choice was not employment or environment but protecting both at the same time (Fortaleza, 2019). The labor movement's framework of just transition serves precisely to bridge these concerns into a unified position that advances both workers' welfare

and environmental protection. In 2015, the International Labour Organization (ILO) mainstreamed the concept. Combining traditional advocacies with new imperatives, ILO (2015) argued that a process of social dialogue and an outcome of decent work should animate the just transition to a low-carbon future.

Decent work is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 of the UN and the normative agenda of the ILO. Both institutions understand that inclusive growth is premised on the achievement of decent work along with economic progress so that all workers benefit. Its four pillars are employment generation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. Social protection refers to programs that seek to mitigate risks that people face in their work and life. Meanwhile, social dialogue denotes any form of discussion and negotiation between the actors in the employment relationship—principally the employer, employees and the government—to resolve workplace issues (ILO, 2017).

Thus, while just transition originated as a concept within industrial relations, it is aligned with the social development ideal of leaving no one behind. This study uses just transition as the theoretical framework in assessing the PUVMP modernization program.

The PUVMP has been cited for its manifest injustices or condemned as a breach of just transition (Fortaleza, 2019; Tiu, 2021; Mendoza, 2021; Bendaña et al., 2021). The PUVMP is in fact a litmus test of the climate change policies of the Philippines and its pronouncements for just transition as well as its avowed employment agenda of decent work and social dialogue.

In 2016, the Philippines was included among a few countries to take part in an ILO pilot project on just transition. The pilot project intended to jumpstart the application of the “Guidelines on Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies” that was released by the ILO in October 2015. According to the Guidelines:

Just transition for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy, as described in this document, needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty... Economies must be productive to meet the needs of the world's growing population. Societies must be inclusive, providing opportunities for decent work for all, reducing inequalities and effectively eliminating poverty (ILO, 2015, p. 4).

The drafting of the implementing rules and regulations of the Green Jobs Act was one of the results of the pilot project (Just Transition and Equitable Climate Action Resource Center, n.d.). The rules aspired to:

Pursue a just transition for all, job security for workers affected by the transition process which drives economic prosperity, decent job creation, sustainable and resilient livelihoods and communities, poverty reduction and social justice, anchored on social dialogue and tripartism at all levels (Department of Labor and Employment, 2017, p. 1).

Therefore, the basic tenets of just transition—decent work and social dialogue—were codified through the Green Jobs Act's implementing rules. However, were actual deeds aligned with these lofty declarations?

The contradictions in the implementation of the PUVMP, its frequently securitized enforcement and the pandemic woes experienced by informal jeepney workers expose the PUVMP as misaligned with just transition and the aim of leaving no one behind. Instead, jeepney drivers and operators are left behind subjects in a discriminatory transition under the modernization program.

Fighting for Just Transition Within the Modernization Program

The demands and position of jeepney groups that call for an outright rejection of the PUVMP are sufficiently documented (Alternative Development Program, 2023; Dimalanta,

et al., 2023; IBON Foundation, 2018; Mendoza, 2021). It is argued that the modernization program is a neoliberal reform that privileges local and foreign capital to the detriment of informal transport workers and the commuting public. Thus, phasing out traditional jeepneys in favor of modern and electric vehicles are unnecessary and ultimately favors big capitalists while informal workers lose their livelihoods.

Jeepney organizations PISTON and MANIBELA demand the total junking of the PUVMP and the repudiation not extension of the consolidation requirement (Relativo, 2023; Tan 2023; Yu, 2023). On the opposite side of the fence are other big jeepney organizations supporting the modernization program (Laqui, 2024). Straddling the extreme positions of outright rejection and full support, the group National Confederation of Transportworkers' Union (NCTU) critically engages the government on the implementation of the PUVMP in pursuit of ensuring just transition within the modernization program. NCTU is a member of the Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO), an affiliate of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), and also a member of Move As One.

Critical engagement describes the actions of groups which accept the necessity for jeepney modernization as a measure to mitigate climate change and traffic congestion but seek reform of the program so that affected workers are transitioned to better working conditions. In other words, critical engagement demands the incorporation of just transition within the PUVMP modernization. The NCTU tactics provide a critical case study of the constraints and potentials of achieving just transition within the modernization program. There is a gap in the literature on the question of critical engagement with the modernization scheme. Thus, the rationale for this study. What can be achieved and not attained through critical engagement with the modernization program for the purpose of just transition for workers? This is a question that is relevant to probe.

Arguably, critical engagement is fraught with difficulties given the discriminatory design and enforcement of the PUVMP. NCTU's standpoint, however, considers the real need for a transition in the quest for climate mitigation. Aligned with NCTU's position is the Move As One. Using the lens of just transition to the contentious PUVMP, Move As One supported the concept of modernization but firmly demanded the revision of PUVMP (Bendaña et al., 2021).

For this study, key informants were two NCTU leaders: one based in Metro Manila and another in Metro Cebu, and a representative of Move As One whose father is a jeepney operator and driver. Zoom interviews were held since the research was conducted during the pandemic. Aside from informant interviews and content analysis of the NCTU social media, participant observation was utilized to gain insights for the study. From 2021 to 2022, the author carried out commissioned and non-commissioned research that inquired on the pandemic impact, just transition, social protection and mental health of informal jeepney workers with respondents from NCTU. This experience gave the author valuable discernment on the motivations, perceptions and beliefs that shaped the critical engagement tactic of NCTU.

Influenced by the advocacy for just transition of both ITF and SENTRO, NCTU conducted educational discussions before the pandemic among its leaders and members, mainly jeepney informal workers, on the necessity for just transition and its concrete application in the Philippines. This gave NCTU leaders and members solid preparation for understanding the nexus between climate change, decent work, just transition and the modernization program. It is on the basis of this understanding that NCTU forged its position of critical engagement with PUVMP. The group sought changes to the application and enforcement of the program to align with the tenets of just transition, that is, decent work,

social dialogue and social protection. NCTU explicitly framed its position as just transition for workers within the transport modernization scheme.

Meanwhile, Move As One agreed with replacing traditional jeepneys with modern jeeps and their consolidation into fleets through formation of jeepney cooperatives, not corporations. The group consistently fought for raising the government subsidy for modern jeepneys to half a million. While that may appear too big, Move As One asserted that it is actually cost effective compared to the alternative of rail development. The group pointed out that the PHP 400 billion cost of buying modern jeepneys to service 40 million commuters compares favorably with the PHP 360 billion cost of the Metro Manila subway that will service only 400,000 commuters per day (Bendaña et al., 2021).

Further, Move As One argued that informality in general, and the boundary system specifically, seriously deprives jeepney drivers and even operators of social protection. The boundary system enables competition among jeepney drivers for passengers and exacerbates traffic. Thus, shifting from informality to formality through implementing a just transition and service contracting is an imperative reform (Bendaña et al., 2021).

Possibilities of a Just Transition Within the Jeepney Modernization

Fighting together for just transition within the modernization program afforded synergy for Move As One and NCTU. Move As One was instrumental in fortifying the lobbying capacity and policy proposals of NCTU. NCTU, along with other grassroots organizations, gave Move As One a social movement handle.

Working together, they were able to get solidarity from certain legislators for the just transition demand during the pandemic. Critical engagement gave NCTU and Move As One concrete victories in their advocacy.

One positive outcome of critical engagement was the higher number of traditional jeepneys allowed to ply their routes as the lockdowns were eased in the latter half of 2020.

This was a result of dialogues with local government units at the city, municipal and provincial levels, and also at the national level through lobbying with the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) and DOTr.

Move as One claimed that one of its wins was the doubling of the government subsidy for modern jeepneys to PHP 160,000 from the initial measly amount of PHP 80,000 (Bendaña et al., 2021). In the post-pandemic period, lobbying would further raise the subsidy to PHP 210,000 and PHP 280,000. However, Move As One continues to advocate for a PHP 500,00 equity subsidy.

The successive extensions of the deadline for fleet consolidation was also attained through consistent and determined dialogue, and lobbying with the LTFRB and DOTr. The original deadline for consolidation into corporations or cooperatives was June 30, 2020. It was moved to December 31, 2020, then to March 31, 2021, and so on.

While the deadlines for consolidation were extended, NCTU aggressively moved to have its membership organized into jeepney cooperatives, as allowed by the PUVMP. NCTU's membership of some 4,000 in nine key cities and provinces were consolidated into 18 cooperatives.

A very innovative advocacy of NCTU and Move As One was the push for transitioning to service contracting as the new normal in public transportation. *Service contracting* is the engagement by the government of bus companies, modern jeepney corporations, jeepney cooperatives and traditional jeepney associations to transport commuters for free. Government paid the companies, corporations, cooperatives and associations a contract fee to provide the service on certain routes during periods within the pandemic.

NCTU and Move As One successfully lobbied for service contracting and government funds were allocated for two years. PHP 5.5 billion was earmarked in 2020 for

service contracting and inserted in the second pandemic assistance, the so-called Bayanihan 2 Law. But the rollout of service contracting confronted a lot of implementation issues such as long delays in payment of jeepney operators and drivers who were contracted. In the end, only PHP 2.5 billion was spent. Thus, Move as One and NCTU moved to have the balance of PHP 3 billion allotted for another round of service contracting in 2021. Service contracting continued in late 2021 until the amount was exhausted. Among the beneficiaries of service contracting were NCTU jeepney cooperatives in Cebu. Service contracting gave jeepney cooperatives a secure income for a certain period and this helped moderate their members' anxieties amid the vagaries of the pandemic.

On the basis of this experience, Move As One and NCTU advocated that service contracting be transitioned from COVID support to the better normal of public transport. Service contracting can have positive outcomes for all stakeholders—commuting public, jeepney operators and jeepney drivers—in the transport ecosystem. Struggling jeepney operators collectivized in cooperatives gain from a stable income source as a result of government service contracts lasting several years. Informal jeepney drivers shift to formal work as employees of cooperatives and enjoy the protection afforded by formal employment relations such as labor rights and standards. Lastly, commuters benefit from a reliable and safe transport system.

Limits of Critical Engagement to Reform the PUVMP

Despite these wins on several aspects of reforming the PUVMP, NCTU and Move As One grappled with difficulties in achieving their other demands in the face of intransigence by the government, and also the challenges in navigating the transition into jeepney cooperatives.

The prohibition against traditional jeepneys from operating during the COVID lockdowns was censured by NCTU and Move As One as discriminatory. Among their initial

calls was for the operation of traditional jeepneys as the COVID lockdowns were loosened. They argued that the open-air design of traditional jeepneys allowed for greater safety while also providing livelihood to informal transport workers who were among the most economically affected by the pandemic quarantine. As with many other reasonable proposals from grassroots organizations and critical experts during pandemic, this demand fell on deaf ears (Pazzibugan, 2020).

While consolidating into jeepney cooperatives meant that jeepney operators can continue with their livelihood, it was just among the first of many hurdles that they had to overcome. According to NCTU (2024), more than half of jeepney operators who consolidated have not been approved for financing to purchase modern jeepneys. A key roadblock was the absence of Local Public Transport Route Plans (LPTRP) which was a requirement of banks for approval of loans for the modernization program. As of July 2024, only a quarter of LPTRPs have been completed (Yu, 2024c). Formulating the LPTRP is a responsibility of local government units and is a frequent bottleneck in the PUVMP. “Alternative certificates” were accepted by the banks in lieu of the LPTRP requirement—as a result of lobbying by jeepney cooperatives—but even that also faced gridlocks in the bureaucracy.

Aside from the demand to raise the subsidy for modern jeepneys to PHP 500,000 and for a permanent service contracting program which remain unmet, NCTU (2024) also called on the government to develop the infrastructure for the manufacturing and servicing of electric jeepneys and vehicles. The lack of facilities for charging stations persist and present a crucial barrier to the operation of modern electric jeepneys.

In a statement, NCTU (2024, para. 4) summed up these issues with the cry that “... those that complied with the program are struggling with so many issues in its implementation? We strongly believe that the LTFRB and DOTr must implement sound policies and responses to address these challenges.”

Finally, morphing from conventional associations to jeepney cooperatives presented a variety of problems to NCTU. In a cooperative, jeepney drivers would be hired as workers on formal contracts. For NCTU, the shift from informal to formal work was one key normative goal of just transition within the modernization program, aside from climate mitigation.

Traditional associations are composed of both jeepney operators and jeepney drivers. NCTU members who were operators transitioned into members of the cooperative. However, it was very challenging for cooperatives to recruit jeepney drivers as members. They preferred to remain hired employees only and not enlist as cooperative members, despite prodding by NCTU.

Another barrier that NCTU had to overcome was ensuring cooperatives are able to manage jeepney fleets. Thus, NCTU formulated capacity building and training programs for its leaders. Orientation and training on cooperative principles, financial management and organizational development were among the activities of NCTU. While the government kept on imposing deadlines, jeepney groups were largely left on their own to consolidate into cooperatives.

NCTU respondents—while proud of their successes in helping consolidate jeepney associations into cooperatives not corporations—expressed that some jeepney operators are unable or unwilling to consolidate due to the lack of viable leadership and resources. The Move As One respondent also alluded to interpersonal relations among jeepney drivers and operators as factors that may affect decisions to consolidate.

In the face of the jeepney protests by MANIBELA and PISTON against the impending consolidation deadline in late 2023, NCTU expressed solidarity for the fellow jeepney drivers and operators who have remained unconsolidated. The group raised the concern for the impending joblessness of jeepney colleagues who remained unconsolidated in their status, which according to Partido Manggagawa's (2023) estimate is around 148,000.

Critical engagement with PUVMP did not serve as a barrier for NCTU to express solidarity with those that chose to directly oppose the modernization. Nonetheless, NCTU's symbolic solidarity did not extend to concrete participation in the protests of PISTON and MANIBELA. This is probably rooted in the historical rivalries among jeepney organizations, on the one hand. On the other hand, this may also be due to NCTU's shift away from mass actions as dictated by pandemic conditions and also its focus on running jeepney cooperatives. Still, NCTU should reassess its repertoire of tactics since street actions, as shown by the protest campaign of PISTON and MANIBELA which garnered popular support, is once more possible in the currently relatively more open conditions in contrast with the heavily securitized COVID situation.

Conclusion

In one social media post, the LTFRB chairperson stated:

Walang maiiwan sa PUV Modernization Program ng ating pamahalaan. Walang driver o operator ang mawawalan ng pangkabuhayan dahil hindi po sapilitan ang pag modernize ng inyong jeep. Isa lang po ang ating prayoridad ang kaligtasan ng ating mga commuters, kaya kung ang jeepneys po ninyo ay "roadworthy" kasama po namin kayo sa PUV Modernization Program [No one will be left behind in the PUV Modernization Program of our government. No driver or operator will lose their livelihood because this is not a forced modernization of your jeep. Our only priority is the safety of our commuters, so if your jeepney is "roadworthy," you are included in the PUV Modernization Program] (LTFRB, 2023).

The group Move As One released its assessment of the modernization program:

The PUVMP in its current form is doomed to fail because it is trying to do everything, everywhere, all at once. There are serious gaps in how the PUVMP's current planning and implementation meet the policy objectives of the program as well as the overall

welfare of the public. The PUVMP needs to put commuter service quality as its ultimate policy objective while ensuring a just transition where no transport worker is left behind. In its current form, the program fails to do both (Move As One Coalition, 2024, para. 2).

As a concrete proposal, Move As One proposed that PUVMP be piloted first in a few cities where jeepney organizations already have a buy-in for the modernization scheme which can then serve as a model for the rest of the country and for the whole program.

This stark contrast between the declared goals of PUVMP and its actual implementation reveals the contradictions about the modernization program. The principle of just transition explicitly provides that workers should not be left behind in the process of change in response to the polycrisis—climate change, job automation and economic disruptions. In fact, the premise of just transition is that workers must reap the benefits of socio-economic changes in the form of improved working and living conditions. But the design and enforcement of PUVMP—formulated with hardly any social dialogue and enforced frequently in a securitized fashion—shows it to be a discriminatory transition, with jeepney drivers and operators sacrificed in its wake and bearing its costs.

Thousands of jeepney operators who did not consolidate stand to lose their individual franchises and traditional livelihoods, along with their drivers. The next phase after consolidation, transitioning the remaining traditional jeepneys into modern ones portends another wave of job loss if done without higher equity subsidies and full government assistance.

Even those who have chosen to consolidate into jeepney cooperatives face formidable implementation issues such as lack of support and bureaucratic inertia. Transitioning from jeepney associations into cooperatives was not smooth sailing as it entailed an allocation of material and human resources that organizations had to develop on their own without

government support. Slow processing by the various government branches of requirements for jeepney cooperatives who had bought into the program contrasted with authorities' insistence on strict deadlines for consolidation.

The dogged resistance of some jeepney organizations to the entire PUVMP is understandable. Nonetheless, the experience of groups such as NCTU and Move As One in critically engaging the government uncover the potentials and constraints of fighting for just transition within the modernization program.

In the context of the pandemic when the conventional jeepney strike was impossible to undertake or mass protests were difficult to conduct due to security and safety issues, critical engagement appeared to be a suitable tactic instead of direct opposition. NCTU and Move As One garnered concrete wins in their effort at lobbying and dialogue during and after the pandemic.

Still, while critical engagement by Move As One and NCTU led to palpable changes in several aspects of PUVMP, other demands were met with intransigence. It faced the government's bias against social dialogue and for market-driven solutions. Government's design and implementation of the modernization program went against the fundamental belief of NCTU (2024, para. 7) that "transport workers must be at the center of the formulation and implementation of the PUVMP."

The tension between the limits and possibilities of achieving just transition within a discriminatory modernization scheme can only be resolved in a real-life struggle of paradigms between the actors involved. With a worsening transportation crisis, any chance of reform lies in how this conflict plays out.

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