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Editorial

Workers at the forefront of the struggle against poverty and oppression

On May one, let us reaffirm the leadership of the working class in the struggle of the Filipino people against imperialist impositions and oppression and its brutal neoliberal policies. Under working class leadership, the entire people must unite to unleash gigantic struggles that will rock the neoliberal state and the entire ruling system.

Over the past four decades, neoliberal policies have been primarily geared against workers. These policies dismantled all hard-won labor rights that have been recognized during most part of the last century. These policies gave capitalists all freedom to exploit labor by stretching work-hours and pressing down wages.

These also gave foreign big capitalists and local ruling classes the right to plunder and exploit the land and natural resources and oppress the toiling people. These caused the further worsening of the different aspects of the Philippine semicolonial and semifeudal system.

Under neoliberal policies, peasants' demand for land reform has been devoided of the peasants' right to land and their clamor for social justice, reducing it to a mere real estate transaction. This has resulted in widespread landgrabbing by big landlords, real estate companies, big foreign capitalists in agribusiness and contract-growing of export crops.

Services, utilities and resources were privatized and the rights to free education, housing and other social services were overturned. Under the neoliberal system, there is no industrialization nor modernization of manufacturing and agri-

culture. Foreign commodities are dumped into the country to the detriment of local products. Bureaucrat capitalism worsens as the state serves the interests of big business under the "public-private partnership."

Cash doleouts (4Ps) complemented privatization. Social services funds were slashed to line the pockets of the big capitalists in the form of PPP of schools and hospitals. Even as 4Ps was implemented, the state allowed the public service infrastructure to deteriorate.

Unemployment, landlessness, poverty and oppression of the toiling masses are widespread. Worker and peasant oppression are bound to worsen under the neoliberal regime and amid the unresolvable and worsening crisis of the world capitalist system.

Amid worsening oppression and poverty, there is resounding clamor of the Filipino people to end the burdensome and op-

pressive neoliberal policies that favor the unrestricted capitalist right to accumulate profit and plunder the country's wealth. They have an unstoppable aspiration for genuine land reform, wage increase, jobs, free education, free health care and other public service, lower price, housing and others.

The oppressed classes and sectors must unite to fight for the democratic aspirations and build their organized strength from the community, office, factory and other basic levels to the district, regional and national levels. They must generate widespread and vigorous mass struggles that will bring together their broadest unity.

The Filipino working class must be at the forefront of the struggle against poverty, hunger and oppression. The working class possesses the most advanced scientific instruments to analyze and grasp the roots of the people's poverty and set forth the tasks to oppose and put an end to these through collective



struggle.

Such leadership is realized through the party of the proletariat and the active struggle of the workers and widespread participation in the struggle of other democratic sectors.

The struggle of the mass of workers against the neoliberal regime is presently geared to achieving a national minimum wage and raising the workers' daily wage to P750. This struggle will unite the mass of workers in advancing their urgent demands and encourage them to vigorously advance other bigger struggles for the workers and the entire people.

The party of the proletariat is deeply and broadly rooted among the masses of workers in their factories and communities. Hundreds of thousands to several million workers must be organized in factory unions, associations and other organizations appropriate to their situation. Impediments to organizing are overcome. Their class consciousness is raised and they are forged in the field of struggle.

The proletariat must untiringly reach out to the broad masses of the people and organize, inspire and lead their struggles. The working class must thoroughly support and sympathize with the struggles of the peasantry and other sectors such as their support for the peasants of Kidapawan.

They must link up the struggle of various sectors with the general challenge against the neoliberal regime imposed on the semicolonial and semifeudal system. They must firmly link up the various struggles against poverty and oppression with the national-democratic struggle to overthrow imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.

Under the leadership of the party of the proletariat, worker activists and cadres must be assigned as organizers and leaders of the various sectors, especially in the countryside. They must be assigned in their numbers to the field of armed struggle to serve as Red fighters, commanders and political guides of the New People's Army. **AB**

Neoliberal policies in the labor sector

SINCE the 1980s, there has been no let-up in the implementation of neoliberal policies against the Filipino working class. Labor flexibility and wage reduction and repression schemes are widespread.

The most extensive neoliberal labor policies in the country were enacted under the first US-Aquino regime. In 1989, Republic Act (RA) 6715 (Herrera Law) was enacted, dismantling employment regulations and paving the way for various forms of contractualization and flexible employment schemes.

On the same year, the RA 6727 or the Wage Rationalization Act which created the capitalist-controlled Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board (RTWPB) was also enacted. It ended the previous system where the national minimum wage was set at the national level and instead, delegated the RTWPB to set wages at the regional level. This system enabled wage reduction in regions where foreign-funded export-processing zones are located.

It was also in 1999 that RA 6715 or the National Labor Relations Act was enacted and served as an extensive and comprehensive basis in the systematic dismantling of existing unions, prevention of the creation of new ones and suppression of the right to strike. The worst among its provisions is the Assumption of Jurisdiction (AJ) which gave the Department of Labor and Employment secretary the sole authority to preempt and stop strikes in the name of "national interests." By using this provision, the state assumed jurisdiction in many of the big strikes in 1990s, including strikes by big unions in the Philippine Airlines, PLDT, San Miguel Corporation and SM.

In the next years, successive regimes amended and made these laws worse through executive,



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DOLE and other departmental orders.

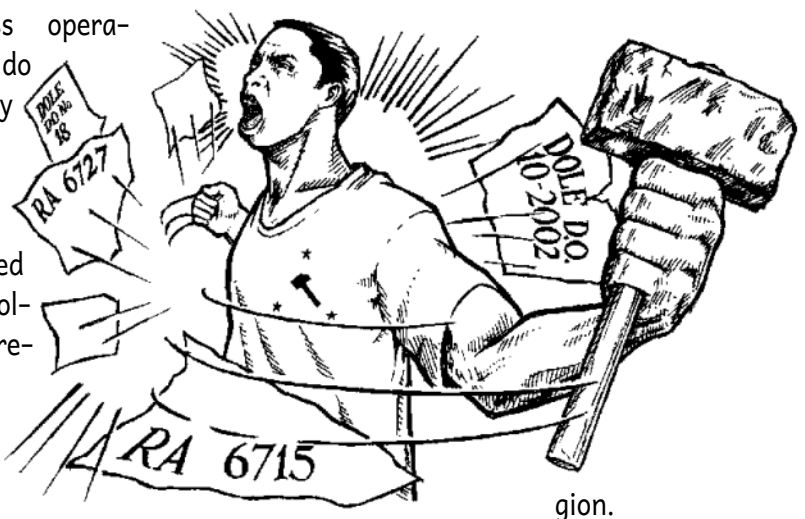
In 2002, the DOLE issued the Department Order 10-2002 which allowed the employment of contractals for the entire duration of production (i.e., beyond the six-month period which requires employers to regularize workers) in processes it deemed "non-core" to the production line. This order was used by Tanduay Distillers' factory wherein workers who have been with the company for up to 15 years were not regularized as they are not at the "core" of the production line.

In 2010, the current regime consolidated various investment policies through the Department of Interior and Local Government and Department of Trade and Investment's Joint Circular Memorandum 01 supposedly to expedite the capitalists' entry and operations. This memorandum created "business one-stop shops" in various cities to speed up the opening and renewal

of business operations. To do so, safety standards protecting workers were relaxed or even abolished. Prerequisites such as building inspections

for safety regulations, for example, were waived. Thus, in the past six years, a minimum of four factory fires were recorded due to this neglect, the worst of which is the Kentex fire last year.

On the wage front, the two-tier wage system which was first implemented in 2012 is set to be completed this year. By July 2015, 92 out of 107 minimum wage rates in eight regions have been declared Tier-1 compliant, including wage rates in the National Capital Re



gion.

In 2012, the DOLE Department Order No. 18-A was issued to solidify the use of agencies in hiring contractals and dismantled capitalist-worker relations in big companies. Most of the recent cases in dismissal and withholding of benefits stem from this order, including that of mass media workers in GMA7 and ABS-CBN. This was also used as the legal basis for withholding the regular status of Coca-Cola workers in Laguna who were reduced to contractals. AB

Government employees rally for decent salaries

SUCCESSIVE protest actions were staged by government employees together with nurses to push for their right to decent salaries. These mobilizations are in preparation for the massive protests to be staged by workers on May 1 against oppression and poverty.

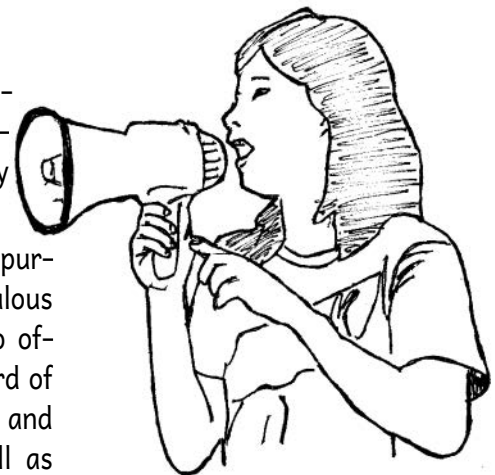
Last April 15, employees of the Civil Aviation authority of the Philippines (CAAP) manifested their opposition to the government's disallowances on salary increases and benefits already given to them since 2012. CAAP employees hung black banners bearing the words "Mayday, Mayday" in airports across the country. The CAAP employs 1,775 personnel.

On the same day, Department of Justice employees also protested the retraction of their salary increases and benefits. Thousands of employees from the courts at the municipal level up to the Supreme Court wore black in their weekly "Black Friday" protests.

The Aquino regime ordered the recall of government employees'

salary increases and benefits purportedly to review scandalous salaries and those accorded to officials and members of the board of trustees of government owned and controlled corporations as well as government financial institutions.

The Confederation for Unity, Recognition, and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE) expressed solidarity and support to the protest actions. Ferdinand Gaité, COURAGE president, said that government employees deserve such salary increases and other benefits that they have been receiving in the past. He said the CAAP employees' situation mirrors that of the vast majority of the 1.4 million government employees whose salaries have long been pegged at



starvation levels.

COURAGE also said that many employees of the government have already received disallowances, and many others were ordered to return the benefits that they have been enjoying in previous years.

Meanwhile, around 100 nurses led by the Alliance of Health Workers (AHW) and the Filipino Nurses United (FNU) staged a picket in front of the Philippine General Hospital last April 14 to push for a minimum monthly salary of P25,000 and demand for the abolition of con-

tractualization.

They also criticized the Salary Standardization Law of 2015, which, aside from giving them a meager P20 per day, also threatens the benefits granted to health workers. Robert Mendoza of AHW said that benefits such as hazard pay, longevity pay, night differential, and subsistence and clothing allowance, while gained through struggle by the workers in the health sector, are not

even uniformly enjoyed by all government health workers.

FNU on the other hand said that it is unfortunate that skilled nurses are endlessly leaving for developed countries due to very low salaries paid to Philippine nurses. The group said that their march expresses their solidarity with all registered nurses, especially those barely earning enough to make a living. AB

Musahamat workers victorious

MUSAHAMAT workers took down their protest camp in victory after the company agreed to their demands. These include: regularization of 52 contractual workers; reinstatement of all suspended workers; and a P1,500 aid to those who completed their suspensions.

The 52 contractual workers have long been with the company. They refused to sign new contracts which did not recognize them as regular workers for which they were fired, along with other union members. On March 28, their union filed a notice of strike.

The workers are well aware that their struggles do not end after their initial demands are met. The union is now preparing to negotiate a decent CBA to further its members' economic and non-economic benefits.

TV5 employees set to strike

A STRIKE by TV5 employees is set to erupt after CBA negotiations between the union and the station's owner fell through last April 15. According to union president Vladimir Martin, they have already lowered their demand for higher wages from P8,300 to P5,000 for the next three years. The company refused even this concession. Instead it offered a P3,500 wage increase for the next three years: P500 for the first year, P1,500 for the second and

...continued at p. 5

Thousands of peasants protest in Northern Mindanao

THOUSANDS of peasants and Lumad people trooped to the cities and town centers in Northern Mindanao to protest the government's inaction and neglect in addressing the extreme drought in the island. They likewise demanded the local government distribute calamity subsidies and increase farm workers wages.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines) stated that the peasants are the worst hit by the drought. Irineo Udarbe, Secretary General of KMP in the region, said that "however innovative the farmers are in looking for alternative crops to plant, or finding some growths that are edible, there is simply nothing but hectares of dust that even weed won't grow on."

In Bukidnon province' Valencia City, a protest of 5,000 peasants led by Kasama Bukidnon (Kahugpungan sa mga Mag-uuma sa Bukidnon or Association of Peasants in Bukidnon) victoriously negotiated 4,200 sacks from the city government, and are expecting additional subsidy from the provincial government.

Also in San Fernando town in Bukidnon, 3,000 farmers gathered at the municipal hall to demand the government's action towards their situation. The 68th IB and the PNP failed twice to block the marching protesters.

In Pangantucan, more than 1,000 farm workers pushed for wage increase, aside from government subsidy. According to Jun Benemerito of Kasama Bukidnon, what farm workers had been earning with regular work is not enough to feed their families. He said that government should extend its support to the farmers, lest they be driven to

subsume their lands to big plantations.

Potable water is also becoming scarce in the town of Maramag. Last April 18, the peasant organization Buffalo-Tamaraw-Limus led 1,500 farmers in a protest action against landgrabbing by a state university and a big plantation.

Simultaneous with the Maramag protests is the march of a thousand farmers coming from Dangcagan town. Similar protests are also set to be launched on April 20 by peasants coming from Malaybalay City. Three thousand marchers are expected to participate in the protest.

Kasama Bukidnon further said that these protest actions will peak on April 21-22 where no less than 7,000 farmers from different towns and cities in Bukidnon will mass up to demand subsidy from the provincial government.

Meanwhile, in the province of Misamis Oriental, an estimated 2,000 members of Misamis Oriental Farmers' Association from eight barangays of Salay town gathered at the municipal hall last April 15. The protesters were successful in pushing the local government to sign a resolution releasing 5% of the calamity funds for the farmers. Similar protests and dialogues were also staged in the towns of Opol on April 15, and El Salvador on April 18.

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another P1,500 for the third, though half of the second and third year increases will be based on the company's "productivity" and employee "performance."

The union refused the company offer. That day, they put to vote their intention to go on strike if negotiations deadlocked. Up to 87% of all union members voted to go on strike.

Workers call for the closure of regional wage boards

KILUSANG Mayo Uno members picketed the National Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board on April 14 to call for the closure of regional wage boards which are being used to deny workers a national minimum wage. They condemned the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) secretary's announcement that regional wage boards have already met the workers' needs through the two-tier wage system. According to the DOLE, minimum wages in 10 regions have already closed the poverty gap.

The KMU denounced the use of the poverty threshold as basis for the minimum wage. Wages should be determined by the living wage, and not by the government's arbitrary and manipulated poverty standards, it said. AB

Landgrabbing in North Cotabato

Six thousand farmers who barricaded the highway in front of the National Food Authority in Kidapawan City were violently dispersed last April 1. Two farmers were killed while hundreds were wounded and more than 70 were illegally arrested.

Majority of the farmers who joined the protest come from different towns in North Cotabato. Aside from enduring the devastating drought, they are also victims of the more basic problem of landgrabbing.

North Cotabato is composed of 17 municipalites, with a land area of 900,800 hectares. Eleven of these municipalities are presently experiencing extreme hunger and hardship brought about by drought.

While farmers are starving and landless, big landlord-compradors in the region continue to harvest banana and other products for export to imperialist countries.

Even before the effects of El Nino, landgrabbing by huge agribusinesses such as Sumifru and Dole-Stanfilco has posed a big problem to farmers. Thousands of farmers have been displaced to pave way for the expansion of pineapple and banana plantations.

In North Cotabato alone, 32,066 hectares in Antipas town are already occupied by rubber plantations while the local government projects to expand palm oil plantations to 58,769 hectares. In 2015, rubber plantations also operate in municipalities of Alameda, Arakan, Antipas, Magpet, Makilala and M'lang. Their monthly yields average 1.6 metric tons (mt) per hectare.

Kidapawan has the most extensive and highest coconut production in the entire province. This covers almost 4,548 hectares with annual harvests of 1.48 mt per hectare. Banana plantations have expanded to around 15,000 hectares with annual yields of 24 mt of lakatan, 30 mt of Cardava and 40 mt of Cavendish.

More than a million hectares of grasslands in North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and regions of Caraga and Northern Mindanao have been converted to palm oil plantations.

Moreover, these companies also aggressively expand their control of land through various forms of landgrabbing such as growership, leasehold, leaseback and voluntary offer to sell which were created by big compradors and landlord to serve the interest of their imperialist boss.

The state connives with the AFP and police forces to ensure and facilitate the entry and smooth operations of huge agribusiness in the area.

Only around 12,980 hectares have been subjected to the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). Of the 204,000 beneficiaries of CARP in Region 12, 90% could not afford to pay the amortizations or were forced to lease the land to transnational corporations and enter outgrower contracts. In this system, they have become mere farmworkers of these corporations on the lands they are paying for under CARP.

Agricultural workers also suffer extreme exploitation. According to the local government of Cotabato, the provincial average daily minimum wage is only P240. Majority of the workers in Dole and Sumifru are contractual.

With a 20,000 workforce, Dole only maintains 4,000 regular workers while Sumifru has 5,000. These companies also attempt to bust and harass the existing unions.

The vast agribusiness plantations also damage the country's rich forest and natural resources. The environment is destroyed by indiscriminate use of pesticides and other chemicals. These result in diseases and land and water pollution in indigenous peoples' communities.

At present, the true owners of the land remain enslaved while environmentally destructive transnational corporations exploit their wealth and push them into further poverty and hunger. AB

The US-Aquino regime is insensitive to the people's hardships due to drought

“AQUINO’S unparalleled incompetence and gross negligence in addressing the prolonged drought is among the main culprits in the bloody carnage of farmers in Kidapawan,” said Rafael Mariano, chairperson of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP).

He said that the drought has been dragging on since February 2015 and yet no decisive action was taken by the Aquino government.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration had declared on May 2014 that El Niño was going to happen for until the coming year. It confirmed this on September 2015, and on other succeeding bulletins, declared that this was continuing and increasing in intensity.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) also declared that 44 of the 81 Philippine provinces were vulnerable. It reported on April 2016 that drought damages to Philippine agriculture have reached P5.53 billion since February 2015, where P2.1 billion were sustained from January to March this year alone. In a memorandum, it announced that 252,176 hectares of land amounting to 383,743 metric tonnes of products were affected. Corn was worst hit at P2.9 billion and rice at P2.38 billion worth of damaged crops.

In Mindanao, which produces 40% of food in the Philippines, 17

provinces were devastated, including Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga

Sibugay, Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Compostela Valley, Davao del Sur, Davao Oriental, South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu at Tawi-Tawi. Damages have reached P823 million worth of crops. In Region 12 alone, P450 million have been destroyed. In the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), more than P110-million worth of agricultural products have been hit.

From 2015 until April this year, 11 provinces and at least 17 municipalities have declared a state of emergency. Three cities, Cotabato City, Zamboanga City and Iloilo City have also declared a state of calamity due to the scarcity of water for drinking and for household use. Drought has devastated the



livelihood of least 22,000 farmers in Maguindanao, 28,000 farmers in Davao del Sur, 25,000 farmers in North Cotabato, 11,000 farming families or 25% of the population in Kidapawan City, 9,380 families in Isabela, and 2,540 families in Guimaras.

Anakpawis has warned earlier that the lack of irrigation for the peasants will worsen. But the government made no decisive measures. Malacanang’s empty boast was that it was ready and had funds for any drought. Not only is the Aquino government unprepared or delayed in its calamity response, it has no intentions whatsoever of solving the drought problem.

The regime’s neoliberal policies do not give priority to funds or resources for agricultural development or the people’s food security, either in Kidapawan or the whole country. Government funds for agriculture have been steadily decreasing. Agricultural production services such as irrigation are being privatized. Agricultural infrastructure is extremely insufficient. World Bank data shows that since the 1990s, only 19.5% of

Province	Drought damages in hectares
Isabela	61,000 corn
NCot	50,000 rice and other crops
Bukidnon	31,750 corn; 4,317 rice; 1,705 cassava, sugarcane
Iloilo	32,800 rice
Maguindanao	18,831 rice and corn
Quirino	12,514 corn, 3,445 rice at 105 vegetable crop
Davao del Sur	6,427 corn; 5,576 rice
SoCot	11,011 rice, corn, high value crops, fishponds
Guimaras	2,722 rice
Cebu	87 sweetcorn, cauliflower, other high value crops

agricultural lands in the Philippines are irrigated. This is a far cry from 37.5% in China, 24.8% in Thailand, and 30.8% in Vietnam, the world's top rice exporters. In the National Irrigation Administration's (NIA) records, only 1.54 million hectares of the Philippines' agricultural land are irrigated. This is 25% of the 6.1 million irrigable land or 14% of the total agricultural land.

Half of the irrigation systems are managed by the NIA, which charges prohibitive service fees. In Tarlac, another drought-affected province, irrigation service fees amount to 6.6% of the total production expenses. In many instances, NIA or the watermasters withhold water flow because more than half of water from the dam is diverted to the Aquino businesses in Hacienda Luisita.

According to the KMP, Aquino has no response to the serious effects of drought on the peasants and local agriculture. The DA wastes money on corruption-vulnerable cloud seeding projects which use up a minimum of P45,000 per flight, and are not focused on areas direly in need of rain. Not only are peasants denied of their rights to food and production aid, the Liberal Party uses the food aid for election campaigns.

Aside from cloud-seeding, irrigation projects are also riddled with corruption. The anomalous P1.29 billion irrigation projects involving at least 195 instances of rigged contract bidding in Caraga have long been unearthed, but many more are not being investigated. No investigation has likewise been conducted into why NIA has failed to implement almost half of the projects with fund allocations in 2015. AB

Protest and support pour in for peasants

More than two weeks after the bloody dispersal of barricading peasants in Kidapawan, protests, condemnations and calls for justice continue to spread, as well as full support for the farmers.

With the help of well-known film and television stars and singers, 78 of the 80 illegally detained peasants charged with trumped-up charges have been set free last April 17. Television and film personalities gathered funds to bail out the farmers. With Aiza Seguerra and her wife Liza Diño at the lead, enough funds were collected from donors for the farmers to post bail amounting to P6,000 each. The National Union of People's Lawyers and other lawyers' groups helped in processing the legal requisites for the bail.

On April 8, a Global Day of Action for Food, Land, and Justice was spearheaded by Bagong Alyansang Makabayan. The bulk of the demonstrators gathered at Plaza Miranda in Quiapo before marching to Mendiola. The protest underscored the demand for full accountability from the Aquino regime and Cotabato's local government.

Painters and graphic designers meanwhile protested via the visual arts. Art pieces depicting the situation of Cotabato farmers and their demands were posted on the internet and on the streets. Among the artists are Neil Doloricon, Boy Dominguez, the Liga ng Kabataang Propagandista, the group BLEEP from Davao City, the group Ang Gerilya, TomasinoWeb and many others. The UP College of Fine Arts dedicated a mural on its freedom wall bearing the demands of the Cotabato farmers. AB

Activists in Aklan and Central Luzon also staged picket protests, while Hacienda Luisita farmers under Ambala-UMA expressed their solidarity for the Cotabato farmers.

The UP College of Engineering Student Council also campaigned for food for the peasants and Lumads, accountability from the government, and an end to human rights violations. Meanwhile, nuns belonging to the Missionary Sisters of Mary posted on the internet their photos holding "Rice Not Bullets" placards.

Abroad, groups calling for justice and condemning the violent repression of farmers in Kidapawan are increasing. Among these groups are Migrante-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Filipinos in Canberra, Australia, the International Migrants Alliance-USA Chapter, residents of Holland, ILPS-Africa, ILPS-Indonesia and Filipinos in the US headed by Anakbayan USA. The Hong Kong Campaign for the Advancement of Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines also condemned the massacre.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas also said that the organization's long-standing campaign for genuine land reform stands as the foremost solution to the peasants' problems.

Meanwhile, the revolutionary people of Eastern Visayas (EV) through the National Democratic Front-EV expressed their solidarity. AB

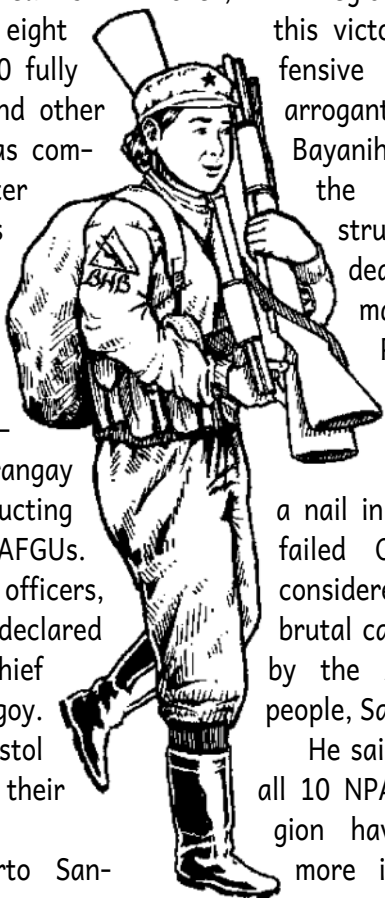
NPA-SMR seizes 23 firearms

The 1st Pulang Bagani Battalion (PBB)-Southern Mindanao Region confiscated 17 automatic rifles and three pistols in a raid on a 72nd IB-CAFGU detachment in Salapawan village, Paquibato District in Davao City last April 16 at 7 a.m.

Among the seized firearms were nine Garand rifles, eight M14s, 78 Garand clips, 30 fully loaded M14 magazines, and other war materiel. The raid was completed in 30 minutes after the two CAFGU elements who were abandoned by their fellow CAFGUs surrendered.

After the raid, another PBB unit arrested five police officers in nearby Barangay Mapula who were conducting operations to rescue the CAFGUs. Among the arrested police officers, who were subsequently declared prisoners-of-war, was Chief Inspector Leonardo Tarungoy. Two .9mm and a .45 pistol were confiscated from their persons.

According to Rigoberto San-



chez, NPA regional spokesperson, this victorious tactical offensive belies the AFP's arrogant claim that Oplan Bayanihan has weakened the NPA's armed struggle following the death of Red commander Leoncio Pitao (Ka Parago) last year. The said tactical offensive serves as a nail in the coffin of the failed Oplan Bayanihan, considered one of the most brutal campaigns launched by the AFP against the people, Sanchez added.

He said the 1st PBB and all 10 NPA units in the region have become even more inspired to wage

armed struggle, agrarian revolution, establish the seeds of a socialist government, squarely defeat the onslaught of heightened and sustained enemy attacks, and address the longstanding problems of the Filipino people.

Meanwhile, the NPA-South Central Bukidnon confiscated around 1,400 sacks of rice from a warehouse in Zone 11, Barangay Batangan, Valencia City last April 18 at 6 p.m.. The confiscated sacks were loaded onto four trucks.

The warehouse is owned by Helen Bernal, a city councilor belonging to the biggest comprador-landlord families in Valencia and neighboring towns. Bernal takes advantage of the drought by hoarding rice. The rice confiscation was undertaken amidst the protest movement of the peasantry against the Aquino regime's negligence and the widespread demand for rice aid.

The NPA said that the confiscated rice will be distributed to areas affected by the drought. **AB**

NPA confiscates machinegun and armalite in Samar

A K3 machinegun and one M16 were confiscated by the NPA-Samar in an ambush carried out against 87th IB troops in Sitio Guirang, Barangay New San Agustin, Basey last April 17, at around 8:30 a.m.. Five enemy troopers were wounded in the ambush.

On the same date at 10 p.m., a unit from the Rogelio Bantilo Command harassed an enemy outpost in Barangay Tagab-iran, Las Navas, Northern Samar. A sergeant from the 20th IB was killed.

Meanwhile, 9th ID troopers suffered seven casualties when the NPA-Bicol (Romulo Jallores Command) launched consecutive tactical offensives last April 14 and 15.

The Celso Minguez Command ambushed soldiers of the 31st IB in Barangay San Pascual, Casiguran on April 14, at around 2 a.m.. No less than three troopers were

killed and another two wounded. The casualties are part of a 10-man security patrol of a Peace and Development Team operation in the said village.

A harassment operation was also launched by the Santos Binamera Command against operating troops of the 2nd IB and CAFGU elements last April 15. The offensive was carried out at 6 p.m. in Barangay Malabiga, Libon. A CAFGU was killed while another was wounded.

In Batangas, a NPA-Batangas (Eduardo Dagli Command) unit torched a backhoe owned by big landlord Boy Unson last April 4. This action was carried out as punishment for his landgrabbing of more than 500 hectares in the town of Balayan. He is also in cahoots with DMCI and Southpacific Inc. in the destructive quarrying of sand in Barangay Pook which has already caused severe floodings in the area. **AB**

Groups denounce US defense secretary's visit

Protests and condemnation met US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter's visit to the country for the closing of the Balikatan 2016 on April 13-15. Meanwhile, national democratic organizations staged protests against the unequal military agreements in Angeles City and Cagayan de Oro City where three of the planned five US military bases are being constructed.

According to the Communist Party of the Philippines statement issued on April 15, Carter's visit heightened US intervention in the Philippines and war-mongering in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is an outright display of contempt of Philippine sovereignty and US high-handedness. His visit also served as an opportunity for saber-rattling and war provocations to taunt China with a display of military power.

To the Aquino regime, Carter's visit is relevant as it serves as an affirmation of its master's support. Carter is currently the US imperialists' baton wielder orchestrating the deployment and build-up of the giant US machinery in accordance with its Asia pivot aims of further fortifying US military power in the Asia-Pacific region to protect US economic and trade interests and contain the military and economic expansion of China.

Through Balikatan, the US flaunts its military strength in the country and the Asia-Pacific.

It also displays, promotes and tests its latest military assets, particularly the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), in the hope of further stimulating the market for US war commodities.

More over, Balikatan 2016 intensified US capability for armed intervention in the Philippines. By using "command post

exercises" or CPX, the US tightens its control and command of the highest level officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The US required the involvement of various AFP unified commands to consolidate its control over the AFP commanders in Luzon and Visayas. This command and control has previously been established by US military advisers and ground troops over Mindanao-based area commands of the AFP by participating in intelligence, psywar and combat against the Bangsa-moro army and New People's Army for the last 15 years.

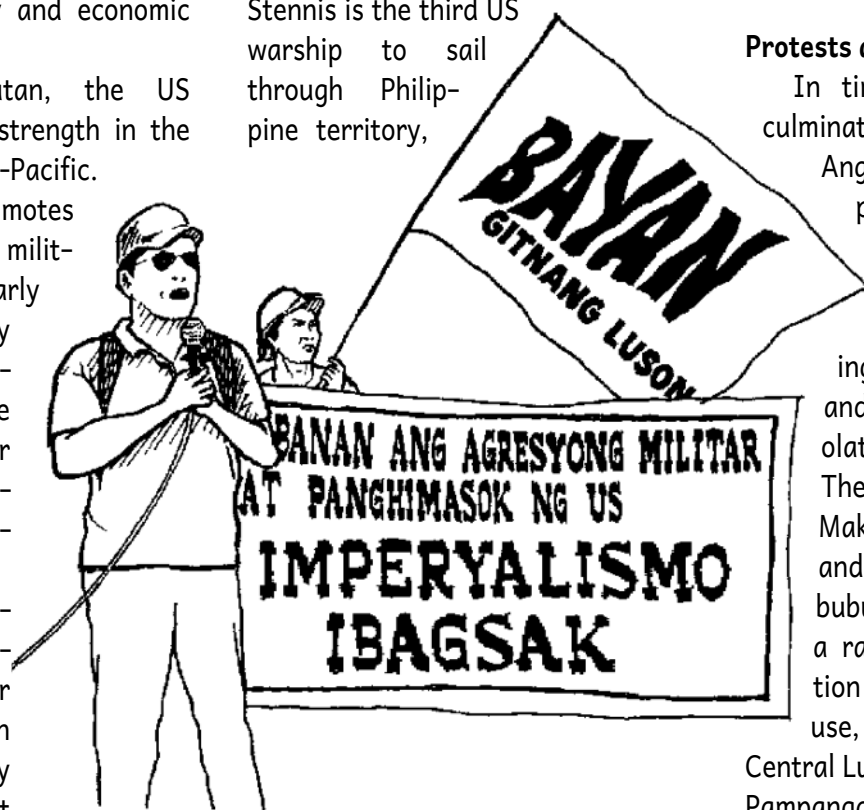
After the Balikatan 2016, Carter later proceeded to board the USS John C. Stennis warship and ordered its crew to make provocative approaches to the disputed islands and maritime formations in the South China Sea. The Stennis is the third US warship to sail through Philippine territory,

after the USS Lassen in October 2015 and USS Curtis Wilbur on January. These maneuvers are overt violations of sovereignty of the nations claiming islands and territories in the South China Sea. Carter's oft-repeated "iron-clad commitment" promise to the Philippines is only an attempt to look cute especially since he has already said in December 2015 that the US is not taking sides with any of the contending nations on their claims to the Spratly's.

The US is vigorously pushing for additional military camps that will accommodate the increasing presence of US troops in the Philippines, beyond those already agreed on by EDCA. In addition to the vehicles and war matériel used in Balikatan, the US also left behind nine war aircraft. These will be used purportedly for "joint" patrols at the South China Sea. The US also left 275 American troops that are supposedly rotational, but in truth will permanently base in the country to guard the war materiel it has left behind.

Protests and struggle

In time with the Balikatan's culmination, hundreds marched in Angeles City and held protests in front of the Clark Air Base on April 16 to demand the scrapping of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and EDCA which grossly violate national sovereignty. The Bagong Alyansang Makabayan-Gitnang Luzon and Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon led a rally against the construction of military bases for US use, two of which are in Central Luzon – the Basa Air Base in Pampanga and Fort Magsaysay in



Nueva Ecija.

Parts of the Balikatan Exercises were also held and US vehicles and war materiel are stationed in the region, particularly at Clark Air Base, Subic Bay, and Camp O'Donnell in Capas, Tarlac.

Protesters strongly denounced the worsening criminality and immorality in places near Balikatan areas. BAYAN-GL exposed the increase of prostitution dens and casinos in Pampanga and Tarlac which primarily victimize women and children. Indigenous Aetas are also being evicted from their ancestral land which are occupied by the camps and military reservation.

Meanwhile, the rallyists condemned the continued violence against farmers residing near Fort Magsaysay. Strafing, grenades, and arson have been used to drive the farmers away from their homes and livelihood. Aside from setting up military bases within the camp, there are also plans to put up another camp for the AFP Northern Luzon Command, along with the National Penitentiary and National Mental Hospital.

In Cagayan de Oro, members of the League of Filipino Students and Kabataan Partylist launched a protest against the Lumbia Airport's transformation into a US military base in line with EDCA. They staged the protest action also in commemoration of the 116th year of the "Battle of Cagayan de Misamis" (presently Cagayan de Oro City) where Cagayanons defended their place during the Philippine-American War. According to history, one of the biggest battles between Filipino and American soldiers occurred at Makahambus Hill, a place near Lumbia Airport where the US was defeated. AB

Boy killed by Scout Rangers in Davao

Alongside the massacre in Kidapawan, the reactionary state's armed forces continues with its murder, intimidation and militarization in different parts of the country. In recent weeks, a boy was killed, an activist was abducted, another was subjected to surveillance and thousands were forced to flee as a result of AFP operations.

Davao City. Soldiers belonging to the 6th Scout Ranger Company shot and killed an 11-year old boy in Sitio Mitundo, Barangay Baracatan in Toril District last April 1.

At the time of his killing, the boy was gathering firewood only a hundred meters away from the hut where three of his adult companions were stripping abaca fiber.

Rubi del Mundo of the NDF-Southern Mindanao Region condemned the 6th Scout Ranger Company's hypocrisy. Although the soldiers admitted to the crime, the 6th SRC lied and declared that they allegedly saw the child and his uncle carrying a rifle, prompting them to open fire. The NDF-SMR further said that the murder of the child is a war crime of the 6th SRC, the 10th ID and the whole AFP. Del Mundo also condemned the soldiers' intimidation of the boy's family in order to coerce them into accepting the 6th SRC's settlement.

Cagayan Valley. Elements belonging to the 17th IB abducted Tomasa Pastor from her home in Barangay Asingga-Via, Baggao, last April 11 at 3 a.m. Pastor, 54, is an active member of progressive organization Anakpawis-Baggao Chapter. She was subjected by the 17th IB to severe physical and mental torture for one and a half days before she was released by the soldiers.

The 17th IB has been encamped at Asingga-Via's barangay hall since September 2015 and has since been conducting PDT operations in the area, as well as in the

neighboring villages of Taging, Bunugan, Carrupian, Bagunot and Ibulo.

The 17th IB's intimidation and harassment of the Pastor family, who are active members of Anakpawis, coincided with the onset of the PDT operations. The family's house was continuously put under surveillance most especially in the late hours of the evening. Soldiers once unlawfully entered and ransacked the Pastors' home on the accusation that the family is hiding property belonging to the NPA.

Cordillera. Military agents subjected to surveillance and tailed Xavier Akien, a native Kankanaey and vice chairperson of Cordillera Peoples Alliance, last April 6 and 13.

Akien observed that his car was being followed while he was leaving a grocery in Baguio City until La Trinidad, Benguet. He identified four motorcycle-riding men and two vans as the ones conducting surveillance on him.

Basilan. Tipo-tipo residents displaced from their communities as a result of the AFP's continuous operations since April 9 against the Abu Sayyaf Group bandits have reached 3,590.

The residents fled the barangays of Baguindan, Silangkum, and Bohe Piang following the AFP's shelling of the area, including attacks from fighter planes and tanks to support advancing ground troops. Military operations of the AFP intensified after they suffered at least 18 soldiers dead and more than 50 wounded. AB

Picket for justice to Berta Caceres launched

PROGRESSIVE organizations staged a picket protest in front of the Honduran consulate in Pasig City last April 7 to demand justice for the killing of activist Berta Isabel Caceres. The picket was led by Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment and International League of People's Struggles.

Caceres was a well-known anti-imperialist activist and an indigenous Lenca of Honduras. She was killed inside her home last March 3, 2016.

She co-founded the environmental organization Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras or COPINH. This organization led protests to resist the construction of Agua Zarca Dam, which might have flooded large areas of land, last 2014 in the river of Gualcarque, in the province of Intibuca. The project is currently being pursued by the company DESA.

According to Kalikasan, the

government of Honduras is accountable for the death of Caceres. Before the crime, she and other members of COPINH have become targets of armed attacks and other types of harassment by the government and DESA.

Last July 2013, Tomas Garcia, a colleague of Caceres, was killed by an army officer. Two weeks after her murder, another member of COPINH was killed by Honduran security forces while the indigenous Lenca are being driven away from their communities. Not less than 109 activists in Honduras have been killed since 2010 until 2015. AB

Students, workers hold nightly protests in France

THE INTERNATIONAL League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) expressed solidarity with hundreds of thousands of French youth and workers who are opposing the new anti-labor reforms that the Hollande government wants to impose.

Workers' unions and students' organizations joined forces to launch protest actions in different parts of France. Under the proposed anti-labor reforms, the current 35-hour work week would be maintained but companies would also be allowed to apply alternative working times including a work week of 48 hours and 12-hour days. The 25% overtime bonus will also be reduced to 10%. The proposed law would also make it easier and less costly for companies to lay off workers.

Tagged as "Nuit Debout" (Up All Night), the protests have spread across the cities of Strasbourg,

Toulouse, Marseille, Rouen, Rennes, and others. Last March 31, around 400,000 workers and youth staged protest actions and since then have been camping out nightly in these areas. On April 9, more than 200 demonstrations in different parts of France including the country's capital, Paris, have been recorded. Police have repeatedly attempted to disperse the demonstrations.

According to ILPS, Hollande's austerity program only protects capitalist companies by attacking the last remnants of the social benefits and protection the workers have won through past struggles. AB

British hold march against austerity

MORE than a hundred thousand anti-austerity protesters marched in London last April 17 to demonstrate against the United Kingdom government's austerity program and its attendant privatization which started in 2010.

In the past five years, the British government has cut down subsidies for housing and other social services for millions of people. It is also in the process of privatizing the National Health Service and cutting down state school system and unemployment subsidies.

From 2010 to 2015, the UK government has managed to "save" 35 billion pounds through decreasing its budget for the country's most vulnerable sectors. It is set to increase budget cuts for social services and benefits to P55 billion pounds by 2016.

Protests are once again on the rise as the referendum for UK's exit from the European Union nears. In the past three months, junior doctors have launched successive strikes to demand an increase in their wages.

The protesters also called for Prime Minister David Cameron and his government to step down as they have proven themselves ineffective and uncaring of the ordinary people's needs. Cameron is currently facing a corruption scandal, along with other European high officials. AB