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Editorial

Block the US-Aquino regime's cha-cha scheme

The Filipino people face a great battle in their historic defense of the nation's sovereignty. Their enemy in this battle is the puppet Aquino regime which is now going all-out in pushing for changes in the provisions of the reactionary 1987 constitution in accordance with US imperialist desires.

Aquino has pulled all stops in using government funds to fuel the cha-cha train.

The entire people must take action and unite to block and derail this scheme by the US-Aquino regime whose end is no other than to condemn the Philippines to new depths of foreign exploitation and plunder.

In just two weeks and after only a few hearings, Aquino's minions at the Lower House of Congress passed a resolution calling for constitutional change. Aquino's people hope that the cha-cha resolution will also be rapidly approved by the House in plenary, just as laws and resolutions pushed by Aquino had likewise been passed posthaste in exchange for fund pledges in the form of projects.

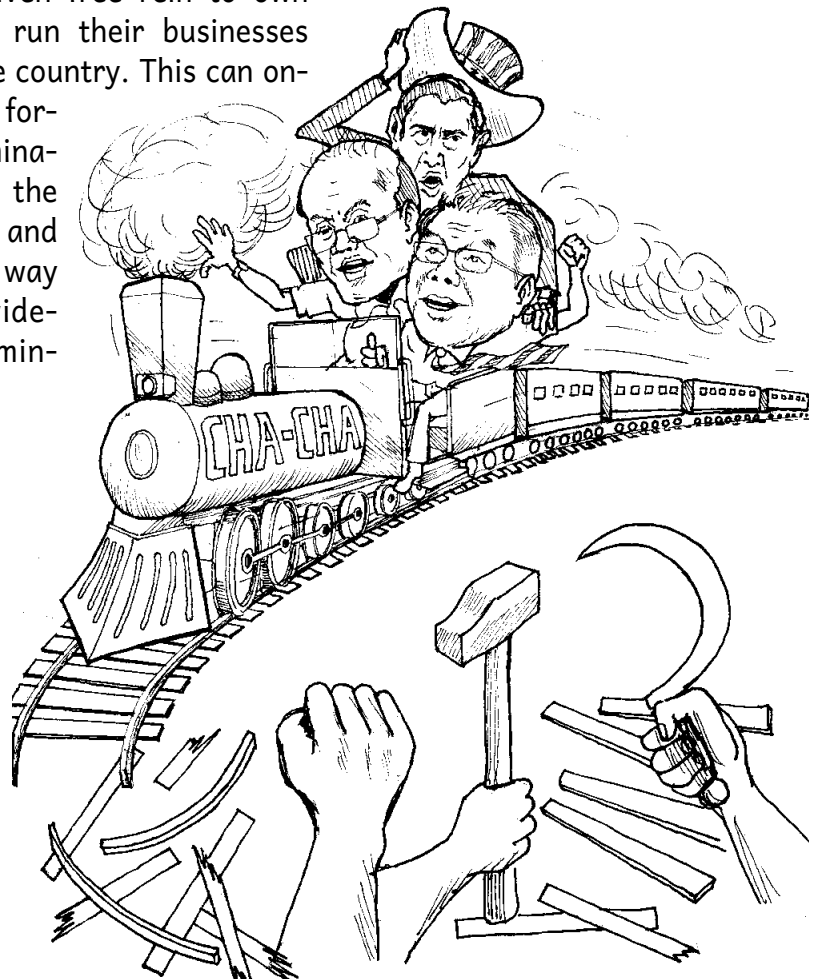
The US government has been brazenly intervening in goading the Philippines into amending the 1987 constitution and has imposed this on the Aquino regime as a condition for joining the US Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, a pact being forged by the US that would lock the Philippines in an unequal trade relationship with

the US. The Aquino regime wants to make sure that the cha-cha train runs full speed so it could brag about it to its master Barack Obama who is scheduled to visit this April.

Once the Aquino regime's cha-cha scheme pushes through, foreign big capitalists will be given free rein to own land and run their businesses within the country. This can only worsen foreign domination over the economy and pave the way for widespread mining operations and the plunder of the country's resources by foreign big capitalists and their com-

prador bourgeois cohorts.

Aquino's cha-cha scheme will further impoverish the toiling masses, worsening the widespread displacement of the peasant masses who will further be deprived of land to till, and aggravating the eviction of minority peoples from their ancestral lands. Already massive landgrabbing by big landlords in connivance with big foreign agribusiness companies and vast export-oriented plantations will become



even more widespread.

The conditions of the Filipino worker masses will also worsen. It is a declared objective of Aquino's cha-cha to attract foreign investments. Along with granting foreign capital the entire gamut of investment and property rights, the ruling state will further pull down workers' wages even if these are already severely inadequate to support the daily needs of a typical family.

Local capital will be further decimated. For the past several decades, areas of the economy where national bourgeois capital and operations could still exist have progressively dwindled. Local capital has virtually been wiped out amid the all-out investment and trade liberalization of the past three decades. With the cha-cha plans, one can expect the eventual extinction of the local bourgeoisie or its complete devourment by foreign capital.

To make the cha-cha scheme palatable, the Aquino regime has been claiming that the key to economic progress is to at-

tract foreign investments. This justification has been bandied about for more than 50 years by reactionary economists and the IMF-World Bank. But it has become crystal clear that the pro-imperialist economists' repeated claim that the massive entry of foreign investments is the solution to widespread unemployment is a big lie.

This was the same reasoning invoked by the US in 1946 when it pushed the Parity Rights amendment granting equal rights to foreigners to own land and businesses in the Philippines. In fact, Aquino is merely restoring Parity Rights to Americans and other foreign big capitalists. Aquino's cha-cha measures constitute a big step backward, and are further worsening the semicolonial status of Philippine economy and society. It will aggravate the backward and foreign capital-dependent agrarian economy that is tied to the crisis-ridden international capitalist system.

The cha-cha scheme will further exacerbate the neocolonial

status of the reactionary state. The ruling classes will become even more dependent on foreign capital, leading to an even tighter stranglehold by foreign monopolies on the ruling landlord-big comprador bourgeois state.


The forthcoming battle against the cha-cha scheme is indeed a historic one, ushering in a major shift in the country's economic and political course.

The Filipino people must fight a great battle against the US-Aquino regime's cha-cha scheme. A widespread political education campaign must be launched in the next few months to revive the spirit of patriotism, shatter the illusion of neoliberalism and expose the damage to the economy and the people's livelihoods wrought by decades of implementing the policies of liberalization, privatization, deregulation and denationalization. **AB**

Worsening prostitution and violence against women

More women and youth are becoming victims of prostitution and violence due to the Aquino regime's failure to address the principal need of Yolanda victims for livelihood. Many mothers and young women have been forced to leave their provinces because of severe poverty.

Hunger, homelessness and unemployment remain widespread in Eastern Visayas. Under such desperate conditions, the people have become ever more vulnerable to being vic-

	
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timized by illegal recruiters just so they could eke out a living and provide sustenance to their families.

Being victimized by sex trafficking and violence is no longer new, especially in the poorest provinces, like Samar. But this has worsened after super-typhoon Yolanda's onslaught and the government's glaring negligence. Even more alarming are reports that most of the victims are children. Out of 170 sex trafficking cases, 125 of the victims are aged 17 and younger and 45 are adult women, according to research conducted by the Center for Women's Resources (CWR). Most of these cases were likewise documented in areas devastated by typhoon Yolanda.

There have also been more cases of violence against women and children, despite the existence of laws that are supposed to protect them. There were 16,517 reported cases in 2013, up from 11,531 in 2012. Sexual harassment, acts of lasciviousness, unjust vexation and seduction cases have also grown, ballooning from 928 in 2012 to 1,489 in 2013. Likewise, rape cases increased from 1,319 in 2012 to 1,602 in 2013. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the rape victims were children.

These are just partial data since many cases go unreported. This is the result of the feudal culture prevailing in society, where domestic violence is widely seen as a personal rather than a criminal matter. Most victims do not report rape out of fear and shame. Most of the time, it is the victims who are blamed for what has befallen them.

The reactionary justice system is also snail-paced and costly. Above all, the state which is expected to defend the rights of

women and children has been the perpetrator in many acts of violence against them. Under the US-Aquino regime, 18 out of the 169 victims of extrajudicial killing are women. And 34 out of the 449 political detainees are women.

International working women's day

GABRIELA and other progressive organizations began a week-long protest action on March 1 in the cities of Baguio, Cebu, Iloilo, Tacloban and Davao to hold the Aquino regime accountable for its complete negligence and failure to address the humanitarian disasters wrought by typhoons Yolanda and Pablo and the AFP attacks in Zamboanga City. The protests will end in Manila on March 8 in front of Malacañang and converge with the commemoration of International Working Women's Day.

en's Day.

On March 8, it will have been four months since Yolanda pummeled through the Visayas, six months since the AFP attacked Zamboanga City and more than a year since typhoon Pablo rammed through Mindanao. But there have been no clearly defined livelihoods for the hundreds of thousands of calamity victims. There is no sustainable program for rehabilitation and the victims' lives have yet to return to normal.

The 103rd commemoration of International Working Women's Day revolves around the issues of hunger, poverty, prostitution and violence and other related social issues. For the progressive organizations, its relevance lies in the assiduous and daring advance of the basic rights of women, especially from the toiling masses. It is also tightly linked to the people's struggle as a whole. **AB**

Panayanon minorities unite

Hundreds of members and allies of TUMANDUK, an alliance of 17 organizations of national minorities in Panay picketed on February 27 in Tacas, Jaro, Iloilo City to assail the absence of any assistance from the Aquino regime for the victims of typhoon Yolanda in the island's interior villages.

It has been almost four months since the storm's onslaught, but aid from the Aquino regime is still focused on the town centers and coastal areas.

Thus, whatever assistance that has reached the victims has been the result of initiatives exercised by the people themselves and their organizations. To enable the victims to recover, TUMANDUK resolved during its 9th assembly on January 19 to demand that government fulfill its obligation to rehabilitate the people, provide social services and advance the rights of indigenous peoples. They agreed to continue the struggle to defend their land. They forged ahead in opposing Oplan Bayanihan and the Jalaur River dam project which are both destructive to their livelihoods, trample on their rights and cause them further suffering.

The assembly which was held in Barangay Aglinab, Tapaz, Capiz was attended by 1,200 members of TUMANDUK, aside from some 200 guests and friends from the Ati tribe as well as pro-

gressive organizations from Iloilo, Antique, Capiz, Aklan, Guimaras and Negros.

The assembly also ratified TUMANDUK's membership in the Philippine Platform for Indigenous People's Rights or PPIPR. The PPIPR was organized by the Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP) and the Koalisyon ng mga Katutubong Samahan ng Pilipinas.

The assembly was a success despite the military's attempts to sabotage it. On the night of January 14, fifty soldiers from the 61st IB arrived in Barangay Aglinab ostensibly to conduct a medical mission. The delegates did not succumb to the military's psywar and the soldiers were forced to leave the day after. **AB**

People's initiatives at rehabilitation in Panay

Because the progressive organizations in Aklan were aware of the government's long-term neglect of impoverished communities in the province, they themselves decided to act and effect the organized evacuation of thousands of families before supertyphoon Yolanda hit.

With the help of KADAMAY, PAMALAKAYA, GABRIELA and PAMANGGAS, more than 13,000 poor peasant families and other residents of coastal areas were evacuated. The evacuees came from the towns of Kalibo, Numancia, Tangalan and New Washington. Thus, the people incurred fewer casualties, especially in New Washington which bore the brunt of Yolanda's fury.

After the storm, the people's organizations immediately mobilized Task Force Tabang-Aklan and coordinated with a wide network of progressive organizations and personalities to bring food, drinking water and other necessities to the first batch of families that evacuated.

Meanwhile, in Tumanduk communities in Panay's interior villages,

the minorities resorted to *dagyaw* (*bayanihan* or community cooperation) to clean up the rubble in the typhoon's wake and repair or rebuild the ruined houses.

Thousands of victims who received assistance from Task Force Tabang-Aklan also helped in distributing relief goods and providing data on the devastation that were more concrete than those reported by government agencies. Through them, it has come to light that almost 90-95% of Aklan's 17 towns lost their livelihoods. The local and national governments have been turning a blind eye to the real depth and breadth of the calamity to justify their criminal negligence.

The people continue to call the Aquino regime to account for its failure to help them.

In February, DILG Secretary Mar Roxas was met with a protest rally of calamity victims at the Kalibo International Airport when he visited Aklan. The protesters demanded that Roxas release government funds for rehabilitation which they have yet to receive. **AB**

NPA launches series of tactical offensives in NCotabato

The Mt. Apo Subregional Command of the New People's Army (NPA) launched a series of offensives in North Cotabato in February, killing nine enemy elements and wounding nine others.

On February 18, the NPA used command-detonated explosives (CDX) on a detachment of the 39th IB in Sitio Jansig, Barangay Old Bulatukan, Makilala at around 3:30 a.m. The Red fighters were also able to seize an M14 rifle, several backpacks, vests and medical equipment. On the other hand, a guerrilla was martyred and two other Red

fighters were wounded.

On February 27, at around 3 p.m., an NPA unit ambushed a convoy composed of troops from the 57th IB and the Philippine National Police escorting Mayor Jaime Mahimpit through Barangay Datu Inda, President Roxas, North Cotabato. Wounded in the CDX explosion were three policemen, including their team leader.

Ka Isabel Fermiza, Mt. Apo Subregional Command spokesperson, clarified in a statement that Mayor Mahimpit was not the target of this particular tactical offensive. The ambush's objective was to stop the 57th IB from continuing with its intensifying military operations in the towns of President Roxas, Magpet and Arakan. The military operations began after the 39th IB took over the 57th IB's area of operations in early January.

In related news, four soldiers from the 49th IB were wounded in a harassment operation launched by an NPA team under the Norben Gruta Command at noon of February 13 in Barangay Patalunan, Ragay, Camarines Sur.

In a report from Ka Diego Magtanggol, spokesperson of the Norben Gruta Command of West Camarines Sur, the NPA team carefully closed in and opened fire on the resting soldiers. The exchange of fire lasted a few minutes, after which the Red fighters were able to maneuver for a safe retreat.

Meanwhile, the Merardo Arce Command (NPA-Southern Mindanao Regional Operations Command) apologized to the civilians who were inadvertently wounded in an NPA ambush on the 39th IB on the night of March 2 in Bansalan, Davao del Sur. The four civilians were aboard an ambulance embedded in a military convoy that was on its way to collect 11 soldiers wounded in an NPA ambush earlier that day in nearby Barangay Managa. Aside from the wounded, 13 other soldiers were killed in the previous ambush.

According to Merardo Arce Command spokesperson Ka Rigoberto Sanchez, the Red fighters failed to note the ambulance's presence within the military convoy because the 39th IB ordered it not to use its headlights or sirens.

Sanchez said that they would immediately provide assistance to the wounded civilians. **AB**

18 harassment operations launched in NEMR

Units of the New People's Army (NPA) disrupted the operations of newly arrived troops of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Northeastern Mindanao Region (NEMR) by launching 18 harassment operations beginning in the last week of January. From January 29 to March 3, the reactionary troops of the 29th, 13th and 30th IBs, the 41st Division Reconnaissance Coy (DRC), 9th SF of the 3rd Special Forces Battalion, 2nd Scout Rangers Battalion (SRB) and the paramilitary Bagani Force suffered 16 dead and 11 wounded. Of note were harassment operations by Red fighters in Cayle, Tago City, Surigao del Sur on January 29 which killed six elements of the 36th IB. In another NPA attack on the 41st DRC in Maraiging, Jabonga, Surigao del Norte on March 2, two soldiers were killed.

The NPA stepped up its harassment operations from January 27 to March 3 after the 2nd SRB which had been sent to Maguindanao in November was sent back to NEMR. This was followed by the deployment of the 2nd Special Forces and the 41st DRC which had come from the Southern Luzon Command (Solcom). These battalions were assigned to the region to reinforce the security personnel of big mining companies operating mainly in Surigao del Norte. **AB**

People's militia municipal command formed

The Milisyang Bayan Municipal Command (MBMC) or the people's militia command at the municipal level was successfully formed in a guerrilla front in Subregion 4 of the Southern Mindanao Region on December 21-22. (The MBMC is also known as the MCU or Militia Coordinating Unit in other regions).

The establishment was accomplished through a conference attended by unit commands of seven people's militia platoons in a cluster of barangays in the guerrilla front. The conference drafted a one-year program of action.

Part of the conference program involved discussions on the context and significance of raising the level of their organ-

ization. Building the MBMC falls within the overall call to raise people's war to a higher level. These were all tackled in more detail during discussions regarding the military situation in the area and the defense of the guerrilla base.

The decision to form the MBMC was arrived at after an assessment of the people's militia's level of development. The

militia members already comprise a battalion and self-defense units had already been established in each sub-village or sitio in eight barangays. These units could be actively mobilized for military operations, monitoring enemy movements and other tasks. In ten surrounding villages, militia units had either already been formed or are in the process of being built. Political education has already been conducted in all people's militia units, with some having attended military training.

The leading Party committee in the area pointed out the need for the people's militia to coordinate at the level of the village cluster or municipality. There

are situations where militia units need to cooperate in order to effectively perform their tasks in advancing guerrilla warfare.

The people's militia's greater tasks highlight the mass character of guerrilla warfare. The MBMC also serves as a partner of fulltime guerrilla units in the coordinated, systematic and organized mobilization of every militia unit.

The delegates enthusiastically asked questions and aired their views as they discussed the orientation, structure, rights and duties of the MBMC. As an operations command at the municipal level, the MBMC's basic task is to mobilize and coordinate the people's militia and self-defense units. The members of the MBMC are leaders of militia units in their respective villages.

The MBMC is directly under the Party section or subsection in the locality. Like the NPA, it abides by the Party's absolute

leadership. It is also under the NPA front operations command. The MBMC is likewise under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Revolutionary Committee through the latter's Subcommittee on Defense.

After the actual establishment, the delegates discussed and ratified the MBMC's one-year program, which includes the conduct of special trainings for the people's militia on sniping and the use of explosives as well as the regular Basic Politico-Military Training. A medical training has also been scheduled to provide medical officers for every militia squad. The MBMC immediately set the date of the trainings and the designated number of attendees from every unit.

The conference took note of



the economic needs of the families of militia members and addressed the problem of rice and other food supplies. They agreed that their communal farms must have an area of at least two hectares. Idle plots and land donated by allies would be converted to communal farms. They will also be planting trees.

The conference ended with speeches from the newly appointed members of the unit command of the MBMC, who all affirmed their readiness to take on their duties. They called on all their comrades to rev up their collective action. **AB**

Mass struggle against usury by microfinancing banks

A mass struggle last year by the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas-Caraga Region against two rural banks has achieved initial gains. Some 2,000 people joined the struggle against Cantilan Bank Inc. (CBI) and People's Bank of Caraga. Two negotiations with CBI have resulted in a reduction of interest charges from 30% to 15%. Service charges were also reduced by 50% (from ₱200 to ₱100).

Insurance fees have also become optional. Up to 7,000 families in 14 municipalities benefited from the struggle. Meanwhile, negotiations with the People's Bank of Caraga are ongoing.

The two banks are engaged in microfinancing (known simply as "lending" in the region). Mi-

crofinancing favors lending from ₱3,000 to ₱25,000 to groups, ostensibly to encourage cooperation, more productive use of borrowed funds and less burdensome debt payments. In fact, group lending is extremely favorable to the banks because group leaders are used as machinery to pressure group mem-

bers into paying. Weekly installments, on the other hand, serve to conceal how big and onerous the interest payments actually are. In essence, this is a form of legal usury.

The demands presented during the negotiations were agreed upon in various municipal-level fora attended by rice farmers, store owners, teachers and mothers. Usually, the following fees are deducted from a ₱3,000 loan: ₱21 for personal insurance, ₱80 (Philam Insurance), ₱200 (capital build-up), and ₱300 (service charge). All

in all, a total of P601 is immediately deducted from the principal, with the borrower actually receiving only P2,399.

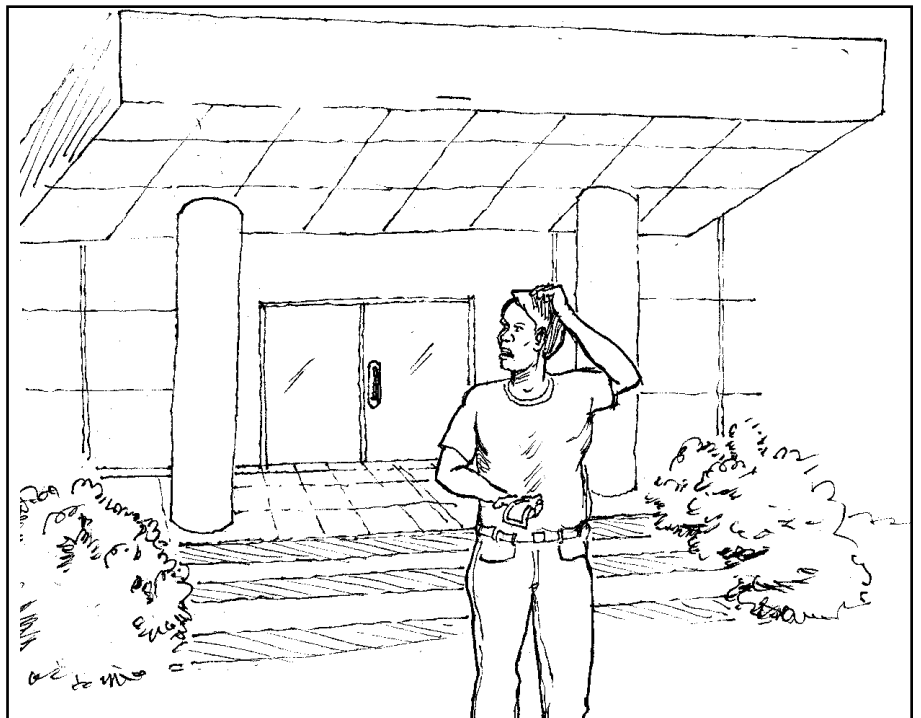
On paper, 30% interest (or P900) is imposed on the principal of P3,000. But with P170 weekly installments for 26 weeks, the borrower ends up paying P4,420 instead of P3,900. Instead of P900, the bank actually charges up to P1,420. The banks claim that the excess amount constitutes the borrowers' "savings," but in actuality, they are never able to utilize the money.

The concept of microfinancing or people's banking/community banking has long been pushed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank allegedly to provide capital to the poor and alleviate poverty, especially in the countryside. These form part of the reformist illusions being peddled by the imperialists that poverty can be resolved without changes in the social structure.

Cantilan Bank Incorporated is owned by Lt. Gen. William Hotchkiss, currently the director general of the Civil Aviation Authority and former chief of the Philippine Air Force under the Ramos and Estrada regimes.

CBI is a member of the Microfinancing Council of the Philippines which has links with institutions run by multinational corporations, among them the William and Belinda Gates Foundation, MasterCard Foundation, Dell Foundation, UK Aid and Citi Foundation.

Meanwhile, People's Bank began engaging in microfinancing in 1999, mainly to allegedly serve wives of beneficiaries of the bogus Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). It has 12 branches all over the Caraga Region. **AB**



AFP kills wounded Red fighter in Quezon

Fascist soldiers mercilessly tortured and killed a wounded Red fighter of the New People's Army (NPA) in Quezon. An anti-mining datu was slain in Agusan del Norte and two peasants were killed in Albay. In Isabela, a peasant leader struggling against landgrabbing was abducted. In Cavite and North Cotabato, several civilians were illegally detained. And in Abra, the military interrogated civilians in a remote village and ransacked their houses.

Quezon. Troops of the 201st Brigade heinously killed a Red fighter rendered hors de combat on March 1.

At around 10 a.m. that day, fighting ensued between a unit of the Apolonio Mendoza Command (NPA-Quezon) and fascist troops of the 201st Brigade in Barangay Sto. Niño Ibaba, Lopez. Ka Bran-

do (Roberto Campaner) was slightly wounded in this firefight and captured.

No less than the village officials of Barangay Sto. Niño Ibaba said the soldiers even showed them the wounded Ka Brando before bringing him to hospital. He did not have any serious wounds and they were sure that he would

survive as long as he would receive prompt medical attention.

But on the afternoon of that day, Ka Brando's family and human rights advocates found him dead at the Magsaysay Hospital in Lopez town. An autopsy revealed that he had nine gunshot wounds. The most serious were two wounds to the chest and one fatal wound in the head that caused one of his eyes to pop out. Ka Brando also had several bruises to the body—indicating that he was tortured before being killed.

Agusan del Norte. Rolando Ambungan, a Higaonon datu was shot to death in Sitio Bala-kalan, Barangay Lumbuyan, Buenavista on the night of January 31. At around 7 p.m., Eddie Ampawan (alias "Com-

mander Bawang") and two masked men arrived at his house. Commander Bawang shot Ambungan with an M14 rifle. Wounded in the shooting was the datu's nephew Janmar Sulhayan. Datu Ambungan had long been opposed to the operations of a mining company in their community.

Albay. Armed state agents killed Rosauro Rayteran and his son Rasty in Barangay San Pascual, Libon on February 6.

Isabela. Unidentified armed men abducted Romulo dela Cruz on February 28 in San Manuel town. Dela Cruz is the leader of Agbiag-Danggayan Dagiti Mannalon iti Isabela, a progressive peasant organization.

Dela Cruz was then with his 21-year old son when the motorcycle they were riding was blocked. He was dragged and forced into a waiting van in Barangay Nueva Era. His assailants posed as agents of the National Bureau of Investigation and passed by the local office of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

Dela Cruz is among those fighting landgrabbing in Roxas, a town adjacent to San Manuel.

Cavite. Five activist fisherfolk were arrested by the police in Sitio Patungan, Barangay Mercedes, Maragondon on February 28 and accused of being members of the New People's Army.

The five were identified as William Castilano, Lorenzo Obrado, Joselito Agner, Basilio Agner and Rogelio Monzales. They are all members of the Haligi ng Batangueñong Anakdagat (Habagat). They were arrested by troops of the Cavite Provincial Safety Company and PNP-SWAT of Cavite. The policemen barged into the houses of the fisherfolk leaders and

planted assorted firearms to justify their arrest.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Pamamalakaya sa Pilipinas (PAMALAKAYA) condemned the arrest. Habagat is the provincial chapter of PAMALAKAYA.

Abra. Forces under the 41st IB Bravo Coy indiscriminately ransacked houses in Barangay Lenneng, Baay-Licuan on February 19. Led by a 1Lieutenant De los Santos, the soldiers subjected the residents to interrogation without a court order.

Among the houses ransacked was that of the Lenneng village chair. Data from his computer were also copied, due to the military's suspicions that it was being used by the NPA. The fascists did the same in Sitio Kileng of the same village.

Soldiers detained Freddie Ligiw, a miner from Sitio Patong of Barangay Sucao on February 22. He was also interrogated and forced to guide to soldiers on the way to Mt. Inuman. He was detained near his piggery, while other soldiers searched Ligiw's house and confiscated a shotgun usually used by the villagers for hunting.

The military released Ligiw at 8 p.m.

North Cotabato. Troops of the 39th IB arrested 11 Lumad who were hunting on February 9 and detained them for more than two hours in a forested area of Barangay Batasan, Makilala town.

Interrogated and threatened were Elorde Panggilan, Denis Panggilan, Dexter Panggilan, Ariel Panggilan, Randy Emban, Lodring Emban, Ryan Baciao, Jonel de Guzman, Wowie de Guzman, Henry Ando and Roel de Vera. They were released only after villagers led by barangay officials protested and negotiated with the fascist soldiers. AB

Obama feigns innocence on human rights violations

Both the Obama government and the Aquino regime are culpable for the grave human rights violations perpetrated by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine National Police and state-controlled paramilitary forces in the name of Oplan Bayanihan.

The Obama government was being downright hypocritical when it criticized continuing extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances committed by various security forces in the Philippines. The criticism was contained in the 2013 Country Reports written by the US State Department.

The US cannot claim innocence because it provides military assistance, advice and training to the AFP. In fact, the Oplan Bayanihan campaign of suppression was drafted under the strict guidance of US military advisers and is practically a carbon copy of the US Counter-insurgency



Guide of 2009.

It is the US that advised the AFP to use the term "peace and development" to conceal the violence and abuse perpetrated by fascist soldiers in military operations under Oplan Bayanihan. But nowhere is it written in the 2013 Country Reports that serious human rights violations were actually perpetrated within the Oplan Bayanihan framework.

Military aid by the Obama government to the Aquino regime likewise ballooned by 300% in two years (from \$11.9 million in 2011 to \$30 million in 2012 and \$40 million in 2013) to enhance the AFP's ability to suppress the people and reward Aquino for allowing the growing presence of US

troops, warplanes and warships in the Philippines.

The 2013 Country Reports is doubly deceptive as it is based on records of the AFP, police and Commission on Human Rights. Reports from these reactionary government agencies are either woefully inadequate or manipulated. Thus, the US State Department report even conceals the real gravity of human rights violations.

Neither does the report mention that those responsible for some of the worst violations have even been rewarded. For instance, Brig. Gen. Eduardo Año and Brig. Gen. Aurelio Baladed, who have both been implicated in the illegal arrest, torture and illegal detention of the Morong 43 have recently received new promotions. **AB**

Thousands to lose jobs in Laguna

More than a thousand workers, most of them women, rallied on February 25 at the Calabarzon National Conciliation and Mediation Board (NCMB) in Calamba City, Laguna to protest the illegal closure of the factory they work in.

Up to 3,600 workers of Carina Apparel Inc., a garments factory in Biñan, Laguna are in danger of losing their jobs after the capitalist factory owner closed shop on February 21. The closure was a desperate move by the capitalist to evade scheduled negotiations with the union for a collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

The Carina Apparels, Inc. Labor Union (CAILU) belied the capitalist's claims that the company was losing. The union said that the company earns ₱82 million daily producing 34,000 pieces of high-end lingerie on a daily basis. But the workers receive a daily wage of only ₱397.

CAILU added that they were forced to go on leave a day before the scheduled negotiations. The workers also believe that the closure is a ploy to bust their union and rake in even more gigantic profits.

Among their demands should the CBA negotiations push through is a ₱60 hike in the daily wage, and retirement benefits or separation pay if the company closes down.

Carina Apparel, which is located at the Laguna International Industrial Park manufactures lingerie for high-end brands like Marks & Spencer, Calvin Klein, GAP, Forever 21, Victoria's Secret, Uniqlo and Toray.

Capitalists cunningly resort to illegal closures and dismissal of workers, especially in industrial parks and special economic zones (SEZ). Soon after, they open shop in another SEZ under a new name and hire new workers under new contractual agreements. This way, they are able to evade labor unions' demands for just wages and benefits.

Students assail relentless tuition fee hikes

Students marched to Mendiola to condemn the nonstop hikes in tuition fees in their universities. They also assailed the Aquino regime for its responsibility in the continuous commercialization of education. They scored the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) non-action in the face of a barrage of tuition fee hikes in private colleges and university.

The government and CHED deceptively issued Memorandum Order (CMO) 3 or the "Enhanced Policies, Guidelines and Procedures Governing Increases in Tuition and Other Fees" and holds occasional consultations. Tuition fees continue to rise, however, because in reality, CHED always upholds the interests of capitalist school owners. In effect, it sanctions yearly hikes in tuition and other fees.

Data from the Rise for Education Alliance show that around 400 universities are planning to raise tuition fees by an average of 3-15%.

The Aquino administration is accountable for this state of affairs in its three years in office. Its deregulation of education has paved the way for the commercialization of education.

It comes as no surprise that state universities and colleges (SUC) have also

Luisita Watch formed

raised their fees due to the inadequacy of funds allocated by government. Aside from tuition, there are other fees shouldered by students in SUCs.

Aside from high tuition fees, students also have to contend with repressive policies. Many colleges and universities ban progressive organizations like the League of Filipino Students (LFS), Anakbayan, Kabataan Partylist and the like.

On the other hand, the College Editors Guild of the Philippines documented more than 200 violations of campus press freedom last year rooted in the high fees charged by universities. AB

“IF real land distribution is not immediately carried out and if terror continues to reign in the area, we just might see a situation not unlike the one which led to the tragic Hacienda Luisita Massacre of 2004.” This was the highlight of a statement issued by Luisita Watch during its launching at UP Diliman, Quezon City on February 27.

Luisita Watch is a coalition formed to support the unrelenting struggle of farm workers of Hacienda Luisita for genuine land reform. Its goal is to call the attention of the public, mass media and concerned government agencies to the continuing violence and maneuvers by the Cojuangco-Aquino family to maintain control over the hacienda lands.

The Hacienda Luisita farm workers' quest for justice faces bigger obstacles. The landlord president is able to use his influence over government and the military for its clan's interests, as proven by the open collaboration between the Cojuangco-Aquino family and the Department of Agrarian Reform.

The launching of Luisita Watch was led by Liza Maza of GABRIELA, Rep. Fernando Hicap of Partidong Anakpawis, UP College of Mass Communications Associate Dean Dr. Danilo Arao and actors Angeli Bayani and Karl Medina.

Cybercrime Law opposed

OPPOSITION to RA 10175 or the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 is growing. The latest to assail the law recently upheld by the Supreme Court is the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). The media watchdog group charged that the law curtails journalists' ability to do their work.

Also among those who assailed the repressive law were the "alternative media" composed of progressive and independent online newspapers.

They said that provisions of RA 10175 on online libel and threats of criminal prosecution against Aquino's critics and his policies are the new weapons to be wielded by the regime.

Despite Aquino's strong influence over the media, the "alternative press" has still been able to use the internet to post news and opinions without restriction.

Lately, the internet has also been used to organize protest actions such as the big anti-pork barrel rallies last year.

This has spurred the Aquino regime to aggressively push for the passage of RA 10175.

At the Lower House of Congress, members of the Makabayan Bloc are vigorously opposing the law and plan to introduce amendments. Meanwhile, at the Senate, even Aquino allies, particularly Miriam Defensor-Santiago, TG Guingona III and Francis Escudero have called for the law's junking and the decriminalization of libel.

ALECO privatization forced

THE Albay Electric Cooperative (ALECO) is set to be privatized despite continued protests by its consumer members. Beginning March 1, ALECO's operations were taken over by the Albay Power and Energy Corporation, a subsidiary of San Miguel Energy Corporation, a company under Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco's San Miguel Corporation (SMC).

Earlier, on February 24, protests against ALECO's sale were suppressed and four leaders of the ALECO Multi-Sectoral Stakeholders' Coalition (AMSSO) arrested. AMSSO has been leading opposition to ALECO's privatization.

SMC has also reneged on its promise to settle ALECO's debts, impose a five-year freeze on power rate hikes and recognize the company's collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with the Aleco Employees Organization or ALEO.

The contract that SMC actually signed contained no provisions on paying the company's debts. The burden of debt service will be passed on to the consumers in the form of higher power rates. Neither was the former CBA recognized, with the only stipulations being the amount to be paid to employees who would be forcibly retired or terminated from their jobs.

SMC's control over ALECO paves the way for the former's further domination over the energy sector in Bicol, including control over the exploration of other sources of geothermal energy.