

EDITORIAL

Further hardships, repression and corruption behind the Covid-19 lockdown

The Duterte regime is using the Covid-19 pandemic in the country to extend the fascist measures imposed in the name of fighting the disease. What it calls the "new normal," in essence, is aggravating the worst aspects of the semicolonial and semifeudal system. Under this, more brutal fascism, worse neoliberal policies and exacerbated corruption will reign under the tyrant Duterte.

It has been more than 50 days since Duterte imposed the lockdown in Luzon and other parts of the country which has wrought unprecedented hunger and hardships on the people and damage to the economy. Up to now, his government has yet to undertake initiatives to carry out widespread scientific study about the real extent and virulence of the Covid-19. Its efforts at mass testing are lacking, slow and disparate, and funds for examining samples are grossly insufficient.

The Filipino people remain in the dark about the scientific and

health basis of the continuing militarist lockdown called the general and enhanced community quarantine (GCQ and ECQ) and what these have achieved so far. While the people are kept blind and shrouded in fear of the Covid-19, Duterte and his fascist minions are carrying out more cruel and worse measures and policies.

Under continuing lockdown, Duterte's police and soldiers trample with impunity on the people's basic rights. Hundreds of thousands of people are forcibly locked up in their homes under the so-called "total lockdown" that has nothing

to do with, and in fact, is contrary to public health.

Fear and distress reign as Duterte's armed men roam the streets in poor communities as well as private subdivisions. People all over are being accosted, handcuffed, beaten, detained and tortured even on simple misdemeanors. A number of places are under curfew. Checkpoints abound. Protests and expression of grievances are prohibited. Mutual help and relief work are being controlled by the police and military in the name of keeping "social distance."

In the countryside, repression against the peasant masses is worsening alongside AFP counterinsurgency operations. Checkpoints and searches, restrictions on farming, limits on the amount of purchases, house searches, intimidation to force people to cooperate

with the military and other forms of suppression cause gross suffering and hardships on peasants.

The ultimate target of Duterte's fascist policies are the democratic and patriotic forces, and critics who expose the sorely lacking and slow distribution of state subsidy during the lockdown, the grave lack of support for health workers, the neglect of public hospitals and the early disregard and lack of preparations for the spread of the Covid-19 and other big failures during the pandemic.

Duterte has already imposed military and police rule through the lockdown. This aims to paralyze the people's democratic resistance and railroad anti-people neoliberal policies that the reactionary state has long wanted to impose.

Malacañang itself has said that the "new normal" will be no different from the GCQ where the state rigidly controls and monitors the movement of entire communities. They wish to maintain this setup until a vaccine is supposedly invented, which according to scientists may take 18 months (or until

December 2021).

Using "social distancing" as an excuse, the regime plans to continue prohibiting gatherings. Claiming to act against the virus, it plans to continue preventing jeepney and tricycle drivers from plying their routes, as well as millions of contractual workers from going to work. The checkpoints will remain using "temperature checks" as justification. It will use sanitation measures to cause the closure of many small businesses. It will open schools and factories, but will continue to prohibit mass gatherings of students and workers. Duterte is pushing for the repressive National ID System in the name of "efficient distribution" of relief and "virus monitoring."

In the name of decongesting the streets, the regime is set on prohibiting old jeeps and replace them with the new vehicles from China, that are controlled by big capitalists. To supposedly decongest cities, it will carry out widespread demolitions of urban poor communities under the "Balik Probinsya" program to pave the way for big bour-

geois compradors and foreign capitalists to control prime real estate in Metro Manila.

Duterte also took advantage of the pandemic to recently levy an additional 10% tax on imported crude oil which will surely be shouldered by consumers. While the regime is fast-tracking plans to cut corporate taxes in the name of reviving the economy, it refuses to heed the calls to repeal or suspend the TRAIN Law which imposed oppressive taxes on basic commodities. Additional taxes are also set to be imposed in exchange for the country's more or less \$4 billion new loans with the World Bank, the ADB and other agencies.

Amid the public health crisis and economic downturn, bureaucrat capitalist plunder is worsening. Duterte, his cronies and the big bourgeois compradors are taking advantage of the crisis to make bigger profits. This include the cornering of contracts for building quarantine centers by the Villar family and Dennis Uy.

Duterte is using authoritarian rule to make all the big bourgeois compradors kneel before him. Recently, Duterte "asked for forgiveness" for his months of haranguing the Ayalas and Manny Pangilinan, which is mere public drama to hide the billions of pesos worth of "settlements."

The other day, Duterte ordered the closure of ABS-CBN, a brazen attack against press freedom. He took advantage of the lockdown so that no one can protest the act. Duterte has long set his eyes on ABS-CBN because it is not easily compliant with Duterte wishes. Bureaucrat capitalists have long arm-twisted ABS-CBN to force it to cooperate in exchange for its franchise or to compel it to sell the company that is being drooled over by Duterte's cronies and their foreign capitalist partners.

The "new normal" under the Duterte fascist regime means all out repression, oppression and corruption. While threatening to declare

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martial law, Duterte has already implemented the elements of absolute dictatorial rule and is killing off what remains of freedom and democracy. Freedom is now only for Duterte and his minions: freedom to rake in wealth and profits; freedom to use the people's money for their self-serving aims; freedom to jail anyone who does not bow. Duterte holds democracy by the neck, ready anytime to squeeze the life out of it.

The entire country is already under Duterte's undeclared martial law. Duterte is further suppressing, oppressing and taking away the people's money. However, declared or otherwise, martial law is a big rock that Duterte is lifting but will only drop on his own head.

The entire people must reject the "new normal" that is mere continuation of the lockdown elements and other policies that only aggravate the country's rotten state. They must ask what scientific basis do checkpoints, curfews and all other stringent measures have. In the name of democracy and freedom, they must bring together their courage and creatively defy and challenge the restrictions and Duterte's militarist lockdown.

The people must build the

broadest unity of all democratic classes and sectors against Duterte's undeclared martial law. The biggest number of sectors must unite and fight against the shutdown of ABS-CBN and show its connection to Duterte's neglect of health workers, to the slow and insufficient economic aid during the lockdown, to his refusal to suspend debt payments or costly counterinsurgency operations to favor the needs of public health, to the brutalities and abuses by police and military force, to Duterte's corruption and his suppression of all basic rights including the right to express oneself and join street demonstrations.

There must be widespread propaganda and education work among the masses. Duterte's lies and unscientific blabber about the Covid-19 must be exposed, while amplifying the clamor for health workers and scientists, not fascists, to lead the country's response to the pandemic. Duterte must be held accountable for using the Covid-19 pandemic to push his scheme to establish a fascist dictatorship. The people must expose neoliberal policies for imposing greater hardship on the masses,

while uniting to demand the repudiation of the TRAIN law and other oppressive taxes, for decent housing, right to work and other democratic demands.

The Party must continue to strengthen its branches and committees in the cities and countryside. The Party must continue to strengthen the underground movement to ensure that its organization continually gains strength even under the fascist clampdown and suppression. At the same time, the Party must strengthen its links with the masses in order to arouse, organize and mobilize them. The Party must effectively lead the masses in their fight for their democratic rights, and for their health and social well-being.

Duterte and his fascist clique will fail in their objective of suppressing the Filipino people's resistance. While the Duterte clique escalates suppression, oppression and corruption during the Covid-19 pandemic, the people's desire to stand and resist becomes ever more intense. The rotten ruling semi-colonial and semifeudal system is being more thoroughly exposed, rousing the people to tread the path of national democratic revolution. **AB**

Lockdown culture in the Philippines, among most toxic—UN

The United Nations (UN) raised concern over Duterte's "highly militarized" response to the Covid-19 pandemic which has resulted in mounting cases of human rights violations. On April 30, it stated that "a toxic lockdown culture against the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted drastically on society's most vulnerable members."

The statement was issued a week after UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on governments not to use the pandemic as a pretext for repressive measures, and to recognize that the threat is the virus and not people.

UN Director of Field Operations Georgette Gagnon noted that the Philippines has the highest number of lockdown arrests with over 120,000 apprehended for alleged

"curfew violations."

The UN stressed, "shooting, detaining, or abusing someone for breaking a curfew because they are desperately searching for food is clearly an unacceptable and unlawful response." It clarified that "the right to life, the prohibition against torture and other ill-treatment, and the right not to be arbitrarily detained" continue to apply even amid the lockdown.

Earlier, in Quezon City, a policeman gunned down retired Army corporal Winston Ragos who was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder for allegedly violating quarantine protocols on April 21. Yesterday, a 13-year-old boy sustained abrasions on his back after being beaten by a policeman with a rattan stick. A day earlier, lockdown enforcers were caught on camera beating up and dragging a fish vendor whom they arrested afterwards. In Agusan del Norte, a 63-year-old man who complained about government food packs was shot dead by a policeman at a checkpoint on April 5. **AB**

Fascism in the time of a pandemic in 7 steps

First, disregard the threat posed by the Covid-19 against the people's health and livelihood. For more than two months, until the first week of March, Duterte and his Inter-Agency Task Force shrugged aside information that the virus was already in the country and was probably spreading in provinces, particularly in Central Visayas.

Second, scare and shock millions of people. Duterte put the entire Metro Manila under lockdown on March 12, and Luzon on March 16. He did this without prior research, local preparation or even warning. Within 24 hours, Duterte swamped the cities with thousands of police and soldiers under the guise of checking the body temperature of travelers. Factories and other workplaces were shutdown, aside from what they deemed "essential" and businesses that cater to foreign clients. Local officials in almost all cities and provinces scrambled to declare their respective lockdowns. Checkpoints were put up across the country where millions are hailed on their way home, to work, to buy essentials, to hospitals or anywhere they would go to. Those who defied the police and military were arrested, detained, punished, and on some instances, gunned down.

Third, paint an image of a "war" and put the police and military on

top of the government's response to the pandemic. People are held at gunpoint by Duterte even when the enemy is "invisible." He bombarded and confused people through daily, many and often conflicting press conferences to condition them to "just follow" his regime's measures. He calls "undisciplined" those who defy his lockdown to earn income, look for food or escape extreme boredom. They are brutally punished and humiliated. Duterte earlier ordered the military and police to shoot-dead anyone who will defy his lockdown. The declaration came after a protest of urban poor residents to demand aid. The marching order emboldened the police, military and even local officials to abuse and disregard people's rights. Twelve- and 24-hour curfews, 48-hour barangay and sitio lockdowns and other arbitrary and anti-people ordinances and resolutions were imposed.

Fourth, give the AFP and its generals command over the daily



implementation of the lockdown. Duterte assigned Delfin Lorenzana as chief of the National Task Force Against Covid-19, Eduardo Año as second in command, Carlito Galvez as chief implementor and Rolando Bautista as head

of aid distribution. All of them are trained in counterinsurgency but not one has a background on public health matters. Duterte assigned the Office of the Civil Defense to lead regional task forces, and most controversially, the authority to buy and distribute medical equipment to health workers and hospitals.

Fifth, grab emergency powers for additional authority. This includes the power to realign billions of funds to the office of the president, takeover private companies who refuse to render service or allow use of its facilities, and silence critics under the guise of stopping the spread of "false information."

Sixth, starve the people and have them line up for limited aid. To cover up the shortage in funds, Duterte puts the blame on local officials who are struggling to address their constituents' plight including unemployment and loss of income, lack of sanitation and public services, hunger and other socio-economic damages caused by the lockdown. Duterte then used the anarchic aid distribution to push for the implementation of the National ID System.

Seventh, make fascism palatable as the "new normal" where restrictions on people's mobility and other rights are maintained. The said system is not different to the old one, but with worse forms of exploitation and oppression against the people. This includes intensified surveillance on meetings and gatherings in the name of monitoring the resurgence of the virus.

Organizations mark 47th NDFP anniversary

VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS commemorated the 47th anniversary of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) on April 24. The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army praised the NDFP for uniting the Filipino people under the banner of national democracy.

The CPP said the the NDFP should strengthen its call for establishing a humanitarian united front to bring together all democratic forces to prevent the spread and mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Revolutionary organizations are at the forefront of mass clinics, rice distribution, information campaigns and medical trainings in various provinces and regions.

Local chapters of the NDFP in Ilocos, Mindoro, Bicol, Eastern Visayas, Negros, Panay and Southern Tagalog also issued their respective solidarity statements.

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Pandemic of hunger and poverty due to lockdowns and restrictions

The United Nations (UN) warned that the stringent restrictions which states have implemented to contain the Covid-19 pandemic will result in a hunger pandemic and “unimaginable effects on health and the economy.” The UN said that “more people could potentially die from the economic impact of Covid-19 than from the virus itself.”

Poverty and disease

At the same time, it noted that global food prices might increase due to disruptions not only in the production of food, but also of other materials used in food production. There is also a drop in harvests due to disruptions in the production of agricultural companies in big exporting nations.

Countries dependent on food imports, such as rice, would be hit hard if exporting countries will implement export bans and price increases. The UN warned that the pandemic could result in long-term poverty that cannot be easily resolved.

According to the UN, the Philippines is among the countries with the highest incidence of hunger. Those who suffer from hunger in congested urban poor communities and rural poor communities are most vulnerable to Covid-19 and other common diseases caused by malnutrition. Such areas are with-

out clinics, adequate water supply and sanitation system. In the cities, the poor are cramped in small spaces, making it impossible for them to maintain physical distancing or to quarantine sick members of the family. In rural areas, medical equipment, health care providers, and health infrastructures such as quarantine facilities are extremely scarce. (See related article in Ang Bayan, April 7.) Millions suffer from hunger due to unemployment, low wages, and landlessness both in the cities and countryside.

The poor suffer from worse hardships due to the economic devastation caused by the lockdown. Stringent travel and work restrictions result in product and labor supply disruptions. The Philippines are among the countries that suffered huge income losses from tourism and remittances from migrants. The weak foundations of the local economy are bound to be devastated. Since the state opted to



loan instead of properly realigning the national budget, the people are bound to shoulder the costs of the lockdown for a long time.

Hunger today and in the future

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), around “30 countries in the developing world could experience widespread famine.” In 10 of those countries, there are already more than one million people suffering from starvation. It noted that another \$350 million is needed to set up the logistics network to get food and medical supplies to where these are needed. Travel bans and restrictions aggravate the problem as these obstruct the delivery of emergency aid from international agencies.

Currently, approximately 812 million people are experiencing hunger everyday. Around 135 million are on the brink of starvation. However, the WFP noted that an additional 130 million people could also be pushed to starvation by the end of the year.

This includes about 30 million people who literally depend on the WFP for food. Without this aid, approximately 300,000 could starve to death within three months.

In the Philippines, food production cycle has been adversely affected by transportation restrictions, from provinces to cities and in between provinces. These restrictions will have severely affect the movement of peasants and farmworkers especially this upcoming rice and corn planting season. AB

Duterte orders reopening of POGOs

DUTERTE IS DESPERATELY trying to justify his call to reopen Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs), online casinos ran by Chinese capitalists, despite its lockdown which prohibits the operation of enterprises that are “non-essential” in addressing the Covid-19 pandemic. POGOs provide exclusive gambling services to foreigners through the internet.

Duterte and his minions including Finance Sec. Carlos Dominguez and Sen. Ronald dela Rosa are making it appear that POGOs are essential to the economy despite the fact that these companies are notorious for tax evasion. In fact, POGOs have accumulated a total debt of P50 billion pesos. Additionally, the POGO industry also serves as a haven for Chinese syndicates. (See related article in Ang Bayan, February 21.) A senate inquiry is being conducted to investigate the prevalence of illegal activities in POGOs such as money laundering and prostitution, among many others. AB

Impact of lockdowns on the children and the youth

Measures implemented by countries to purportedly contain Covid-19 has resulted in unprecedented school closures. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), around 190 countries have been closed down, affecting more than 1.5 billion students worldwide and forcing them to stay at home. This aggravated child hunger in various parts of the world.

Due to school closures, "370 million children are missing out on school meals," stated UNICEF. Most of these children are from countries that are torn by war or military interventions. Children in evacuation centers dislocated by calamities and militarization are also vulnerable.

The closures intensified inequality among students. Most poor students have no means to continue their studies, unlike students from well-off families who have internet access and computers at home. The lockdown decreased learning opportunities for

poor students, especially as most of them live in congested homes that are not conducive to learning, do not have books and other school supplies, and have no outdoor spaces where children can go out and play. There is a strong clamor to end the semester or academic school year and give all students a passing grade.

Researches indicate that school children are less vulnerable to Covid-19 infection. There is no strong evidence to prove that school closures can stop the spread of the infection. Scientists recommend

that instead of closing down schools, governments should prioritize efforts in isolating and putting those who are sick in quarantine. In March, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and UNESCO issued a set of guidelines providing a roadmap for the safe reopening of schools amid the pandemic.

This includes the use of schools for information dissemination and proper health care, continuation of appropriate activities and ensuring essential services and supplies. The groups insisted that school closures must be time-bound.

In countries most affected by the pandemic, school closures result in income loss for education workers, while aggravating the burden shouldered by parents performing crucial duties in hospitals including nurses and doctors. AB

CPP-NPA ends unilateral ceasefire

On April 30, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) declared that it will no longer extend its unilateral ceasefire. "As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to worsen, the CPP and the New People's Army (NPA) will give highest priority to fight the disease despite Duterte and the AFP's order to intensify offensives and other military operations against the NPA. However, the CPP can no longer extend the humanitarian ceasefire of the NPA after April 30. This widespread attacks and military operations of the AFP-PNP will only result in worse atrocities against the NPA and the masses," said the CPP.

From March 16 to April 30, the military and police have continued to conduct intense and sustained counterinsurgency operations in 159 towns, covering at least 432 barangays. This resulted in at least 54 armed encounters, 39 of which were raids against NPA encampments. Last of which was a raid by the 4th IB against an encampment of Red fighters in Rizal, Occidental Mindoro on April 30.

The clashes resulted in at least 31 killed and 27 wounded on the side of the AFP-PNP. On the side of the NPA, 20 Red fighters were martyred while eight others were wounded.

During the same period, *Ang Bayan* was also able to record 39 in-

cidents of human rights violations that were perpetrated by state forces under the guise of the regime's counterinsurgency campaign. Four civilians were killed, two of whom were peasants. Sixty others were illegally arrested, 54 of whom or 90% are peasants.

The most recent violation was the arbitrary against of 9-month pregnant Lumad woman in Butuan City. Elements of the 23rd IB accosted Mayet Ambason at Sitio Bantaling, Purok 8, Barangay Nong-Nong on April 30 at around 4 p.m. They accused her of being a member of the NPA who was involved in an encounter in the same barangay on April 24. AB

Filipinos oppose China's claim of Kalayaan and Panatag

THE FILIPINO PEOPLE firmly opposed China's move to further tighten its claim over two Philippine territories: the Kalayaan Group of Islands (international name: Spratly Islands) and the Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal.)

Last April 18, China announced that it was establishing two new districts at the South China Sea. It designated the Kalayaan Group of Islands, which is a municipality of Palawan, as part of the Nansha district. On the other hand, it designated the Panatag Shoal as a part of the Xisha district. The latter also covered the Paracel Islands which is being claimed both by China and Vietnam. The said districts were established under the Sansha City which was founded by China in 2012 to strengthen its claim over small territories located at the South China Sea. AB

NTC orders ABS-CBN closure

The National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) ordered the ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation to stop airing its radio and television programs upon the expiration of its franchise on May 4. This was the second time that the company was forced to operations after it was first shutdown in September 1972 when martial law was declared by the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

ABS-CBN journalists were shocked by the closure order as House Speaker Allan Peter Cayetano recently vowed to extend the franchise until June 2022. However, Rodrigo Duterte has long set his eyes on the network, saying that it refused to air his presidential campaign commercials. The House of Representatives has since vowed not to extend the franchise. There have also been reports that a Chinese company linked to Duterte's

crony Dennis Uy has been planning to acquire the station. The closure was ordered during the implementation of a "total lockdown" and curfew in the barangay where the company is located.

Various sectors strongly denounced the closure order. Among those who contested the closure are ABS-CBN employees and artists, journalists, lawyers, businessmen and even officials and agencies of the Duterte government. Labor

group Defend Jobs Philippines said the closure order is "is a clear betrayal to the station's more than 11,000 workers and their families." The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines also called the order against the biggest broadcasting network in the country "an underhanded assault on freedom of the press and of expression."

Marco Valbuena, Chief Information Officer of the Communist Party of the Philippines said that Duterte is behind the network's closure. "Like a king, Duterte is using his tyrannical power to realize his whims. He wants all big businesses to bow down and pay homage to him," said Valbuena. **AB**

Police arrests 76 activists, volunteers on Labor Day

Elements of the Philippine National Police (PNP) successively arrested 76 activists and relief volunteers in Metro Manila, Rizal and Iloilo on Labor Day, May 1.

Ten volunteers were arrested in Marikina while conducting a feeding program for urban poor residents. Marikina City Mayor Marcy Teodoro ordered the release of the victims asserting that they have not violated any law.

In Quezon City, four youth volunteers and 14 residents were arrested while conducting a feeding program in Barangay Central. Four activists were also arrested in Valenzuela City for protesting at home and posting their demands on social media. Two workers were also arrested in Rodriguez, Rizal.

Forty-two individuals were arrested in Jaro District, Iloilo City while preparing for a caravan to condemn the recent killing of Bayan Muna coordinator Jose Reynaldo "Ka Jory" Porquia. The police filed criminal charges against Porquia's daughter, colleagues and seven journalists. The 42 were only re-

leased after paying a bail of P12,000 each or a total of more than half a million pesos.

Porquia, 59, sustained nine bullet wounds after being shot by four unidentified male assailants in Barangay Santo Niño Norte, Iloilo

City on April 30.

On the same day, elements of the 202nd Infantry Brigade illegally arrested 16 Coca-Cola workers in Santa Rosa, Laguna. The victims were brought to Camp Vicente Lim in Calamba City and were then presented before the media as "surrendered" members of the New People's Army on Labor Day. **AB**

Labor day protests

RODRIGO DUTERTE'S FASCISM failed to stop workers and other sectors from uniting and protesting to mark the International Labor Day. The Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) led the protest to demand the Duterte regime to immediately address the plight of workers amid the health crisis. They united under the theme, "Fight for health, livelihood and human rights!"

Maintaining physical distance, workers, teachers and students protested at the University of the Philippines Diliman in Quezon City. Lightning rallies were also mounted by Paperland workers in Quezon City and members of the Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Harbor Centre in Tondo, Manila, among others.

The KMU also spearheaded an online protest which was participated in by various sectors and watched by 50,000 viewers. Similar online protests were spearheaded by local KMU chapters in Southern Mindanao, Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog. **AB**

Luyo-luyo in food production

Tatay Lery estimated that his rice stock, his share from the harvest in an adjacent barrio, would only last a week to feed his family. His son who works in Manila could not remit money to him because he lost his job due to the lockdown.

The lockdown has further cut the income of farmers in Barangay Dasig. Most of the barrio's farmlands are devoted to coconut production and the area was also devastated by typhoon Tisoy in December 2019. This makes it difficult for families of members of the local Party branch including that of Tatay Lery and his collective Tatay Utê to buy rice.

Such situation underscores the importance of the Party's food production campaign to address hunger which was aggravated by the lockdown. In Barangay Dasig and the entire guerrilla front, farmers cultivated the land collectively to help address the food shortage.

A production campaign has since been conducted in the guerrilla front. Local chapters of the Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid and Makibaka restrengthened the said campaign in the early 2010s. These functioned as cooperatives and allocated parcels of land for vegetable production, animal husbandry and fisheries.

Chapter groups implemented a mutual aid system called "luyo-luyo." Mutual aid groups called "grutuls" were also formed to help smaller and weaker chapter groups in production.

At the onset of the campaign, Party cadres encouraged villagefolks to rely on their own strength. In the past, some of the projects, chapter groups and *grutuls* were focused on earning profits. The groups were able to

sell their produce, while at the same time providing them food. They were able to get some people to invest in the cooperative, but for various reasons, they still lost profits.

Particularly in Barangay Dasig, the *grutul* was composed of Tatay Utê and seven other small peasants. They are all beneficiaries of the agrarian revolution and were given the right to till their own farmlands. These, however, have remained unproductive due to past typhoons. The said *grutul* was among the those formed in the barrio and barangay clusters.

They were already able to clear an area at the foothills of Mt. Salig. If the rains won't come, they can already set the area to fire to prepare the land for farming. They have also already prepared pechay and string beans seeds which they plan to plant first. These were solicited by NPA fighters who operate at the guerrilla zone. They also provided residents with rice to immediately help them amid the crisis.

Once they are able to start planting, they will only need to count a few weeks until they can harvest their produce. In the long run, the *grutul* aims to plant cassava, banana, rice and taro.

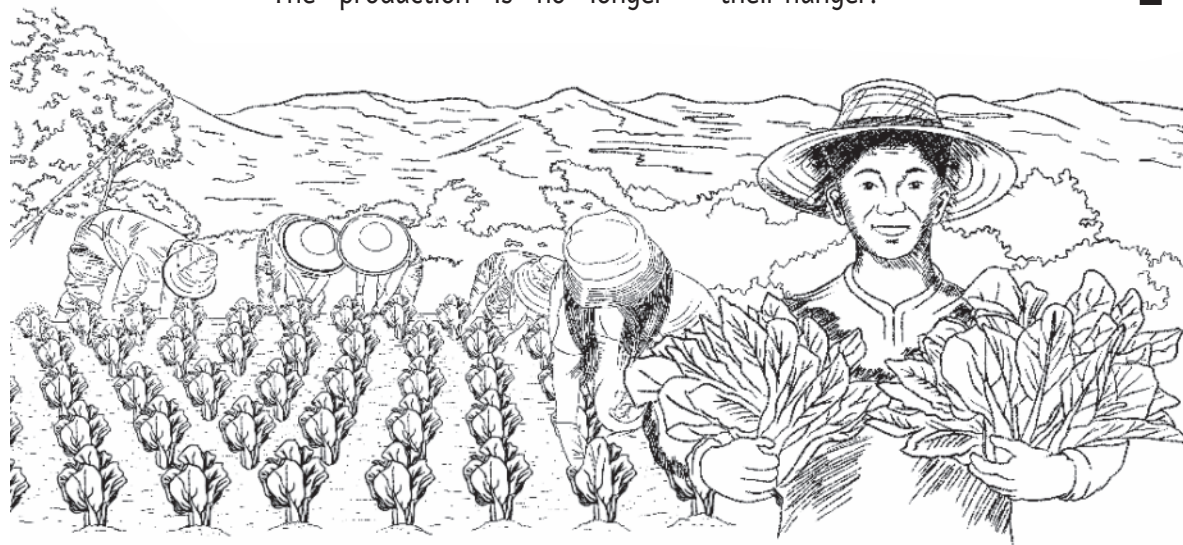
The production is no longer

aimed at earning profits but in feeding the families of farmers. That is why they will only produce what is enough for them. Surplus produce, if there is any, can be sold to other villagefolks.

With regards to how coconut planters in Barangay Dasig will source rice, the guerrilla front committee is already coordinating the production campaigns in all clusters operating within the area. In the case of Barangay Dasig, they may produce an additional volume of vegetables which they can trade with rice which, on the otherhand, is the main product of another barangay in the lowlands. Palay production was also designed to harvest enough rice supply which can be traded for vegetable products from upland villages.

Tatay Lery has decided to join the *grutul*, to which Tatay Utê belongs, even without yet seeing the fruits of their collective effort. Party cadres are expecting to encourage other peasants to organize more *grutuls*, or better yet, reactivate chapter groups that have weakened.

Barangay Dasig has accumulated lessons from its rich revolutionary experience. Tatay Lery no longer needs to wait for the end of the lockdown and the money which his son remits to him. He has realized even farmers within the barrio can carry out measures to address their hunger. AB



Plunderous mining operations in Mindanao continue amid pandemic

MINING COMPANIES TVI Resource Development (Phils) Inc. (TVIRD) and Agata Mining Ventures Inc. (AMVI) continue to operate in Zamboanga del Sur and Agusan del Norte last April despite the Covid-19 lockdowns implemented in the provinces. The companies continued to erect structures and position additional mining equipment during the said period.

The TVIRD which manages mining operations in Mt. Balabag in Bayog, Zamboanga del Sur is 30% owned by the Canadian multinational Toronto Ventures Incorporated (also known as the TVI Pacific Inc.). The latter also holds an indirect control over the operation of the AMVI in Agusan del Norte as it is 60% owned by the TVIRD.

The said multinational company has been conducting plunderous mining operations in mountains of the the Zamboanga Peninsula for two decades now. It was the first company to be awarded with a mining concession in the country under the Mining Act of 1995.

The TVI Pacific Inc. started its operations in the Philippines in

1998. The company is known as the biggest gold and silver producer and the biggest exporter of copper and zinc concentrate. It seized control over Mt. Canatuan in Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte which is considered sacred by the Subanen Lumad group, and Mt. Balabag in Bayog, Zamboanga del Sur. Since the 17th century, the group inhabited the said mountains as part of their ancestral domain.

The entry of TVI Pacific Inc. in Mt. Canatuan resulted in massive devastation. The company opened its first gold and silver processing plant in the mountain in 2004. In its first four years of operation, it was able to produce more than 105 ounces of gold and 1.8 million

ounces of silver doré amounting to approximately \$86 million.

The mining plant stopped operations in 2014 after depleting minerals in the said mountain. Soldiers of the 44th IB serve as the mining plant's security forces and are behind the forcible eviction of Subanen Lumads and suppression of their resistance.

After its plunderous operation in Mt. Canatuan, the TVI Pacific Inc. started its operation in Mt. Balabag in 2008. The company used the issuance of Mineral Production Sharing Agreements to encroach in 4,479 hectares of land in Bayog. There are estimates that the area has 210,000 ounces of gold reserves.

In October 2014, the company opened the AMVI along the boundary of Jabonga, Santiago and Tubay in Agusan del Norte. It mines copper and iron which it exports to Korea, Japan, China and Australia. **AB**

Environmental destruction will result in more pandemics

THE PEOPLE ARE exposed to highly infectious diseases such as Covid-19 due to massive mining operations and other government policies that destroy the environment. This was the assertion of Panalipdan! Mindanao in their statement to mark the 50th Earth Day on April 22.

According to the group, the unprecedented denudation of forests result in the destruction of natural barriers to disasters and diseases, especially to those that are zoonotic (or transmitted from animals to humans) such as Covid-19.

On top of plunderous mining operations, the group noted that monocrop plantations, energy projects, large agricultural and poultry farms, and other forms of land-use conversion are also responsible for environmental destruction.

The global problems of de-

nudation of forests and depletion of natural resources continue unabated in the Philippines.

More than 60% of the country's forests was denuded over the past century. Instead of addressing denudation, the government has further opened vast areas for land conversion into mining, dam and plantation concession areas.

Under the Duterte regime, a mil-

lion hectares of forest and agricultural lands in Mindanao were designated as oil palm plantation areas. Dam projects under the Build, Build, Build program also endanger farmlands, forests and waterways. **AB**



88th IB troops misencounter in Bukidnon

THE 88TH IB concocted a story that an encounter between its troops and the New People's Army (NPA) erupted at Sitio Mahayhay, Barangay Lipa, Quezon, Bukidnon on April 28 in the morning.

What, in fact, took place in the area, was an encounter between the 88th IB's Bravo Company and intelligence unit, according to an NPA-Bukidnon report. A soldier was slain while many others were wounded during the 30-minute fire-fight. An M203 grenade exploded near a community and caused fear among residents.

The 88th IB is notorious for killing, illegally arresting and coercing peasant and Lumad residents to surrender as NPA fighters. Since the unit was formed in 2017, at least five Lumad peasants were shot dead by its troopers. Among its victims are Jeffrey Bayot, a member of the Organisasyon sa Yanong Obrerong Nagkahiusa who was killed in August 2019.

The unit was also behind the arrest and detention of the chairperson of Kasama-Bukidnon and other peasants in Buffalo-Tamaraw-Limus in January 2020, and of two minors in Kitaotao in February 2019.

Last December 2019, Lt. Col. Franklin F. Fabic, commander of the 88th IB, threatened to bomb Sitio Dumasilag, Barangay Sta. Filomena, Quezon and coerced residents to surrender as members and supporters of the NPA. This resulted in the forcible evacuation of 113 residents, including 35 children.

The 88th IB was jointly formed by the 3rd, 4th, 8th and 9th ID. The camp of the butcher battalion is located in Barangay South Poblacion, Maramag. Its forces serve as mercenaries and protectors of plunderous plantation and mining corporations in Bukidnon. AB

#SolidarityAmidCovid on 36th Cordillera Day

THE CORDILLERA PEOPLE'S Alliance (CPA) marked the 36th Cordillera Day commemoration last April 24 by distributing food packs and personal protective equipment (PPE) to the poor and health workers.

It enjoined the people to make the Cordillera Day celebration meaningful by continuing to unite and defend the Cordillera people's rights and ancestral lands.

The Health for the People Brigade spearheaded the conduct of the *ub-ubbo*, *innabuyog* and *binnadang* to raise PPEs and other donations for the poor.

The *ub-ubbo*, *innabuyog* and *binnadang* are indigenous systems of labor exchange to support those in need which highlight the value of collective effort and mutual aid.

For years, the Cordillera Day also served as a venue to commemorate the Cordillera people's struggle against dictatorship, fascism and human rights violations. Macli-ing Dulag, leader of Butbut tribue in Tinglayan, Kalinga was killed by the military on the same day in 1980. Dulag was among the tribal leaders who led the struggle against the Chico Dam Project. Dulag's death was commemorated from 1981 to 1984 and was dubbed Macliing Memorials. From that time on, the CPA launched the Cordillera Peoples' Day which was annually celebrated in various provinces in Cordillera and in Baguio City. AB

Cuba condemns attack on Cuban embassy in the US

CUBAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS condemned the shooting against its embassy in Washington D.C. in the US on April 30. The gunman was identified as Alexander Alazo, a mentally deranged Cuban exile.

Cuba believes that the hostility toward Cuba by US government officials fomented violence. Cuba likened the incident to attacks against Cuban health workers who are providing medical assistance to poor countries that are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Such crimes are being perpetrated simultaneous with aggressive policies implemented by the US against Cuba such as blockades and other economic sanctions. AB

Foiled US attack in Venezuela

VENEZUELAN SECURITY FORCES foiled an armed incursion of US mercenaries in the country on May 4.

In a television broadcast on May 5, Venezuela Pres. Nicolas Maduro said that two American citizens were among those arrested for participating in the attack. They were identified as Luke Denman and Airan Berry, former members of the US Special Forces. They are employed by Silvercorp, USA, a private security company based in Florida which was founded by Jordan Gourdeau, a former member of the Green Beret.

The armed incursion against Venezuela, dubbed Operation Gideon, was launched in the early morning of May 3 and was foiled the next day. Thirteen mercenaries were arrested while six others were killed. Pres. Donald Trump denied US links to the attack but said that all options are on the table against Venezuela. Earlier in January 2019, another US-sponsored coup attempt was also foiled by Venezuela. Maduro believes that the botched attack is linked to the oil as the US has long wanted to monopolize control over the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela is a member of. AB