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Editorial

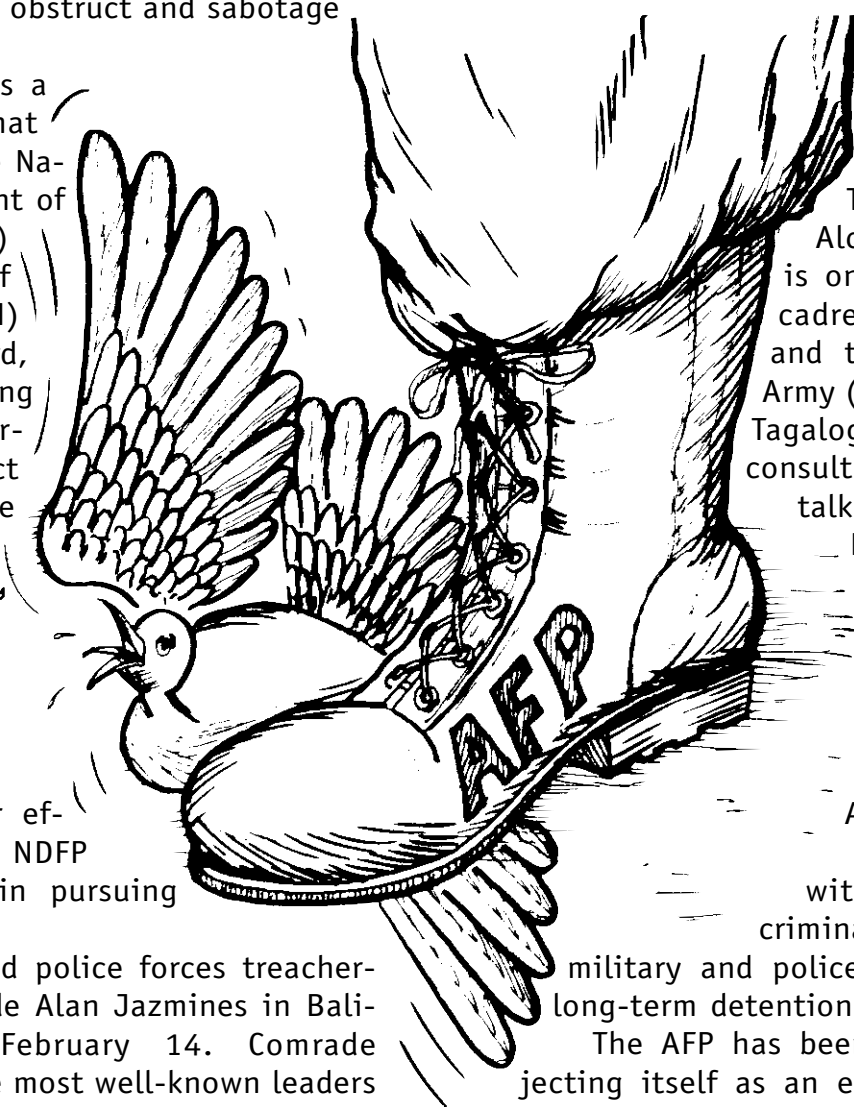
Unite against the fascist forces working against peace

The darkest clouds that are dimming the hopes of advancing the long-stalled peace talks are the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and its new Oplan Bayanihan (OPB). Rabidly fascist forces have been relentless in their efforts to obstruct and sabotage the talks.

Every time there is a glimmer of hope that the talks between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Government of the Philippines (GPH) will be moving forward, forces zealously working against peace undertake moves to obstruct the negotiations. The AFP's fascist generals have the gall to declare themselves as peace advocates in the face of their violations of existing agreements and their efforts to malign the NDFP and its seriousness in pursuing talks with the GPH.

Fascist soldiers and police forces treacherously arrested Comrade Alan Jazmines in Baliuag, Bulacan on February 14. Comrade Jazmines is one of the most well-known leaders of the Communist Party and a leading consultant of the NDFP in the peace talks. In arresting him, the AFP brazenly violated the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees

(JASIG). Jazmines was arrested by the AFP on the eve of the resumption of formal talks between the NDFP and GPH, virtually dashing the people's hopes of achieving a big step forward in the negotiations.



Comrade Jazmines was captured a few weeks after the AFP's arrest of Tirso "Ka Bart" Alcantara. Ka Bart is one of the leading cadres of the Party and the New People's Army (NPA) in Southern Tagalog and is also a consultant in the peace talks. All in all, 15 NDFP consultants involved in advancing the peace talks have been arrested and jailed by the AFP and PNP. All of them have been slapped with trumped-up criminal charges by the military and police to justify their long-term detention.

The AFP has been boastfully projecting itself as an entity that is beyond the pale of agreements entered into by the GPH and NDFP. It arrogantly declares that "law enforcement" operations by the military and police cannot be suspended

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during the peace talks. Even during the 19-day ceasefire in December-January, the AFP relentlessly sowed terror through "special operations" in villages within guerrilla fronts, and even had the temerity to call them "peace and development" operations.

The fascist officers of the Aquino regime have absolutely no interest in seeing the peace talks succeed. All they want is to use the talks to deceive the people and cause the capitulation of the revolutionary forces. To military and police officers, peace means nothing but the suppression and defeat of all of the people's armed resistance and mass struggles.

The military's antipeace policy is articulated in the OPB, which is in turn patterned after the US Counterinsurgency Guide whose objective is to maintain US imperialist rule in the Philippines and its other semicolonies by subjugating forces advocating national liberation and people's democracy.

The OPB manifestly shows no interest in attaining a just and lasting peace. Under the OPB, the AFP officers' avowed role with regard to the peace talks is to deprive the NDFP of any advantage in facing the GPH. This only shows that

The darkest clouds that are dimming the hopes of advancing the long-stalled peace talks are the Armed Forces of the Philippines and its new Oplan Bayanihan. Ravidly fascist forces have been relentless in their efforts to obstruct and sabotage the talks.

there is no room in the AFP's fascist mindset for the conduct of talks between two equals and for mutual efforts to address the issues that lie at the roots of the civil war.



The AFP has also shown that it will not be bound by any existing or future agreements between the NDFP and the GPH. It thus wants to show the people that nothing significant can come out of the peace talks and to push the NDFP to withdraw from the talks to justify the AFP's con-

tinuing intensification of its fascist war against the people.

Everyone must realize that the peace talks between the NDFP and the GPH can only succeed if we can put a stop to the efforts of the rabid fascists within the military and police to sabotage the negotiations. The Aquino regime's policy of unleashing its fascist dogs in the AFP to trample with impunity on all the agreements between the GPH and NDFP, including the JASIG and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) is detrimental to the talks.

The Filipino people are one in their desire to achieve a lasting peace based on justice, and thus support the peace talks between the NDFP and the GPH through their widespread resistance to the fascist forces working against peace.

We must go all-out to expose and resist the AFP's rampage and the hollowness of its slogan of "peace and development." We must resist its fascist terrorism.

The revolutionary forces are aware that the NDFP's negotiations with the GPH can be an effective arena of struggle to attain peace if it is undertaken alongside the people's mass struggles and armed resistance. The people must therefore advance their national and democratic aspirations through all arenas of struggle. It is these aspirations that form the foundations of the peace they desire. AB



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angbayan@yahoo.com

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Military arrests valued NDFP consultant

"To hell with the JASIG!" This was the arrogant reply of the officer who oversaw the arrest of Comrade Alan Jazmines, a Communist Party official and peace talks consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

Jazmines was arrested in a house in Baliuag, Bulacan at around 5:30 p.m. on February 14. Scores of operatives from the 56th IB, 7th MIB of the 7th ID, 703rd Brigade, Intelligence Security Group and the Bulacan PNP swooped down on the house where he was staying. While he was being taken, Jazmines told the arresting unit that he was protected by the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees and was immune from arrest. But the operatives completely ignored this.

In a statement, Jazmines said his document of identification issued by the NDFP in accordance with the JASIG bears the reference number 978213 under the name of Dodi Lapida. Despite Jazmines' assertion, the military insists that he could not present any proof that he was an NDFP consultant and was protected by the JASIG. The JASIG guarantees the right of consultants and staff of both parties against surveillance, arrest and detention.

The arresting units hauled off several items being used by Jazmines in his work as an NDFP consultant, including computers, documents and funds he used in his consultations.

The AFP justified Jazmines' arrest, saying he was facing 13 counts of murder committed in 1989 in Quezon. Just as it has done with other NDFP consultants and staff who have been arrested, the criminal cases

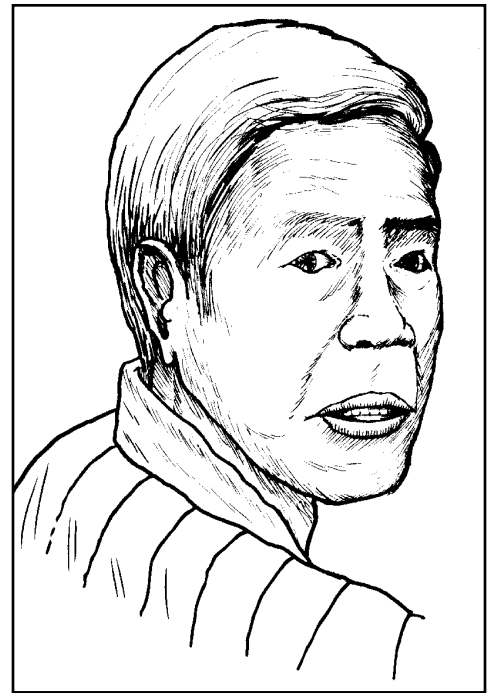
filed against Jazmines are all manufactured.

In arresting Jazmines on the eve of the opening of the formal peace talks on February 15, the AFP wants to show that it can easily trample on the JASIG and other agreements forged during the peace talks without even a slap on the wrist from its commander in chief. The military pays lip service to supporting the peace process, but it is actually destroying the favorable conditions for the talks that both panels have been striving to create.

A statement issued by Jazmines from his jail cell lambasts his arrest by military and police operatives as a brazen disregard for, and an act of, sabotage against the peace process. He said that the GPH's violations of the JASIG must first be addressed before the talks proceed to the other agenda. The talks are set to discuss the Comprehensive Agreement on Socio-Economic Reforms.

Jazmines graduated with an engineering degree from the Ateneo de Manila University and is a former professor at the Asian Institute of Management. He was incarcerated twice during the Marcos dictatorship and was a political detainee for seven years. He was one of the founders of Partido ng Bayan. He is now detained at the PNP Custodial Center in Camp Crame.

In a related development, human rights organizations



Comrade Alan Jazmines

and other peace advocates called for Jazmines' immediate release and that of 13 other NDFP consultants.

The Samahan ng mga Ex-Detainee Laban sa Detensyon at para sa Amnestiya (SELDA) demanded not only Jazmines' release but that of other detainees out of respect for the JASIG and as a goodwill measure.

SELDA said many of these detainees have been imprisoned for more than five years and all are victims of the repression and "legal offensive" of the Arroyo administration. They are Glicerio Pernia, Eduardo Serrano, Eduardo Sarmiento, Jovencio Balweg, Randy Malayao, Emeterio Antalan, Eduardo Friginal, Jaime Soledad, Alfredo Mapano, Tirso Alcantara, Ma. Luisa Pucray, Edwin Brigano and Pedro Codaste.

They also demanded the immediate surfacing and release of consultants who are victims of involuntary disappearance, among them Leo Velasco, Leopoldo Ancheta, Rogelio Calubad (who was abducted with his son Gabriel) and Prudencio Calubid. **AB**

Formal peace talks between NDFP and GPH opens in Norway



Despite the AFP's sabotage efforts, the opening of formal talks between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Government of the Philippines (GPH) went ahead as scheduled on February 15 in Oslo, Norway. The talks will run until February 21. A simultaneous ceasefire was also agreed upon in the same period.

Upon the negotiations' resumption, the NDFP Negotiating Panel led by Comrade Luis Jalandoni immediately demanded the release of Comrades Alan Jazmines, Ericson

Acosta, 14 other peace talks consultants and members of the Morong 43 who remain in detention. (See related article)

Also present during the peace negotiations' opening were State Minister Espem Barth Eide and Ambassador Ture Lundh who represented the Norwegian Royal Government which acts as Third Party Facilitator. Representatives of both panels delivered speeches—Comrade Jalandoni on the side of the NDFP and the Aquino regime's Presidential Peace Adviser Teresita Quintos-Deles.

The current agenda are socio-economic reforms. Comrade Jose Maria Sison, founding chair of the Communist Party of the Philippines and NDFP chief political consultant is set to lead the discussions on the NDFP side.

Meanwhile, Fr. Diony Cabilas of SELDA happily announced that Comrade Angelina Bisuña, 66, one of 14 detained consultants, has been released. Ipong was freed on February 17 after six years in detention. She was arrested by military and police operatives in Aloran, Misamis Occidental on March 8, 2005 and subjected to interrogation, torture and sexual abuse for days.

Also released was Edwin Dematera, 39, one of three detainees belonging to the Morong 43 who were not released last December. Aside from the two remaining detainees, there are five others still detained at Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal who are being compelled by the military to serve as government witnesses against their comrades. AB

Activist arrested in Samar

Elements of the 34th IB arrested Ericson Acosta, 37, an activist and former student leader, in Barangay Bay-ang, San Jorge, Samar at around 10 a.m. on February 13. According to reports, Acosta was about to board a pump boat to San Jorge town when he was suddenly seized by soldiers. The operatives took his personal belongings and money.

Acosta was the literary editor of the *Philippine Collegian* at the University of the Philippines-Diliman in 1993 and a member of a cultural organization and alliance. The arresting team planted a grenade on Acosta's person and filed criminal charges against him at the Regional Trial Court Branch 41-Gandara. He is currently detained at the Gandara Police Municipal Office in Samar.

Various groups have roundly condemned Acosta's arrest. His friends and family fear that he has been tortured, especially since it took some time before he was surfaced. They demanded that his rights be respected. AB



CMO in Mindanao are blatant violations of the ceasefire

National Democratic Front-Mindanao spokesperson Jorge “Ka Oris” Madlos strongly condemned continuing civil-military operations (CMO) in the island as blatant violations of the ceasefire running from February 15 to 21.

Ka Oris said that armed elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine National Police and Citizens Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) enter villages ostensibly to push for “peace and development.” In actuality, they break up into two groups, with one focusing on psywar operations and the other on security clearing operations.

The soldiers require the villagers to attend mass meetings

where they are forced to give information on the New People’s Army (NPA). Video footages of the barriofolk are also taken without their permission. After this, some individuals are “invited” for interrogation about the NPA or mass activists’ presence in the barrio. Those who refuse to cooperate are intimidated or beaten up. Many of them are likewise forcibly recruited into the CAFGU.

Ka Oris said that CMO are

violative of the ceasefire because of the following:

- ▶ they are offensive military operations against the NPA and the revolutionary masses in suspected NPA areas and launched far away from military camps or detachments;

- ▶ investigations or interrogations under CMO are intelligence operations, which are part of offensive military operations;

- ▶ intimidating and mauling civilians in the middle of CMO are violations of both the ceasefire and of human rights.

Ka Oris challenged Benigno Aquino III to show his authority as commander-in-chief by overpowering the hawks in the AFP and ordering them to put a stop to CMO during the ceasefire. AB

AFP reneges on ceasefire commitment

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) wantonly violated the February 15-21 ceasefire agreement between the NDFP and the GPH in the provinces of Masbate, Sorsogon and Bukidnon, according to initial reports.

Masbate. Troops from the 9th IB and 903rd Brigade attacked the towns of Mobo and Uson in Masbate. The soldiers indiscriminately fired their weapons despite the absence of their enemy, creating fear among the civilians in the area. The shooting incidents occurred in Sitio Binusbusan in San Jose Uson; Sitio Makamote in Sawmill Mobo; Sitio Bailan in Bagacay, Mobo; and Sitio Cabacagnan in Baang, Mobo.

Sorsogon. Soldiers of the 49th IB did not budge from villages they had been occupying since October 2010. They have been conducting RSOT operations in 19 barangays in the towns of Gubat, Casiguran, Bulan and Barcelona and in Sorsogon City. In Bulan, 24 military elements conducted operations on February 15 and returned to their camp only at around 7 a.m. of February 15.

Bukidnon. Elements of the 8th IB

launched a massive military operation in five of the province's towns.

Two truckloads of troops from the 8th IB and the PNP went to Barangay Osmeña, Danggagan on February 15-16 to force the people to attend a mass meeting and extract intelligence information from them.

Also on February 15, a squad under the 8th IB launched a commando operation in the sugar cane fields of Barangay Kauyonan, Kitaoao. At the same time, two other truckloads of soldiers from the 8th IB and PNP Regional Mobile Group operatives aboard two patrol cars launched operations in Barangay Kalumihan in the same town.

In Don Carlos town, a jeepload of military men conducted combat patrols in Barangay San Nicolas-Banban. An M35 truck filled with elements from the 8th IB patrolled the villages of Bagsak and Pinamaloy.

In Barangay Namnam, San Fernando, a truckload of soldiers from the 8th IB reoccupied an abandoned detachment.

In Quezon, Bukidnon, military operations that began on February 10 continue without letup. AB



NPA frees prisoners of war

Red fighters of the New People's Army released prisoners of war M/Sgt. Mario Veluz and P03 Jorge Sabatin in two separate places on February 18.

Veluz was transferred by the NPA Herminio Alfonso Command (HAC-NPA) to the custody of Gov. Emmylou Mendoza of North Cotabato.

HAC-NPA spokesperson Ka Isabel Santiago said Veluz was proven by the people's court not to have committed any serious crime against the revolutionary movement.

Veluz was captured at a mobile checkpoint set up by NPA Red fighters along the Davao-Bukidnon highway on February 6. Seized from him was a cal .45 pistol.

P03 Sabatin, an element of the Agusan del Sur Police Mobile Group was transferred by Red fighters of the Conrado Heredia Command to the custody of barangay officials. He was captured on February 1 after a raid by NPA guerrillas on a PNP extortion checkpoint in Trento, Agusan del Sur.

Sabatin was slightly wounded in the foot and was immediately provided medical attention by NPA medics. AB

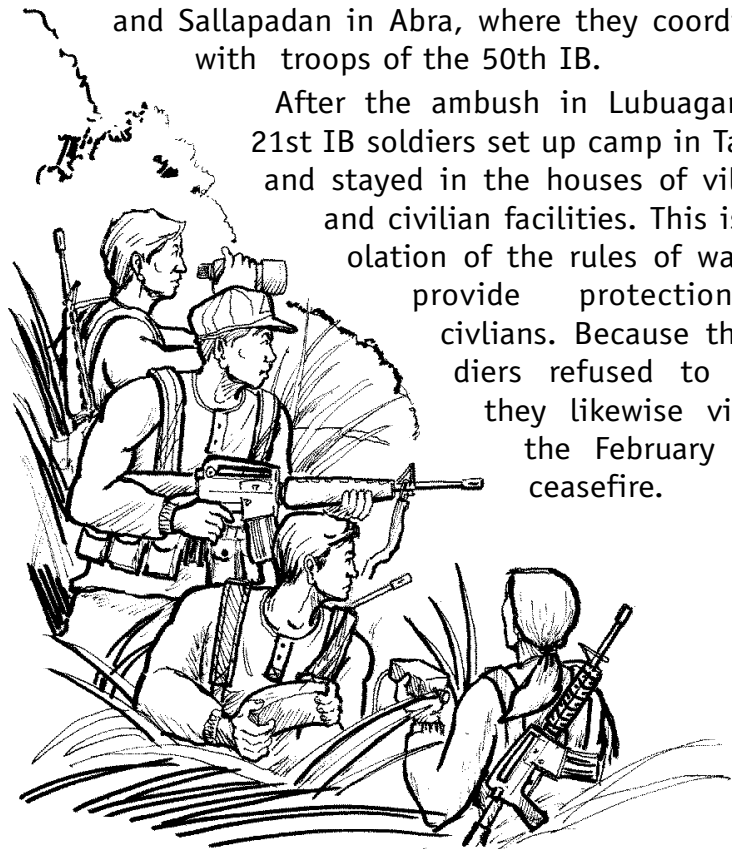
3 soldiers killed in Kalinga ambush

Three soldiers were killed in an ambush by guerrillas of the Lejo Cawilan Command of the New People's Army on elements of the 21st IB in Tanglag, Lubuagan, Kalinga on February 8. An undetermined number of soldiers were also wounded.

The ambushed soldiers were part of a military troop that has not relented in occupying Kalinga since September 2010. Since the middle of January, they have intensified combat and civil-military operations in Pinukpuk and Balbalan towns. In Malibcong and Lacub towns in Abra, their operations were coordinated with the 41st IB.

The operations eventually shifted to the towns of Lubuagan, Tabuk and Tanudan in the southern part of Kalinga and to the towns of Boliney, Daguioman and Sallapadan in Abra, where they coordinated with troops of the 50th IB.

After the ambush in Lubuagan, the 21st IB soldiers set up camp in Tanglag and stayed in the houses of villagers and civilian facilities. This is a violation of the rules of war that provide protection to civilians. Because the soldiers refused to leave, they likewise violated the February 15-21 ceasefire. AB



Red fighters capture soldier in ComVal

Guerrillas from the Front 25 Operations Command of the New People's Army in Southern Mindanao Region captured an element of the 5th Scout Ranger Company.

Pfc El Bryan Cañedo, 23, was arrested at an NPA mobile checkpoint in Barangay Marapat, Compostela, Compostela Valley at around 6 a.m. of February 7.

Seized from him was a 9 mm pistol.

Cañedo is currently undergoing investigation on his possible involvement in crimes against the masses and the revolutionary movement.

In an audio clip sent to the media on February 17, Cañedo called on the military and police to stop their offensive operations to rescue him since

these would only delay the processing of his release.

He also assured his family that he was sleeping and eating well and that his rights as a prisoner of war were being fully respected.

Aside from the audio clip, the NPA also sent a picture of Cañedo reading and another picture of him smiling while drinking from a tin cup. AB

General Reyes' death and corruption in the AFP



Investigations on corruption within the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) became even more complicated when Ret. Gen. Angelo Reyes committed suicide on February 8. On the other hand, his death has underscored the depth and breadth of systematic corruption in the entire reactionary system.

Reyes was a former AFP chief of staff under both the Estrada and Arroyo regimes and secretary of the Department of National Defense as well as other departments under the Arroyo regime. He led the Estrada regime's bloody campaign against the Moro people. The fascist Oplan Bantay Laya campaign was begun by the AFP under his leadership.

Ret. Lt. Col. George Rabusa implicated Reyes in the systematic embezzlement of AFP funds. Rabusa, a former AFP budget officer said Reyes and his wife pocketed at least P150 million during Reyes' term as AFP chief.

Reyes' suicide has not derailed the Senate and Congress investigations. And it definitely has not mollified the anger and hatred of the people and foot soldiers at corruption in the entire AFP. The one thing people are sorry for is the fact that Reyes will no longer be able to divulge what else he knows, especially about Gloria Arroyo's direct role in corruption within the AFP. **AB**

Statistical sleight of hand revealed

Obscuring the real face of poverty



Instead of implementing programs that would really address widespread poverty in the country, the Aquino regime has resorted to watering down the definition of poverty to make it appear that the number of impoverished people has been reduced.

The regime now claims that every Filipino needs only P46 per day to live, based on a new poverty threshold that the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) began using in 2009. This figure is even smaller than the already understated former threshold of P52. With this redefinition of poverty, the regime has managed to exclude up to 5.32 million individuals from the number of impoverished people.

Due to the lower poverty threshold, the Aquino government now claims that only 2.6% of Metro Manila residents can be considered poor.

In fact, should the regime continue using the previous poverty threshold, the number

of poor Filipinos would have grown by 850,000 in 2009 compared to 2006. This is the fourth time since 1991 that the NCSB reduced its poverty threshold.

The NCSB's new methodology redefines the concept of food bundles or the food items consumed by Filipinos on a daily basis. In particular, it has removed *galunggong* (scad) from the list of daily table fare and replaced it with mung beans.

The new methodology has reduced not only the food threshold but that of other items needed by Filipinos in daily life. For transport expenses alone, however, the P46 threshold is already much too inadequate for an ordinary



worker who rides the MRT. He would most likely spend as much as ₱30 on fare on his way to work, which would already account for a huge percentage of the ₱46 daily threshold defined by the regime. Aside from food and transportation, there are other expenses for items such as cooking gas, tuition and medical needs, all of which have become much more expensive.

The Aquino regime's new method of determining the poverty threshold is a huge insult to the people. It has the audacity to claim that the number of poor Filipinos has been reduced when the people are in fact reeling from the blows of the denationalization, privatization and deregulation policies in the country. The regime turns a deaf ear to the long-standing demands of workers and low-income professionals for just and adequate wages and salaries. Neither has it taken measures to address the grievances of peasants and farm workers.

The Aquino regime's attempts to obscure the true face of poverty are no different from Gloria Arroyo's attempts in April 2005 to cover up the real extent of unemployment in the country. Arroyo claimed to have pulled down the number of unemployed by 1.5 million and the unemployment rate by 3.6% without having done a thing to effect real reductions.

Central Luzon farmers fully support GARB

AGRARIAN reform must be implemented immediately. Thus demanded farmers from Central Luzon during a hearing of the House Committee on Agrarian Reform on February 17. They also declared their full support for House Bill 374 or the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill (GARB).

The farmers' delegation that attended the hearing was led by Joseph Canlas, chair of the Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon (AMGL). Also at the hearing were members of Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Hacienda Luisita (AMBALA). The farmers openly repudiated CARPER (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program with Extension and Reforms) in favor of GARB.

The peasant delegates said that CARP or CARPER is utterly useless to them because it has failed to protect their right to land. In fact, said

Canlas, CARP even served as the savior of the Cojuangco-Aquino clan's interests in Hacienda Luisita through the Stock Distribution Option (SDO).

The farmers cited cases of agrarian disputes where CARP favored the interests of big landlords instead of that of the peasantry. Among the estates involved are the 3,100-hectare Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation (FMMR) in Laur, Nueva Ecija; a 375-hectare estate in San Miguel, Bulacan being claimed by Rep. Luis Villafuerte; and a 200-hectare landholding in Barangay Prado, Siongco, Lubao, Pampanga where the Pineda family has ordered the demolition of 200 farmers' houses. There are also land disputes in Barangay Balangcinaway in Bayambang, Pangasinan; Barangay San Roque, La Paz, Tarlac; and in the town of Orion, Bataan.

DOLE disapproves Bleustar union registration

THE management Bleustar Manufacturing and Marketing Corporation (BMCC) continues to harass and intimidate the company's workers even after entering into a collective bargaining agreement with them in November 2010.

The Bleustar Workers Labor Union (BLWU) struck last year to protest management's violation of the workers' rights. Among the violations cited were union busting, sexual harassment and other unfair labor practices.

After the new CBA was signed, BLWU immediately had it registered with the Department of Labor and Em-

ployment (DOLE).

DOLE refused to register the new CBA, saying that there was a pending petition from another entity at the BMCC. The petitioner claimed that there is no existing union at the BMCC nor is there a CBA between the company and its workers. It requested the conduct of certification elections to enable it to put up a union.

The petitioner is the Advan United Workers Labor Union (AWLU), which is affiliated with the yellow Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP).

BLWU believes that the

AWLU petition is nothing but a DOLE-management scheme to bust the legitimate union and disregard the CBA. BLWU said that this is proven by DOLE's approval of AWLU's baseless petition.

UE students stage walkout

HUNDREDS of students at the University of the East-Manila walked out of their classes to oppose impending hikes in matriculation fees. The mass walkout was led by UNITE-UE and other progressive organizations.

The protesters opposed the 5-10% tuition fee hike and the P200 increase in miscellaneous fees. UNITE-UE spokesperson Jade Valenzuela said it is very hard for students to continue with their studies due to hikes in tuition and other school fees.

Meanwhile, other schools are reportedly planning to raise their fees, among them the Lyceum of the Philippines, Philippine School of Business Administration, University of Sto. Tomas, Far Eastern University and the University of the Philippines.

Kabataan Partylist Rep. Raymond Palatino asked schools at the elementary, secondary and tertiary levels to allow students to take their exams even if they had not yet paid their tuition fees. This is in accordance with an order issued by the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in 2010.

Palatino said that the Kabataan Partylist was receiving numerous complaints about violations of this order. He has filed a bill in Congress that would formally prohibit such a practice by capitalist school owners and set stiffer penalties, including the cancellation of permits of schools that refuse to comply. Palatino added that schools should consider the fact that prices of commodities, fare and school fees have all been going up.

Bahrain now the center of uprisings in the Arab world

AFTER Egyptian Pres. Hosni Mubarak's downfall on February 11, Bahrain has emerged as the focal point of people's uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Uprisings are also fast erupting in Yemen, Oman, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait and Iran.

The Egyptian people were angered no end after Mubarak's speech on February 10 declaring that he would not step down until after the elections in September, ostensibly for an orderly transfer of power.

US imperialism and its rabid puppet Israel quickly maneuvered to topple Mubarak, with the military seizing the reins of government as hundreds of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets the day after.

The collapse of Mubarak's three-decade rule came after 18 days of protest. He and his family hurriedly fled from Cairo to a resort in Sharma el-Sheik.

Meanwhile, in Bahrain, four persons have been killed and many others wounded in three days of protest.

The upheaval began on February 13 with calls on the country's Sunni minority rulers to loosen their grip on the government. In particular, the protesters demanded the right to choose government officials and more opportunities for the Shiite majority. The protesters eventually demanded more jobs, better housing, the release of all political prisoners and an end to the 200-year old Sunni rule.

US Pres. Barack Obama has expressed concern about such developments since Bahrain is the US' most strategic ally in countering Iran's influence among the Arab countries. Bahrain's ruler, Sheikh Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa has given cash doleouts to every family, but even this failed to dampen the protest. According to the latest reports, up to 23 persons have been arrested by the police despite Obama's admonitions to its ally to tread carefully.

Protests have likewise been widespread in Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world and the US' key ally in its "anti-terrorist" campaign in the Gulf region. The Yemeni people are demanding the resignation of Pres. Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh, who has been ruling the country for more than three decades, is not due to finish his current term until 2013.

In Oman, Sultan Qaboos has announced a wage hike for all workers in the private sector, fearing that his kingdom will also be swept by the wave of protests. Omani workers will now be receiving 200 rials (\$520) per month, up from the current 140 rials (\$365).

In Libya, protests turned violent when Moammar Ghaddafi's Revolutionary Guards strafed demonstrators from aboard helicopters. Up to 200 protesters have been killed, according to the latest reports.