



ANG

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29 firearms seized

Successful offensives across the country

FIVE SUCCESSFUL New People's Army tactical offensives were launched from both ends of the archipelago this past week. The NPA pummeled police units and CAFGU elements with raids and ambushes in Northern Luzon, Bicol and Southern Mindanao.

On March 18, around 8:30 a.m., in Barangay Cawayan, Ragay, Camarines Sur, a team of the NPA-West Camarines Sur (Norben Gruta Command or NGC) successfully ambushed CAFGU elements under the 22nd IB of the 9th ID. Norbert Sabariza was killed, while Jerick Neo and Olan dela Torre were wounded.

According to the residents and the NGC's investigation, said CAFGU elements were involved in proliferating illegal drugs in the area, poisoning fish in the rivers, and stealing the people's goats, chicken and crops. The residents also complained about the nearby detachment in Barangay Casay, Lupi, Camarines Sur which is located near homes and the CAFGU elements who stop passers-by whenever they are drunk. The NGC is extending its apologies to the spouses Rey and Besabe Barrientos of Barangay Casay, who were wounded when their motorcycle sped past the CAFGU vehicle at the time of the ambush.

Meanwhile, Red fighters of the BHB-Southern Mindanao Re-



EDITORIAL

Oppose AFP all-out war, push for the peace talks

One with the Filipino people, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) welcomes the continuation of peace talks between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). The talks were agreed upon by representatives of the two sides in talks last March 10-11 in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

The Party is encouraged by the common determination to concentrate and accelerate efforts to forge the Comprehensive Agreement on Socio-Economic Reforms (CASER) and Comprehensive Agreement on Political and Constitutional Reforms (CAPCR).

The Party and New People's Army (NPA) are set on issuing a de-

claration to restore the previous unilateral ceasefire. This is to boost and encourage the forging of CASER and as a show of goodwill for the scheduled talks this coming April.

The Filipino people must act to push the Duterte regime to forge the CASER and CAPCR with the NDFP within the year, in order to open the opportunity to implement

...continue on page 3

and have the people benefit from these under the Duterte regime.

The continuation of peace talks gives the Duterte regime an opportunity to unite with the Filipino people in their aspiration for substantive reforms.

Consonant with the continuation of peace talks, the masses of workers must continue to strengthen their struggle against contractualization and for wage increases and to hold Duterte accountable for his failed promises. Peasant mass struggles must be intensified nationwide for genuine land reform, especially to dismantle the haciendas, assert the right to till and make land productive, and resist landgrabbing by landlords, mining firms and plantations.

The Filipino people must intensify their struggles to make Duterte account for his failed promises. In line with this, legal and clandestine national democratic organizations in the cities and countryside must be strengthened.

All national democratic forces must take advantage of peace talks in order to highlight the national democratic line and analysis of Philippine society and the demand for revolutionary change through protracted people's war. Undertake a widespread national democratic education and propaganda campaign.

It must be underscored that basic reforms demanded by the people are what should be addressed in peace talks; that peace is not merely ending the war, rather resolving the causes of war.

In reinstating the ceasefire declaration, the Party is fully aware of the continuing occupation by armed troops of the AFP of around 500 barrios. The AFP makes use of civilian infrastructure and usurps or takes over the work of civilian agencies (behind the catchword of "delivery of service") in order to impose the armed presence of its troops in the barrios.

In order for the ceasefire to be truly meaningful and beneficial to the people, the AFP must cease all

its intelligence, psywar, armed suppression and combat operations against the peasant masses and minority peoples.

The AFP must also cease its criminal shelling and aerial bombing and strafing near barrios which endanger the people, ravage their livelihood and destroy the environment. Several thousand people have been forced to evacuate since Duterte commanded the AFP to "flatten the hills."

The Filipino people must demand the AFP to order their troops back to their barracks at the battalion level and end the plunder, repression and bombing.

If the AFP does not heed these calls, the reciprocal ceasefires of the NDFP and GRP will quickly lose significance.

The people must actively resist militarization in the barrios. They must quickly act to protest the presence of armed soldiers in the midst of their homes, in the barangay halls, schools, day-care centers, health centers and other civilian structures.

There are rich experiences across the country where soldiers were forced out of the barrios through collective and courageous actions of villagers such as confrontations with soldiers, evacuations and encampments in the town centers.

People from neighboring villages and from town centers or cities must be mobilized to support the struggle in the barrios to defend their rights and welfare.

The NPA must continue to be strengthened. Launch widespread campaigns for recruiting new Red fighters both in the countryside and cities. Launch theoretical studies and practical trainings in order to temper the spirit, sharpen their consciousness and strengthen their bodies. The NPA must keep high its fighting will and firmly hold initiative especially in the face of continued enemy attacks. AB

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gion (Mt. Apo Subregional Command) raided a house serving as secret armory of a policeman in Barangay Mateo, Kidapawan City on March 15, at 1 p.m. Fifteen firearms were seized here.

Taken from Reynaldo V. Dinampo, a scalawag agent of the PNP-CIDG Region 12, were four Bushmaster M4 rifles, two M14 rifles, one Ultimax light machine gun, two M203 grenade launchers, one shotgun, one KG9 sub-machine gun, and four calibre .45 pistols, which were part of the firearms he was trafficking for the higher officials of the PNP-CIDG in the region. Various ammunition and magazines and other military equipment were also seized. The daring disarming operation was staged near the command headquarters of the 39th IB, and only a few minutes away from the city's police headquarters.

Rigoberto F. Sanchez, spokesperson of NPA-Southern Mindanao, announced that "with the protection of mercenary police scalawags, Dinampo and his network of dealers smuggle arms and ammunition for private armies of warlords, big landlords and compradors, big bureaucrats and fanatic paramilitary groups in North Cotabato, Far South and Central Mindanao and some parts of Davao Region. The same weapons have targeted Lumad and peasants in the countryside, and other civilians and members of progressive groups.

The masses in North Cotabato celebrate this recent disarming operation by the Red army as fitting revolutionary justice against the fascist PNP that opened fire at thousands of protesting Lumad and peasants, killing three and severely wounding others, on April 1 last year in what is notoriously known as the Kidapawan massacre."

At the other end of the country, a unit of BHB-Abra (Agustin Bernalen Command-Procopio Tauro Front or ABC-PTF) successfully

Continuation of NDFP-GRP peace talks

THE REPRESENTATIVES of the GRP and NDFP agreed to continue peace negotiations and the scheduled fourth and fifth round of talks in April and June. The meeting was held in Utrecht, The Netherlands last March 10 and 11, a few weeks after Duterte declared last February that he will no longer negotiate and that he will have the NDFP consultants rearrested, a few days after the Party and NPA declared the termination of its ceasefire.

Duterte sent his representatives to meet with the NDFP after he was convinced to do so in the face of growing clamor of various sectors for continuation of peace talks as a method of addressing the roots of the Philippine civil war.

In the March 11 joint state-

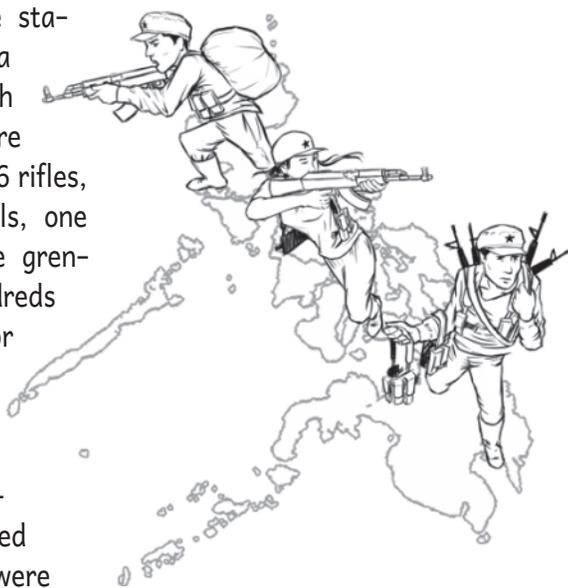
ment of the GRP and NDFP, the GRP assured the safety and freedom of all NDFP consultant who all are threatened with rearrest and detention, promised to release a consultant rearrested last February as well as four others who remain under detention.

The GRP also promised to release 19 political prisoners on humanitarian basis and to continue processing the release of all others.

It was also agreed to forge a bilateral ceasefire which will take effect once the terms of references and other matters are settled, taking into consideration the various issues that arose during the previous six-month ceasefire. Both sides agreed as well to reinstate each other's unilateral ceasefires.

raided the municipal police station of Malibcong, Abra around 7:30 p.m. on March 12. Seized from the raid were 10 firearms including six M16 rifles, one M203, two 9mm pistols, one calibre .45 pistol, two rifle grenades, one grenade and hundreds of rounds of ammunition for M16, M14, and pistols. Deputy Chief of Police SPO4 Romeo Tubera, PO3 Richard Daus and PO2 Leo-mar Tuscano were captured during the fight but they were turned over to the residents of Poblacion Malibcong, together with their personal effects and money, before the Red fighters safely withdrew from the scene. The drunk policemen could not put up a fight.

A few minutes after 10 a.m. the next day, March 13, another unit of the ABC-PTF ambushed the reinforcing convoy of the Provincial Public Safety Company (PPSC) headed by the provincial chief of police himself, PNP-Abra Provincial Director PSSupt. Alexander Tagum. Among the five reported wounded in the



ambush were PO2 Jessie Trinidad, PO2 Marlon dela Paz, PO1 Gerome Baldos, PO1 Kennon Sanggoy and PO1 Von Harold Layao.

Previously, at 7:10 a.m. on March 8, a team of the NPA Mt. Apo Subregional Operations Command ambushed a unit of PPSC of the PNP which was conducting operations in Barangay Sibayan, Bansalan, Davao del Sur. The PNP-PPSC unit was responding to the punitive operations conducted by the NPA on Marlon Lomantas, an intelligence agent of the 39th IB

who was notorious for his role in the illegal drug trade in the area. After a ten-minute exchange of gunfire, the NPA recovered two M16 rifles and two 9mm Glock pistols.

The back-to-back raids and ambushes against police operating troops were in line with the directive of the NPA national command to launch tactical offensives to frustrate the Duterte regime's all-out war. According to Ka Diego Wadagan, spokesperson of Agustin Begnalen Command, "the PNP is a staunch instrument in the counter-insurgency campaign that conducts psywar, intelligence and combat operations against the people and the entire revolutionary movement. This action is in response to the complaints of the residents who have been victims of abusive policemen who are prime movers of illegal drugs, drunkenness, gambling and brutality, and in implementing 'Oplan-Tokhang' that victimizes thousands of poor families by extrajudicial killings."

PSSupt. Alexander Tagum, who was in the convoy that deserted their wounded colleagues during the ambush, was the commander who gave the direct order to police to shoot protesters in Kidapawan before he was transferred to Abra. **AB**

AFP misencounters in all-out war

PERHAPS DUE to frenzy or acute desperation, reactionary soldiers are increasingly seeing ghosts when they launch operations in the countryside. Misencounters between AFP troops have occurred one after the other since Duterte ordered his all-out war.

On March 8, 8:30 p.m., in Barangay Budlingin, Alegria, Surigao del Norte, encamped troops of the Alpha Company, 30th IB battled their fellow troopers who were on patrol around the camp. Killed in the gunfight was Pfc. Jhon Francis Rivera while Pfc. Windyl Daayata was wounded.

An incident similar to this happened on February 12 in Purok 6, Bullocan, Laak, Compostela Valley between units of the 60th IB when they exchanged fire for more than an hour. To make it appear that it was a legitimate encounter with the NPA, they shelled the area afterwards (See page 6).

On February 5 in Little Baguio, Malita, Davao del Sur, troops of the 73rd IB battled each other while allegedly pursuing Red fighters. One of the soldiers was killed. They also employed artillery fire on the area a few days after.

There are also incidents of terrified soldiers shooting at shadows. In Brgy. Cambalidio, Libmanan, Camarines Sur, soldiers

of the 22nd IB, 9th ID told the press that they were fired upon by the NPA around 10:30 p.m. on February 13 though there were no NPA units in the area. In Cabatangan, Lambunao, Iloilo, residents reported that soldiers frequently fired their rifles around their detachment supposedly to prevent the NPA from coming near them. These are aside from the numerous cases of killed civilians that the military presents as NPA members, such as those in Jebaca, Maayon, Capiz on February 24 and in Capalonga, Camarines Sur on March 15 which add to the ire of the residents (See page 11).

Because the war they are waging is unjust and unprincipled, soldiers who launch operations or encamp in the villages are increasingly being isolated from the masses in the countryside. It is not surprising for ordinary soldiers to develop low morale and for more misencounters to occur as the regime's all-out war continues.

AFP's incessant attacks against peasants

State agents continue killing peasants whom they label as members of the New People's Army (NPA). The AFP also continues with other forms of attack under Oplan Kapayapaan.

Sorsogon. Manuel Garais, 48, who was shot and killed by soldiers of the 31st IB while attacking an NPA unit in Brgy. Tugas, Matnog on March 16 at 9 a.m., is not an NPA member. This is in contradiction with 31st IB commander Lt. Col. Randy Espino's declaration. According to the victim's family, Garais was a barangay tanod and was only collecting bets for *loteng* (small town lottery) at the time.

Camarines Norte. Soldiers under the 902nd IBde of the 9th ID killed a civilian identified by the surname Obina last March 15 in Brgy. Itok, Capalonga. The 9th ID made it appear that Obina was a member of the NPA who was killed in an encounter. The soldiers even purportedly confiscated weapons and ammunition from the incident.

According to Ka Carlito Cada, spokesperson of NPA-Camarines

Norte, no encounter occurred in the area. According to the residents, Obina was a civilian and a farmer accused by soldiers as an NPA member and subsequently killed. The leader of the soldiers was identified as one Sgt. Hernandez who is based in nearby Brgy. Mactang.

Basilan. Soldiers of the Western Mindanao Command (Wesmincom) killed Bayan Muna coordinator Hadji Billamin Hassan after he was arrested in Brgy. Tum-os, Tabuan Lasa last March 8 early in the morning.

According to Suara Bangsa-moro, Hassan—more known as Ka Ben—was a veteran leader of the progressive party and was an ardent defender of the rights of the Moro people and critic of the long-standing collusion between the AFP and the Abu Sayyaf in kidnapping-for-ransom.

In the operation conducted by the PNP-CIDG and soldiers of Wesmincom, three other civilians fell victims when the soldiers and police fired at the residents. One-year old Nurmayda Abbi was killed, while another child, an 11-year old, was seriously wounded. Another civilian, Nuruddin Muhlis, was also killed. Afterward, the AFP Wesmincom announced that they were able to kill a leader of the Abu Sayyaf, along with three other members.

Agusan del Norte. Around 300 residents of Brgy. Hinimbangan, Kitcharao evacuated as a result of intense operations by the 29th IB since March 14. From the elementary school of the barangay, the evacuees transferred to the municipal gymnasium the following day.

On March 16, some residents attempted to return to their community, but were forced to move back after soldiers fired cannons at the surrounding areas of Hinimbangan.

After soldiers withdrew aboard six 6x6 trucks, all the evacuees returned to their village on March 18. However, their fears came back after a new batch of soldiers arrived.

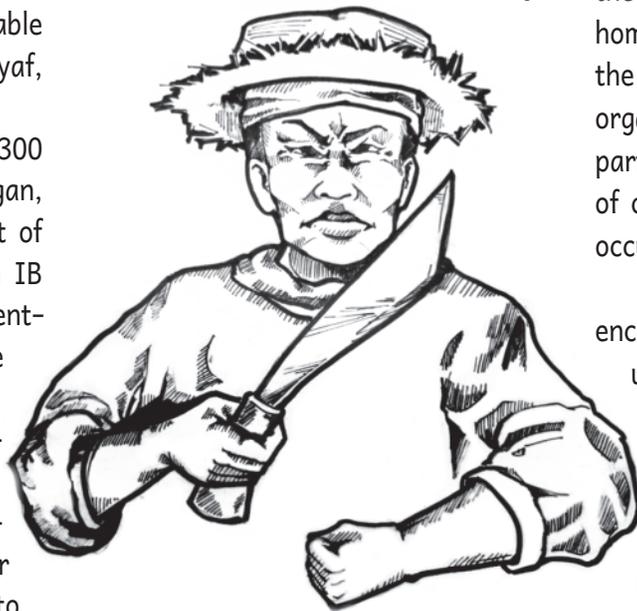
Davao Oriental. In Maragatas, Lupon, soldiers tortured Eduardo Mandabon last March 3 when he passed by them after coming from selling bananas in Sitio Tagada.

According to Mandabon, he was called, along with his companion Noel Naredo, by soldiers who were encamped at the school in Sigang. They were told to unload their sacks of rice, and the soldiers in-

sisted that those were for the NPA. When Mandabon denied, a knife was pointed at his side. To make him confess, he was forced to swallow the salt and sugar he was carrying, and also chili and *kamias*.

Aside from these, he was hit on the head, and was also instructed to hit himself. He was brought behind the school building and was hit by the soldiers with rifle butts. His head was also continuously beaten, impairing his hearing.

Mandabon was forced to admit that the rice he was carrying was for the NPA when the soldiers pointed their guns at him. According to Mandabon, his companion Naredo was also beaten by



the soldiers. After this, they were brought to the barangay captain and were made to sign papers that they were not manhandled.

Cagayan. In Sto. Niño, soldiers belonging to the 17th IB harassed and terrorized the relatives of Marlon Battad last March 6 in Sitio Calassitan, Brgy. Abariungan. Battad is a member of Anakpawis and a Project Officer of CARE Shelter Assistance.

The victims were on their way to their farms when soldiers who were in ambush position intercepted them. They were interrogated on Battad's whereabouts and his activities as a member of Anakpawis.

One day before this, two other village mates of Battad were also

interrogated by the soldiers. According to Karapatan-Cagayan Valley, soldiers have been occupying the community since November 2016.

Batangas. The Philippine Air Force' 730th Combat Group, and the Philippine Army's 59th IB and 202nd IBde herded by force some 200 residents from barangays Kaylaway and Aga in Nasugbu last March 8.

According to reports, farmers were forced away from their farms and communities and were rounded up in Balagbag Elementary School. After a purported encounter between the NPA and the soldiers, the residents were told to return home, while the soldiers occupied the school instead. Human rights organizations and progressive parties condemned the hamletting of communities by the AFP and its occupation of civilian structures.

Mindoro. Police and soldiers encroached upon the campout set up by farmers in Brgy. Mabini, San Jose, Occidental Mindoro last March 8. The state agents terrorized the descendants of Pio de Roda who have long been developing and farming the land.

Marikina City. The PNP CIDG-NCR illegally arrested last March 9 Lilia Bucatcat, 70, a long-time organizer of peasants in Samar province. Bucatcat was on her way to the Marikina River Park to walk her pet dog when she was arrested without a warrant. She was denied her right to inform her family of the arrest, or to return home and get some belongings.

Bucatcat was brought to the PNP CIDG-NCR in Camp Crame and was placed under tactical interrogation. Only after this was she shown a warrant of arrest containing a trumped-up arson case. Bucatcat is suffering illnesses due to her advanced age.

AFP bombards civilian communities

CONSECUTIVE BOMBARDMENTS of communities in the countryside were conducted by troops of the AFP. This, after Duterte gave orders to "flatten the hills" in response to the NPA's offensives.

These bombardments destroy the people's livelihoods, not only through direct damages, but also by displacing the residents from their communities.

Abra. After consecutive successful tactical offensives by the NPA-Abra in Malibcong, the Philippine Air Force (PAF) launched bombings using FA-50 fighter planes on the mountains of Bangilo and Mataragan District last March 16.

The bombing started at 8 a.m. and lasted till 2 p.m. wherein PAF conducted a total of 14 bombing runs. These resulted in the widespread burning of mountains, rice fields and pasture lands, and brought fear to the people. No less than 56 families, including 200 children, were affected.

Alongside this, the 24th IB and the PNP-Cordillera accused the employees and officials of the local government of Malibcong, as well as the progressive organizations, as NPA members in order to coerce them. Soldiers also ransacked the properties of civilians, and intensified checkpoints along the roads.

On March 18, soldiers arrested Joshua Gumatay and Antonio Ambalneg Jr., both members of Kabataan Partylist. They were subjected to interrogation for almost four hours before being turned over to the DSWD and the mayor of Malibcong.

Maguindanao. Around 1000 families in Datu Salibo, Maguindanao fled after the AFP shelled Moro communi-

ties from March 13 to March 16.

According to the organization Suara Bangsamoro, aside from bombs dropped by FA-50 fighter planes, the community of Brgy. Andavit was also bombed by MG-520 attack helicopters, and shelled by 105mm howitzers, prompting 300 families to evacuate.

At 5:30 a.m., around 600 soldiers aboard tanks and trucks entered the area. According to the 6th ID, they shelled Brgy. Andavit purportedly to drive away members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. Because of the militarization, residents from nearby villages of Tee and Gawang were also forced to evacuate.

Compostela Valley. More than 75 families from Brgy. Cabuyoan, Mabini, were also forced to evacuate last March 11 due to helicopter bombings after an encounter between the NPA and the 46th IB.

According to the residents, no less than 10 bombs were dropped by the helicopters on their communities. The helicopters also used machine guns in their attack. As a result, residents from sitios (sub-villages) Magpalusong, Post 2 and Patawon evacuated to the Cabuyoan Elementary School.

The residents also complained of the soldiers' plunder of their food supplies and store goods.

Before this, the 60th IB also shelled last February 12 Brgy. Bullocan in Laak town after a misencounter among the soldiers. This forced more than 300 families to flee their communities. Likewise, on February 22, Brgy. Fatima in Paquibato District, Davao City was targeted by aerial attack for more than an hour, bringing fear to the residents.

AB

Quezon martyrs honored

“ We are saddened by the deaths of our beloved comrades. However, our grief and sorrow will be supplanted and transformed into further revolutionary courage and steadfastness. The fascist AFP and the Duterte regime are mistaken in daydreaming that they can defeat the defiant masses, more so the New People's Army.”

This was the statement of Ka Cleo del Mundo, spokesperson of NPA-Quezon (Apolonio Mendoza Command) in honoring the four Red fighters who were killed in the encounter on March 7 in Sitio Umagos, Brgy. Camplora, San Andres, Quezon.

Felicardo Salamat (Ka Japson/Jelmon), Paul Aringo (Ka Arki/Junpio), Jomar Resurreccion (Ka Roro/Dodong) and Jeramie Garcia (Ka Ash) were in a meeting with farmers in a peasant's house dis-

cussing the problems of land and cattle rustling when they were attacked by the 2nd Jungle Fighter Company under the command of the 85th IB.

Soldiers led by Capt. Zander Khan Usman fired at the farmers who were talking with the Red fighters. They strafed the houses even when children were in full sight around the homes. Wounded in the shooting was civilian Jennifer Yuson, 22 years old, a farmer. She and her family were detained by the

soldiers together with the owner of the house named Teteng and Christopher Redota, another civilian. Even Teteng's money from the sale of his carabao was taken by the soldiers.

Ka Japson came from a peasant family in Guinayangan, Quezon. A veteran of the armed revolution, he worked fulltime in the NPA since 1985. He participated in many successful NPA operations against enemy armed forces. He had been wounded several times. He had been arrested twice by the enemy.

Ka Ash came from a community along the railways of Laguna. He chaired a youth organization in their community until he developed into a good youth leader of Laguna.

With other youth, he participated in organizing a cultural group and performed in many protest actions in provincial up to national activities. In joining ARMAS (Artista at Manunulat ng Sambayanan) in Southern Tagalog, he wholeheartedly advanced the national, mass and scientific culture.

Around mid-2016, he did organizing work in Cavite and Laguna communities, living among the peasants and workers, also in Batangas. At the age of 18, he joined the NPA in Quezon and participated in advan-

cing the peasant struggle for land and livelihood.

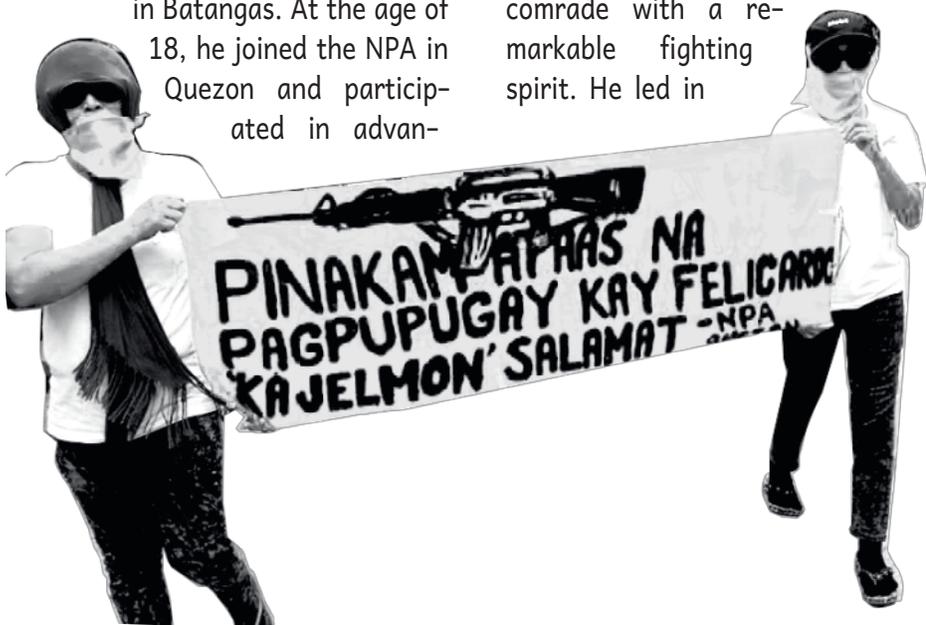
For his part, Ka Junpio came from the urban poor community of Bagong Barrio in South Caloocan. He spent his time organizing the youth to mobilize them for various sectoral and people's issues. He promptly became a member of the Communist Party. He was a tireless educator of the youth before he became an NPA member in 2015. KM-Quezon saluted him as a brave comrade with a remarkable fighting spirit. He led in

propaganda work among the masses in his unit's area of work, was a capable broadcaster of *Radyo Pakikibaka*, and also an occasional artist for *Diklap*, the CPP's mass newspaper in Southern Tagalog-Bondoc Peninsula.

Ka Dodong was a native of Dasmariñas, Cavite. For seven years since his political awareness as an activist, he always participated in cultural activities and quick reaction teams' responses in urban demolition areas and extremely militarized villages in the countryside. He also worked in Palawan before he was deployed in Quezon.

The corpses of the four Red fighters were exposed to the sun the whole day before human rights advocates could retrieve them because of the AFP's prohibition. The corpses were almost unidentifiable by the time they were recovered.

The four martyrs were each accorded hero's wakes and burials. Their coffins were draped with red banners and protest marches were held with each funeral. AB



CNL-SMR holds first regional congress

SIXTY-THREE (63) bishops, priests, nuns and other lay workers from different provinces and denominations gathered together for the 1st Regional Congress of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) in a guerrilla zone in North Cotabato, March 14-15.

The Congress commenced with a discussion on the region's revolutionary situation and reflection on the CNL's active contribution therein and in the national democratic revolution.

Highlights of the event included discourse on the organizing and mobilizing practices of the religious sector and strengthening their involvement in the struggle of the Filipino people. Conscious that the church is a traditional reactionary institution, the delegates agreed to criticize the outright inclination of each of their church's leadership towards the ruling class. Said one

priest in attendance, "We must bring the church closer to the revolution in order to gradually curtail its reactionary character."

After the election of its officers, the congress also outlined and approved the program of CNL-SMR. This included establishing and consolidating new CNL chapters; increasing the number of NPA recruits from the religious sector; mustering political, material and other forms of support for the people's war; underlining the justness of the people's war in the face of the ruling class' unjust war; and propagating a nationalist,

scientific and pro-people culture.

In his video message, Ka Porferio Tuna, Jr., NDFP consultant who hails from SMR, said that the religious have a unique opportunity because they live with the destitute. "They are aware of the reality of exploitation and oppression against the poor... Because of this, it is not difficult for the religious to embrace the armed struggle and live by the principles of the revolution," he said.

The two-day gathering ended with a tribute to the region's martyrs from the religious sector, including Fr. Bert Salac, Wilfredo Galeto, Val Mante, Jr., Fr. Pops Tentorio and many others. The CNL was founded on February 17, 1972. AB

International Working Women's Day 2017

FROM CORDILLERA to Davao, women led by Gabriela celebrated International Working Women's Day last March 8 by holding protests.

In Metro Manila, a group of women marched to the Batasang Pambansa to protest the railroading of the death penalty bill designed for criminals convicted of drug-related crimes. Gabriela, alongside other progressive parties in the Makabayan bloc, have rightfully voted against the death penalty as this will only legalize state violence in face of the regime's failure to resolve various people's issues. The regime should work to resolve the roots of criminality and poverty, instead of finding ways to strengthen state fascism, the representatives say. Days after voting down the bill, the representatives were removed as chairpersons of their respective committees.

Around noon, another Gabriela group went to the DOLE office to protest the then draft pro-contractualization order. (*Read related article.*) At 2 p.m., the women converged in Mendiola to demand to Duterte that he fulfill his promises to the people. They called for women to have their own land to till, national industrialization and for the regime to continue peace negotiations between



the GRP and NDFP. After this, they marched to the US embassy to denounce the anti-women and anti-immigrant policy of the newly-installed Trump regime.

In Baguio City, indigenous women's representatives under Innabuyog-Gabriela marched in the streets to call for social justice and peace. In Tuguegarao, Gabriela and Gabriela Youth launched a 3-day festival called 'Peace Ta Kababaihan' last March 6 in support of the NDFP-GRP peace talks.

Protests were also launched in Panay and Negros. In Davao, the women's rally started in front of the San Pedro Church. There was also a gathering at Barangay Bankas Heights in Toril District.

#OccupyBulacan widely launched

“Where in the law is it stated that government housing should be left rotting and uninhabited?”

Coinciding with the celebration of International Women's Day last March 8, more than 10,000 urban poor from Bulacan, Navotas and Caloocan launched #OccupyBulacan, a campaign of coordinated occupation of vacant houses of the National Housing Authority in Bulacan.

These past more than 10 days, the group occupied five relocation areas: Pio de Pandi resettlement, Pandi Heights BJMP Housing, Villa Luis AFP/PNP Housing, Pandi Residence 3 and Pandi Village 2.

The Duterte administration has failed to fulfill its promise of giving free and mass housing to the poor.

According to NHA data, only 13% or 8,237 from the total of 52,341 housing units allocated to the Armed Forces of the Philippines



*artwork from Sining Kadamay

and the Philippine National Police currently have residents.

This number is not even enough to fill up the expected seven million shortage of housing units in the whole country in 2022. In Metro Manila alone, more than 4.64 million urban poor residents do not have decent housing.

Amidst the swelling housing

shortage and the volume of urban poor communities, thousands of housing units remain vacant not only in Bulacan, but also in Bataan, Laguna, Cavite, Rizal, Batangas and Quezon.

Gloria Arellano, Kadamay chairperson, said that the government makes a living on relocation housing projects. Private companies

are contracted to build the houses, and are bought by the government after construction. Numerous housing units are rotting and vacant because the poor do not have the ability to pay.

The monthly amortization for the housing units in Bulacan costs P200. This amount increases every four years. This will have to be paid on top of the monthly expenses for food, transportation, water and electricity bills and school expenses which amount to P8,100.

During its protest action at Mendiola, Manila last March 13, Kadamay assailed President Duterte's statement that the occupation of housing projects is anarchic and that the group should follow the law.

"Even the law states that the poor should have decent housing. They are endlessly being victimized and are denied their rights. This occupation is organized and just," countered Carlito Badion, Kadamay's secretary general.

The group added that what's unacceptable is the absence of decent housing for the poor amidst the decaying housing projects.

The urban poor likewise condemned the lack of basic services in the relocation sites, like water and electricity, and the AFP and PNP's violence and setting up of barricades in the area.

On March 15, the NHA announced that the group only has one week to voluntarily leave the area, or they will be forced to employ violence. In the face of this, Kadamay asserted that they will not vacate the vacant houses.

According to them, they already went through the application process last year, and have also attended dialogues with the HUDCC for five instances but nothing came out of these. Even Malacañang turns a blind eye to their predicament.

Meanwhile, the campaign of the urban poor gained wide support

from different sectors.

According to Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, the issue of housing requires immediate response from the government. It is necessary to accord social services to the poor in order to make the relocation liveable.

For its part, the youth called for the posting of statements of unity with the hashtag #OccupyBulacan and #KadamayAko using their social media accounts.

Contrary to Duterte's statement, the Makabayan bloc said that the urban poor's #OccupyBulacan is an organized action to assert and regain their rights for decent and mass housing. Makabayan added that the government is solely to blame for the crisis.

Last March 18, hundreds of Kadamay members, progressive organizations and individuals launched a caravan to Pandi, Bulacan to declare their solidarity with the campaign. AB

Free tuition law, a sham



STUDENTS LAUNCHED protests in front of the Commission on Higher Education in Pasig City and at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City last March 14 to protest the deceitful and sham bill that will supposedly provide affordable college education.

The Senate Bill 1304 or Affordable Education for All is what was formerly known as the Free Education Bill. Under the said bill, tuition is not free for all, like what had been promised. Instead, students which the state deems "poor and deserving of financial aid" will be given subsidy and funds. Students who want to avail of this aid will have to go through an arduous and meticulous process.

The scheme is no different from the Socialized Tuition and Financial Assistance Program (STFAP) or what is now known as Socialized Tuition System (STS) that has been in place in UP for the last 27 years. Under this scheme, the state "subsidizes" students who are "poorer" by keeping tuition fees high for those who can "afford" the rates. In the past, UP used this scheme to relentlessly increase tuition fees as state subsidy decreased. From P40/unit in the 1990s, tuition is now at P1,300/unit. In a year, UP managed to gain a profit of P11 billion from tuition and other fees' collection alone. As of now, only three out of every hundred UP students enjoy free tuition under the STS.

It is clear to the students that the Senate Bill 1304 only highlights the commercialization of education. It did not do away with the deregulation of tuition and other school fees. In fact, it maintained high tuition fee rates in state universities and colleges. This is also in favor of big capitalist educators who will profit from the funds allotted to "poor and deserving" students who will enrol in private schools. AB

DOLE's new order a big lie

Relentless protests preceded and greeted the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) new order, the Department Order (DO) 174 of 2017 which was made public last March 16.

On International Working Women's Day, women workers marched to the DOLE offices. On March 13-15, workers from the All Workers' Unity and Kilos na, Manggagawa held a three-day protest to express their anger over the order. On the day the order was issued, they held a vigil to wait up for DOLE officials and greet Bello's lies and deception with jeers.

The next day, they marched to Mendiola to demand that GRP Pres. Duterte fulfill his promise to end contractualization. According to Jerome Adonis, Kilusang Mayo Uno general secretary, by issuing the new order, government's policies remain subservient to big business interests to the detriment of worker's rights and welfare. The group called Duterte as the "presidenteng puro dakdak (the empty talk president)."

Department Order 174

The new order does not differ from the DO-18A issued by the US-Aquino regime. In practice, it extends the long line of orders implementing provisions in the Labor Code (Art 106-109) which legalized job contracting and encouraged different forms of contractualization. The new DO only banned practices which had long been declared illegal. These include labor-only contracting (or its worst forms of endo and 5-5-5) and the cabo system, labor agencies supplying contractuales to their own companies, using contractuales when workers are on strike or are poised to strike, and for work done by unionized or regular workers. It also banned coercing workers to sign blank papers or documents which limits their rights.

In addition, the new DO raised registration fees for labor agencies from P25,000 to P30,000 and their requisite capital from P3 million to P5 million purportedly to make it easier to shut down fake agencies. It does not dismantle the system of employment through these agencies which companies use as excuse to avoid regularization of their workers.

Increasing labor agents to inspect businesses and factories and to ensure correct practices will not be enough. Businesses are estimated at 950,000 but there are only 535 inspectors. In 2015, the DOLE only inspected around 50,000 businesses. Adding 200 new inspectors which the order authorized will not address the shortage.

Regulation is not contractualization, according to the workers. Instead, it is a step to further legalize an anti-worker practice.

Thus, it is clear that calling the order as "anti-contractualization" is a big lie. In essence, it is no different from the "win-win" solution championed by big local and foreign capitalists. This was confirmed by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry which praised it as "positive." Under the order, companies can continue to employ contractual workers from labor agencies and these agencies will be responsible for the said workers' regularization and benefits. Nine months' worth of dialogues with the DOLE and Duterte regime have come to naught.



Persistent contractualization

Contractualization was first practiced in the country in the 1960s when US company Manpower Inc. established Manpower Philippines as the first service contracting agency. In the 1970s, the Marcos dictatorship passed decrees exempting export processing zones from labour laws, including those on hiring and firing. Labour contractualization was rampant by 1989, under the amended Labour Code, and especially as neoliberal globalization started to intensify in the country and the rest of the world.

Various studies put contractual figures from more than half to 70% of the 38 million currently employed workers. According to the Anakpawis Party, seven out of 10 private companies have "flexible" arrangements with their workers. They are called the OJTs (on-the-job), part-time, agency-hired, project employees, apprentices, fixed-term contractuales, piece-workers and others. In the public sector, contractuales are called casuals, project-based and those with "job orders." Figures are sure to be much higher as these are based on data dependent on capitalists' and employers' disclosures.

In any case, the share of non-regular workers has still markedly increased over the years. From around 10% of rank and file workers in the 1990s, figures are at 35% in

2014. In 2012-2014 alone, the number of contractuels increased by 16.3%. Figures are highest (38%) in big companies (those with 200 workers and up). Reported non-regular work is worst in construction (over 59%), agriculture (42%), wholesale and retail trade (64%), and support services (40%).

According to the Center for Trade Union and Human Rights' studies, contractuels number up to 85% of workers in factories and warehouses in Valenzuela City in the National Capital Region and 60% in the electronics and semiconductor industry in special economic zones. The country's biggest oligarchs are also among the biggest hirers of contractuels, including Henry Sy of the SM group of companies, the Gokongwei group including Robinson's malls, and the Lucio Tan Group including Philippine Airlines and Fortune Tobacco. **AB**

Anti-contractualization actions

ON MARCH 14, stevedores from the Manila Harbor Center picketed in front of the DOLE-National Capital Region to push for their regularization.

Led by the Samahang Manggagawa sa Harbour Center, the picket was made to coincide with the hearing of their employer, labor agency Grasials Corp. They should have been made regulars a long time ago, said the workers, as they carry out core tasks that are essential to company operations.

Aside from the absence of security of tenure, the stevedores denounced low wages, absence of overtime pay and 13th month pay, food breaks and SSS, Phil-health and Pag-ibig benefits. They also condemned the company's violation of safety standards and failure to provide medical personnel in the workplace.

On March 16, contractual carpenters, janitors and other maintenance workers picketed in front of Adamson University after the university administration fired them since its contract with their agency employer supposedly expired. The picket was led by the Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Adamson University.

Prior to this, TV5's ABC Employees Union decried the arbitrary dismissal of more than 100 employees last February 24, most of which (98) are union members. TV5 justified the dismissals by saying that the company is losing money, though its owner Manuel Pangilinan failed to substantiate this with concrete figures. TV5 is the third largest television network in the country.

The dismissals aim to dismantle the union which has successfully negotiated last year. The union was able to gain concessions in the CBA such as a wage increase and additional benefits. Most dismissed workers have worked for the company for 10 years.

Last March 17, dismissed workers picketed in front of the Toyota building in Makati City. They were fired in 2004 and replaced with contractuels. Their case is still languishing at the DOLE up to the present.

In other parts of the country, union and association struggles continue, including that in Nakashin Davao International in Davao City and Soro-soro Ibaba Development Cooperative in Batangas City.

Dire conditions of contractual workers in HTI

ALMOST TWO months after the fire that hit the House Technologies Incorporated (HTI) in Indang, Cavite, the conditions of more than 1,300 workers (500 in Department of Labor and Employment records) who were trapped inside the factory are yet to be known.

The company's owner, as well as the local government, remains silent on the number of those believed to be missing from the fire. The company has only admitted to five deaths (one at the scene of the fire and four in the hospital) and more than 100 injured. HTI's six-hectare factory was razed to the ground last February 1 in a fire that lasted 48 hours.

According to investigations undertaken by labor groups in the first week of February, the fire took place because HTI violated many safety standards for the workers, including the lack of fire exits. The investigation revealed that these

were closed during the fire. Windows were also nailed shut and workers needed to break them in order to escape. According to witnesses, those trapped inside the factory, most of whom were women, had to jump out of the windows.

Even before the fire, HTI workers had been suffering extreme conditions. Up to 7,000 of its 13,000 workers are contractuels, and are employed from six labor agencies. According to the investigations, HTI finds ways to avoid the necessary regularization of its contractuels. Initially, they are employed as casuals for three months for training and evaluation.

After a worker qualifies, he/she is then transferred to labor agencies for a two-year contract. During this period, he/she is regarded as an employee of the agency even if he/she performs tasks of a regular worker.

Worse, the company severely underpays its workers. It pays at minimum wage (P356/day for an 8-hour labor) but overtasks workers up to 12 hours. The company only pays P50/hour or 25% of the standard overtime pay. While regular employees could opt to work overtime, casuals and contractuels are required to work overtime every day.

Here, workers have no right to unionize. Similar to other companies operating inside export processing zones, part of the workers' orientation, whether regular or contractual, is the prohibition for them to join or form unions. **AB**