

[From *Ang Bayan*, #4, Oct.-Dec. 1998]

Prospects of the revolutionary workers' movement

Strengthening towards a new and higher level

The Second National Conference of the Revolutionary Workers' Movement last September was held to further strengthen the Party's unity on the tasks and policies needed to advance the workers' movement. The eightday conference was held in a guerrilla zone and led by the General Secretariat and the National Organizational Department. Cadres of the workers' movement in Metro Manila, Northern Luzon, Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Bicol, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Panay, Negros, Northern Mindanao, Southern Mindanao and Far-South Mindanao attended the conference. There were observers from Western Mindanao and other Party organs.

Through the Conference, the principal questions facing the revolutionary workers' movement were resolved. The Conference delegates united firmly on the tasks for invigorating the revolutionary workers' movement nationwide towards a new and higher level.

There is urgency and basis for further strengthening the workers' movement towards a new and higher level.

The acute economic crisis has aggravated the oppression and misery of Filipino workers. To defend their interests and rights, it is necessary to expand and strengthen the collective and militant struggles of the working class.

The basic revolutionary principles for advancing the workers' movement were reaffirmed through the Second Great Rectification Movement. The grave mistakes of the past were also firmly criticized and repudiated— while the all-out demolition campaign of the revisionist renegades was resolutely resisted and defeated.

The Party should take firm hold of its initial victories in revitalizing and reinvigorating the revolutionary workers' movement, using this as the foundation for advancing to a new and higher level.

The principal issues facing Filipino workers

It is the policy of the Estrada regime to continue and even surpass past efforts to open up the Philippine economy to imperialist "globalization". Foreign monopoly capitalists continue to relentlessly plunder the country's economy. The interests and rights of the people, especially those of the workers and peasants, are also ruthlessly attacked.

In the name of the slogan "*manggagawang* world-class", Estrada is upholding the policy of maintaining cheap and oppressed labor-power as the principal come-on for foreign investors. Workers are severely oppressed through:

(a) Slave wages. Already low wages are further depressed. The average minimum wage, according to law, is P160 daily. This is woefully inadequate to cover the cost of providing the daily minimum needs of a family, estimated to be P342.22 (nationwide). Worse, a large number of enterprises (almost 25%, according to a DOLE survey) do not pay the legally mandated minimum wage.

The reactionary government upholds the policy of slave wages in order to gorge big foreign and local capitalists with superprofits. Part of this wage policy involves the ruthless reduction or outright elimination of benefits that should accrue to workers, and of expenditures to ensure their health and a safe working environment.

Workers are squeezed dry, made to work beyond endurance, their minds and bodies ravaged. Yet their families are increasingly deprived of their basic needs. This further results in a precipitous drop in the workers' already miserable living conditions. Prevalent and worsening accidents in the workplace, and in communities, raging epidemics and criminality, addiction to drugs and vices and various forms decadence are just some facets of the hellish existence workers go through.

(b) Widespread unemployment and layoffs. The presence of an overly large number of unemployed workers is an intrinsic characteristic of the non-industrialized Philippine economy. According to the doctored results of a government survey, as much as 13% of the labor force or 4.278 million are out of work. All things considered, however, more than 20 million or half of the labor force are unemployed.

Hundreds of thousands more are out of work because of the severe crisis. From January to October 1998, 2,000 enterprises closed shop. Many others are reducing their workforce as in the infamous case of Philippine Airlines (PAL) where 5,000 workers were dismissed. All in all, almost 100,000 workers lost their jobs during this period, not counting the thousands of overseas contract workers being repatriated after having been laid off.

(c) Contractualization and casualization. It is the norm under "deregulation" and "flexibilization" to fire regular workers and replace them with agency-contracted or casual workers. This prevails not only in exportprocessing zones but in the largest industrial corporations such as San Miguel Corporation. The contractualization and casualization of labor are the principal and among the worst methods of depressing wages, depriving workers of their benefits and rights, imposing stricter labor regulations and busting unions.

It is estimated that for every regular worker in the industry and service sectors, there are six non-regular (contractual, casual, apprentice or parttime) workers. These workers do not have job security, receive lower wages and toil under more oppressive conditions. The employment of contractual workers is used to compel regular workers to accept lower wages and more intolerable working conditions.

(d) Widespread and intense attacks on the right to unionize and other democratic rights of workers. The "no union-no strike" policy is strictly and harshly imposed in export-processing zones. Workers are cooped up like animals in guarded "dormitories" to block efforts at self-organization. Union members and strikers are blacklisted.

The police and military are utilized to ruthlessly suppress protesting workers. Of the 58 cases of violations of workers' rights recorded from January to July 1998, 53 were perpetrated by the PNP/SWAT and AFP.

There is also widespread criminalization of strikes and other forms of militant collective struggle. Union members and strikers are slapped with trumped-up criminal charges such as in the case of the 300 workers of PICOP industries in Agusan del Norte who struck in January and March 1998. This is to give the police, who are hired goons of big capital, an excuse to attack, arrest and imprison workers.

Estrada enunciated his anti-strike policy at the heels of the PAL strike, even as a number of bills had been filed in the reactionary Congress that would formally illegalize strikes. Amendments to the labor code, especially the Herrera Law (RA 6715) of 1989, have provided capitalists with more legal loopholes and excuses to attack unions and strikes. Meanwhile, a number of anti-worker laws and decrees enacted by the fascist Marcos dictatorship continue to be enforced.

(e) Treachery of old and new yellow union leaders. In the face of the intensified exploitation and oppression of the working masses, the treachery and betrayal perpetrated by the old and new yellow union leaders become all the more revolting. Yellow union leaders connive with capitalists in deceiving workers about the real nature of and devastation being wrought by imperialist "globalization" and "deregulation". Many yellow union leaders now serve as labor contractors or *kabos*; collude with the fascist military and police in busting workers' strikes and unions; and sell out workers' struggles.

Advance of the revolutionary workers' movement and related issues

There is widespread and intensifying discontent and anger among the masses of workers. The participation of more than 35,000 workers in the militant demonstration last May 1 portends the impending expansion and intensification of strikes and other workers' struggles.

There has been a remarkable increase in the number of strikes. Forty strikes have already been recorded from January to April 1998, equivalent to the number of strikes for the whole of 1997. Strikes involving thousands of workers broke out in large companies such as PAL, PICOP, the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT) and the Light Railway Transit (LRT). These strikes pushed to the fore the issues of contractualization, CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement) violations and increases in wages and benefits.

The workers' struggle for a P100 increase in the daily minimum wage is advancing nationwide. The reactionary state and yellow union leaders have failed in their attempt to obscure the wage issue, block and divert the struggle for wage increases.

Growing numbers of workers are joining anti-imperialist and antifascist struggles. Thousands joined the protest actions against Ramos' attempt to prolong his stay in Malacañang by amending the constitution. The *Lakbayan Laban sa Kahirapan at Imperyalistang Pandarambong* (People's March Against Poverty and Imperialist Plunder) of October 1997, jointly organized by workers and peasants, gained widespread support. Workers are at the forefront of the struggle against the spiralling prices of gasoline.

Militant and progressive unionism is resurgent. An increasing number of unions are swelling the ranks of militant federations and labor centers because of the desire of the mass of workers to expand their militant unity and struggle. More and more, the bankruptcy of the opportunism and collaborationism of the old and new yellow union leaders and federations is being unmasked.

The rectification movement is vigorously advancing in the revolutionary workers' movement. The twin opportunist line of insurrectionism and economism has been repudiated and largely eradicated. The dominance of these opportunist lines, especially during the latter half of the '80s, weakened and wrought great harm on the revolutionary mass movement. This period was marked by the serious neglect of the task of raising the workers' class consciousness and Party-building among their ranks; the isolation of the workers' movement from the antifeudal peasant movement in the countryside; overextension and weakening of unions and workers' organizations as a result of adventurist street actions that overstretched their capabilities; and corruption and decadence that had a corroding effect on some sections of the movement.

Guided by the Second Great Rectification Movement and the lessons derived from the summed-up experiences of the workers' movement, the worst errors and shortcomings were overcome step-by-step. The line of the two-stage revolution and the program for a people's democratic revolution were steadfastly upheld.

The Party was able to steadily strengthen itself in the ideological, political and organizational fields. Party members and worker-activists are energetically studying the summing-up documents of the Party, Philippine society and revolution, the situation of the working class, Marxist political economy and others.

There is continued improvement in the Party's conduct of mass work among workers. The disposition of Party members and cadres, and the organization of Party units and organs and of underground cells within unions, especially among the latter's mass membership, are getting to be more streamlined. Party branches are being organized step-by-step alongside the formation or transformation of unions as basic workers' organizations. This task is rapidly being accomplished especially among workers who have been exposed to militant unionism.

Relatively large numbers of mass activists are being tempered in the course of advancing the workers' movement. However, there is ample room for expanding and accelerating the organization of underground groups and organizing committees, as well as Party groups and branches among the workers. The expansion of clandestine organizations in factories and communities has long been neglected and hindered by conservatism and the setting of unrealistic standards.

There is particular importance in organizing the semiproletariat in order to effectively address the widespread and worsening problem of underemployment and other facets of poverty.

More and more workers are going to the countryside to participate in the peasant movement and armed struggle. However, there is need to continuously propagate within the workers' movement, courses on the issues of advancing the armed struggle and the antifeudal movement in the countryside. This is to impress on the workers the importance of trekking to the countryside in their numbers.

Organizers are being deployed more systematically in strategic enterprises, in areas where workers are concentrated and in the country's major urban centers. This is significant in the all-sided and nationwide invigoration of the workers' movement.

Tasks for the revolutionary workers' movement

To further advance the revolutionary workers' movement, the militant union movement and the unions' economic struggles should be resolutely expanded and strengthened, and systematically and firmly raised to the level of political struggles in accordance with the line of people's democratic revolution through protracted people's war.

We should continue to grasp firmly the correct combination of consolidation and expansion. Underground Party branches and groups should be continually built and national-democratic and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist education propagated while advancing mass struggles, expanding unions and increasing the number of mass activists. We should actively lead ever larger sections of the masses even as we strengthen our own ranks.

In the coming year, the following tasks should be given attention foremost:

1. Expand, streamline and solidly build the revolutionary workers' movement nationwide under the leadership of the Party.
 - a. Increase the number of Party branches and revolutionary workers' unions.
 - b. Strengthen the Party machinery for the workers' movement. Produce and train a large number of cadres and mass leaders in the national and local levels.
 - c. Give special attention to organizing women and child workers.
 - d. Exert all-out effort in developing the workers' movement in regions with a high concentration of industrial workers, including export processing zones.
2. Expand the strike movement to include an ever growing number of factories and workers. Advance dynamic and potent economic struggles in factory strikes and coordinated area-wide strikes.

The struggle for wage increases and to defend the right to unionize, and the struggle against contractualization and unemployment, privatization and other policies that are oppressive and injurious to workers should be coordinated on a nationwide scale.

3. Continue strengthening alliance work among the working class, semiproletariat, peasantry and other democratic sectors.
4. Strengthen and more effectively utilize capabilities in propaganda and cultural work at the national, regional, provincial and local levels.
5. Mobilize a greater number of workers for political struggles.
6. Vigorously propagate studies on Marxism-Leninism- Maoism and on the principles and line of the nationaldemocratic revolution.

Give particular attention to theoretical studies on the critique of imperialism, neocolonialism, neoliberalism, Trotskyism, revisionism, opportunism and yellow unionism.

7. Systematically develop a large number of workercadres for the revolutionary workers' movement, the countryside and other revolutionary endeavors.
8. Increase support to the countryside.
9. Actively contribute to and forge stronger unity with the anti-imperialist struggles of workers and peoples around the world.

Outlook

The Party looks forward to a more rapid invigoration of the revolutionary workers' movement towards a new and higher level. This higher level shall be characterized by the expansion and strengthening of the militant union movement, as well as of the underground Party organizations and revolutionary associations of workers in factories and communities. Their intensifying enslavement and poverty compel workers to defend themselves and fight. Under the Party's leadership, the militant workers' movement will serve as a powerful fortress of the national-democratic revolution. **AB**

[From: <http://www.philippinerevolution.net/cgi-bin/ab/text.pl?issue=199810-12;lang=eng;article=06>
(archived on Feb. 9, 2007)]