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Editorial

Resist US military intervention and Aquino's puppetry

The recently concluded Strategic Defense Dialogue (SDD) held January 26-28 in Washington D.C. signals the intensification of US military intervention in the Philippines and the entire Asia-Pacific. It also marks the heightened use of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) by the US to pursue its objective of suppressing China and becoming the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region. Simultaneously, the US aims for tighter control over Philippine economic and political affairs.

The Philippines has long been serving as one big US military base, where American troops are able to enter and leave any part of the country at will. For the past 15 years or so, the 600-strong Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines has been permanently stationed in an exclusive area within Camp Navarro in Zamboanga City. These American troops have long been involved in surveillance and civil-military operations and providing combat and logistical support to AFP counter-guerrilla military

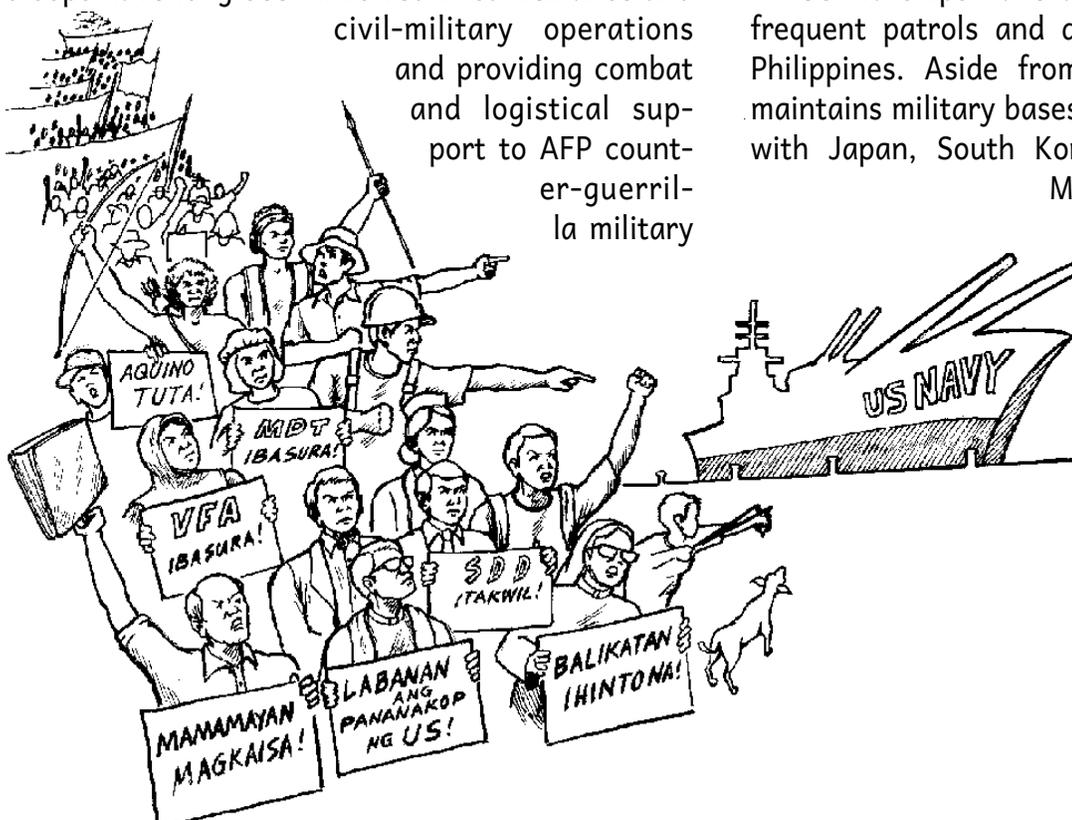
operations.

US military intervention and hegemony over the Philippines are to be stepped up even further under the Aquino regime. Benigno Aquino III is proving himself to be a most obedient puppet of US imperialism.

Aquino plays to the hilt his US-assigned role in the media psywar offensive to portray China as a bully that is out to grab Philippine territory. The media portrayal is meant to justify US military presence ostensibly to strengthen Philippine defenses.

In reality, the US is using the Philippines as a launching pad for its operations in the South China Sea, a major trade route it wants to control. The two vintage warships sold by the US to the AFP are being used in support of the US' anti-China objectives.

US warships have also been conducting more frequent patrols and docking more often in the Philippines. Aside from the Philippines, the US maintains military bases, treaties or arrangements with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and In-



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donesia. By maintaining its presence in these countries, the US is able to rapidly deploy its forces anywhere in the Asia-Pacific.

Joint military exercises between the AFP and US troops will also be held more often to make the Philippine puppet government's military priorities hew closer to those of the US. More and more American troops have been given access to the AFP Western Command headquarters as preparations are underway for the this year's Balikatan exercises to be held off the western coast of Palawan.

The Aquino regime does not even bother to make a pretense of defending the nation's sovereignty against US military intervention and hegemony. Its puppetry and treachery to the national interest are without bounds. It has no independent foreign policy to speak of and presumes that Philippine national interest is synonymous to the US' ultranationalist interest of seeking worldwide hegemony. On its master's bidding, the Aquino regime considers the US' ene-

mies as its own. It deprives the Filipino people of the right and the initiative to forge alliances and friendships based on mutual benefit and interest.

Also in accordance with US-imposed policies, the Aquino regime perpetuates the failed neoliberal economic policies of the last 30 years. It continues to allow foreign big capitalists to lord it over the local economy, depress workers' wages and use the state to guarantee foreign profits and provide tax holidays and other incentives. Big landlords, foreign big mining companies and plantations continue to enjoy a monopoly over land ownership and seize farmers' lands.

It is the toiling masses of peasants and workers, the unemployed, small wage-earners and other ordinary people who continue to bear the brunt of the increasingly onerous effects of liberalization, deregulation, privatization and denationalization and the Aquino regime's failure to implement land reform and national industrialization.

Plans are also afoot to com-

plete the economic recolonization of the Philippines through the removal of provisions in the 1987 constitution that advance and protect the national patrimony.

To defend national sovereignty and ensure a progressive and democratic future, the Filipino people are faced with the urgent task of heightening their struggle against US military interventionism and economic domination, and against the puppetry and all-out treachery of the Aquino regime.

They must demand an end to unequal agreements with US imperialism such as the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) and the Visiting Forces Agreement. They must oppose the schemes of the Obama and Aquino regimes to use the Philippines as a platform for US provocations against China as well as military buildup and maneuvers in the scheme to contain China. They must oppose the scheduled "joint military exercises" which are aimed at US power projection and building military presence in the South China Sea.

The CPP calls on the New People's Army to further intensify the people's war and heighten tactical offensives against the AFP and other state armed groups which are armed by US imperialism and serve to secure US and foreign big capitalist interests in the Philippines.

The NPA must launch bigger and more frequent tactical offensives to punish the Aquino regime for its national treachery and out-and-out puppetry to the US imperialists.

The CPP also calls on all revolutionary forces to exert all efforts to reach out to the people in their millions in order to rouse their patriotism and urge them to assert their aspirations for national liberation. **AB**

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Intensifying US military intervention in the Philippines

US armed intervention in the Philippines is mounting and is bound to grow stronger under the strategy laid down by the Obama regime, which seeks to deploy more US troops in the Philippines over the next months through military exercises, civil-military operations and other schemes hatched by the US in collaboration with the Aquino regime.

The various schemes that would allow the entry of American troops and their use of the Philippines as a base for operations in the Asia-Pacific were the subject of talks during the Strategic Defense Dialogue held on January 26-28.

Among the matters discussed during the SDD were the conduct of a massive joint military exercise under Balikatan 2012 in April with up to 1,500 American soldiers participating. Balikatan 2012 will be held in the South China Sea off the coast of Palawan. Such military exercises exacerbate tensions on the Spratly Islands issue involving China, the Philippines and other countries in the region.

Continued US military presence in the Philippines was also agreed on during the SDD.

Aside from maintaining the 600-strong Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), US warships are likewise set to conduct more numerous and more frequent visits and port calls in the Philippines and disembark American troops. There are also plans to conduct more “military exercises.”

Another subject discussed in the SDD is the strengthening of Philippine naval defenses through the sale of more vintage US warships to the AFP. Through this, the US is able to permanently station warships in the South China Sea manned and defended by Philippine soldiers under the US' direction and control.

In accordance with plans under the so-called US Pacific Century, US imperialism is

closely collaborating with the Aquino regime to use the Philippines to achieve its politico-military ends. US officials have since been streaming into the country, with Sens. John McCain, Joseph Lieberman, Sheldon Whitehouse and Kelly Ayotte as the most recent visitors last January. McCain and his party held talks with Aquino and key military and defense officials.

Before this visit, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also came to the country in November 2011. In April 2011, US Sens. Daniel Inouye and Thad Cochran arrived to inspect the Subic Naval Base, the US' former military base in Olongapo.

Meanwhile, Aquino has already made three visits to the US to meet with key American military and defense officials just over a year and a half into his presidency. He has also been summoned twice by US officials and flown by helicopter for talks aboard American warships. **AB**

US desperately wants to maintain worldwide hegemony

On January 2, the US Department of Defense issued “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” a document that laid down US military strategy for the coming years. The paper defines US imperialism's priorities and stresses to maintain global hegemony amid crisis and growing challenges to its power.

Although the Obama regime has not paid any less attention to the Middle East and Africa, it emphasizes the need for so-called “rebalancing” or shifting priority troop deployment and military

expenditures to the Asia-Pacific. One of its priorities is the defeat of perceived threats to its interests in South Asia and the Middle East.

It plans to lay down mechanisms to monitor and put under surveillance armed and revolutionary movements in the region that it perceives as threats. It will collaborate with the puppet and reactionary classes to control territories still beyond the reach of its power, and if necessary, to launch strike operations against

what it deems to be the most dangerous groups and individuals.

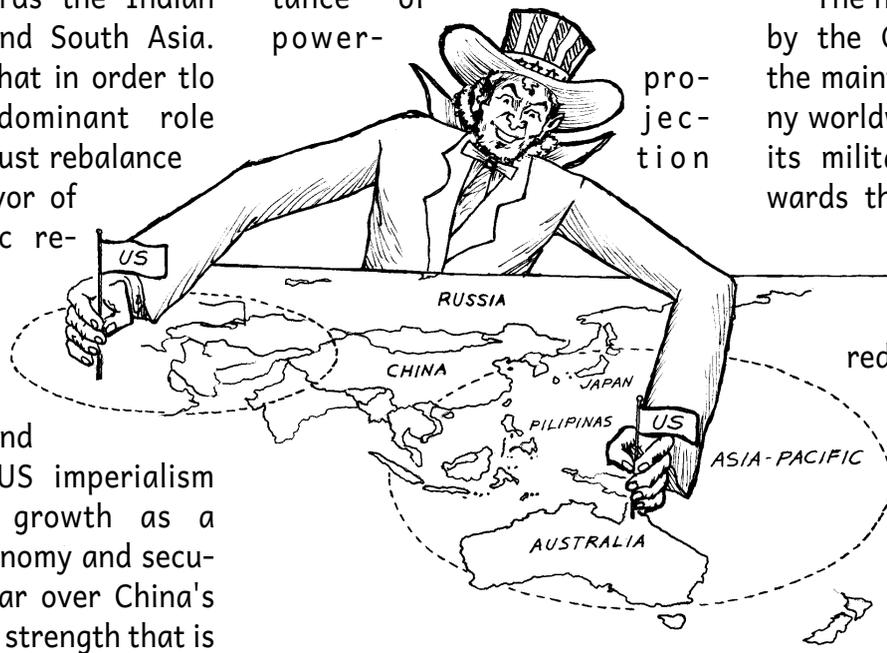
The US had had no qualms admitting that its economic and security interests are closely intertwined with the situations in countries comprising the arc from the Western Pacific and East Asia towards the Indian Ocean region and South Asia. The US knows that in order to maintain its dominant role worldwide, it must rebalance its forces in favor of the Asia-Pacific region.

One of the US' concerns is China's growth as a regional and global power. US imperialism views China's growth as a threat to its economy and security. It is its fear over China's growing military strength that is

pushing the US to further enhance its military forces deployed in Asia. In particular, the US is targeting control over the South China Sea, which serves as one of its major trade routes from Asia to America and Europe.

The US stresses the importance of power-

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in the Asia-Pacific. Using its warships and military bases in Japan, South Korea, Guam and Australia and military agreements with the Philippines, the US plans to have tens of thousands of American soldiers conduct continuous patrols in the region.

The new US strategy framed by the Obama regime targets the maintenance of US hegemony worldwide even as it reduces its military expenditures. Towards the end of January, US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced plans to reduce US military troops by 100,000 and slash the defense budget by \$487 billion in the next ten years. Some sectors in the US have expressed opposition to such plans. **AB**

Monopoly capitalism and oil prices

Only a handful of monopoly capitalists control the international oil industry. The five biggest industry giants are Exxon Mobil, British Petroleum, Royal Dutch Shell, Chevron Texaco and Total. These five companies control the exploration, extraction and refining of crude oil, and the transport and retail of petroleum products in local markets in various parts of the world. "Free competition" in the local and international oil industry is an illusion.

Monopoly oil pricing involves setting market prices that are far divorced from actual production costs. In 2008, researches revealed that up to two-thirds of the price of each barrel of crude oil consists of profits of monopoly companies. A barrel of crude oil then cost \$92 in the international market. Of this amount, exploration expenses accounted for \$3-4, and drilling and refining \$7-8. Royalty payments to oil-producing countries accounted for \$13.

The remaining \$67-69 consisted of company profits.

Monopolies extract superprofits by depressing production costs and artificially raising product prices in the market. Monopoly capitalists are continuously able to raise oil prices because of their huge markets. Oil consumption grew by 2.65% annually from 1965 to 2010. Thirty-three percent (33%) of energy production worldwide is oil-based.

It is estimated that the five

biggest oil companies earned a combined profit of \$160 billion in 2011 (equivalent to 75% of the entire Philippine economy). Exxon Mobil raked in the biggest profits at \$41.1 billion, or P3.5 million per minute. Royal Dutch Shell amassed \$29.6 billion while Chevron-Texaco (mother company of Caltex) earned \$26.9 billion.

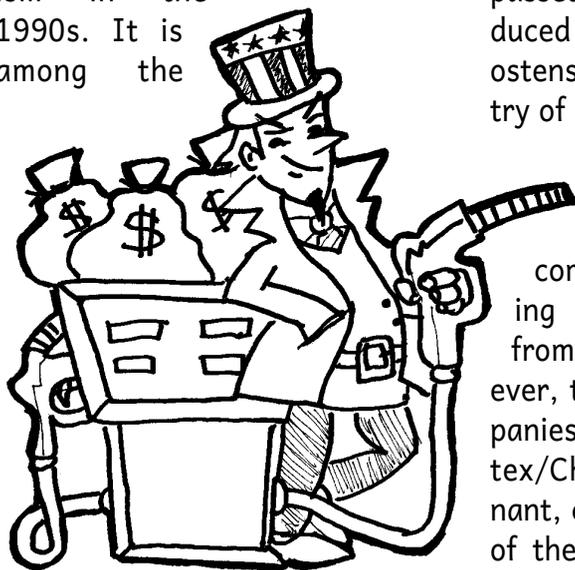
The oil companies keep on invoking various global conflicts in justifying high oil prices, especially if wars break out in oil-producing countries. But even during years when there were no wars or conflicts in countries where oil is sourced, the prices of petroleum products continued to soar. This year, for instance, oil prices rose, even if Libya had resumed its oil production and tensions had al-

ready eased in Iran.

Supply was never an issue during times when there were huge and sudden increases in oil prices. Oil prices actually rise mainly because of speculation in the oil markets. The imperialist financial oligarchs (consisting of giant banks and finance capitalists like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley) connive with the monopoly oil companies in causing oil prices to skyrocket. Some researches state that speculation accounts for up to 60% of oil prices.

Deregulation to provide profits for oil giants

The deregulation of the oil industry was one of the main policies pushed by US imperialism in the 1990s. It is among the



neoliberal policies that aimed to further give free rein to big foreign capitalists to amass profits through plunder and exploitation in the Philippines.

The oil deregulation law was enacted under the US-Ramos regime. The latter justified the law by claiming that there was a need to cope with rising oil prices in the international market that had already depleted the Oil Price Stabilization Fund (a fund set aside to ensure the profits of oil companies at a time when oil prices were regulated in the market).

The Supreme Court junked the first law deregulating the oil industry in 1997, saying that there was no real competition in the oil industry. A new version passed by Congress in 1998 reduced taxes on oil companies, ostensibly to encourage the entry of new players.

The oil industry was deregulated that same year. The number of companies engaged in retailing petroleum products rose from three to 35. In fact, however, the three biggest oil companies (Shell, Petron and Caltex/Chevron) remained dominant, controlling more than 90% of the local market. They also

control almost 100% of oil importation. It is these companies that set the prices of petroleum products in the market.

Since the oil industry was deregulated, prices of petroleum products have steadily risen. From P11.76 per liter (gasoline) and P8.25 per liter (diesel) in 1998, prices jumped to P29.13 and P26.02, respectively, by 2005. Prices have risen even more steeply, especially in the last three years, with gasoline now selling at P53.66 and diesel at P45.82 per liter. Thus, under a deregulated regime, the prices of petroleum products in the Philippines rose by close to 500%.

Deregulation is clearly a bankrupt policy that serves none other than the monopoly oil companies. The people are right on track in demanding state regulation of the oil industry, centralized oil importation, the nationalization of refineries and of Petron and limits on profits of oil companies in order to curb skyrocketing prices. Beyond this, they must expose and oppose imperialist control over oil and the obsequiousness of the puppet state to the dictates and whims of foreign and local cartels in all areas and at all times. AB

NPA metes punishment on PAF in Batangas

Red fighters of the New People's Army (NPA) launched two successive attacks on elements of the Philippine Air Force (PAF) on January 25 and 28 to punish them for serving as goons of big landlords and comprador bourgeoisie like Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco and the Zobel family.

Ka Apolinario Matienza, spokesperson of the Eduardo Dagli Command (NPA-Batangas) reported that at 9 p.m. of January 25, an NPA unit threw a grenade at the camp of the 732nd Combat Squadron in Barangay Biga, Calatagan town, destroying the fascists' hut and wounding a number of soldiers. Another grenade was thrown at a

squad-size detachment under the same military unit in Barangay Matabungkay, Lian town on January 26, at around 11 p.m., killing a soldier and wounding an undetermined number of troopers.

Calatagan residents deeply loathe the fascist PAF soldiers because they serve as thugs of the Cojuangco and Zobel families. The Zobels practically own all of Calatagan town. Due to their influence on the reactionary government, the Zobels



were able to have 2,000 hectares along the Calatagan coast titled. The people resisted and fought this all the way to the Supreme Court—then under Chief Justice Claudio Teehankee—which issued a decision in favor of the residents. Nonetheless, by the time the court had issued its verdict, the Zobels had already sold the land to a private company.

On the other hand, residents of Lian town are complaining about the extortion activities of the 732nd Combat Squadron victimizing resorts and fisherfolk. The fascists are also in the habit of indiscriminately firing their weapons, terrorizing resi-

dents and resort owners.

Meanwhile, plans are underway to construct a cement factory to process limestone to be mined from Calatagan's mountains, where the mineral abounds. The Cojuangco-owned Asturias Mining has expressed interest in the project. Cojuangco is an uncle of Benigno Aquino III.

Mining activities are set to begin in Barangays Baha and Talibayog and will cover six other adjacent villages. The people are opposed to the mine because its operations will be a source of pollution and cause the denudation of their forested uplands which will result in

floods and the destruction of their homes.

Raid in Northern Samar. A bodyguard of Mayor Romualdo Menzon was killed when he fought it out with Red fighters of the NPA Rodante Urtal Command on January 20. The NPA had planned on disarming the abusive private army of the Lapinig, Northern Samar mayor but his bodyguards had fled even before the Red fighters arrived aboard a dump truck in Barangay Poblacion del Sur. The NPA then proceeded to the police station located in front of the town plaza but the five police personnel on duty, including the police chief ran towards the direction of Barangay Imelda after a brief firefight.

The NPA attack belies claims by 803rd Bde chief Col. Oscar Lopez and 8th ID chief Maj. Gen. Mario Chan that the military has completely wiped out the revolutionary movement in the area, said Ka Karlos Manuel, spokesperson of the Efren Martires Command (NPA-Eastern Visayas). AB

NPA thwarts 2 coordinated AFP attacks

Six Philippine Army soldiers were killed and several others wounded when the New People's Army (NPA) thwarted two separate but coordinated military attacks in Negros Occidental in the last week of January.

Prior to these gunbattles, 303rd Bde chief Col. Oscar Lactao had bragged that the NPA in Negros had lost its influence, was going hungry, suffering from low morale and fighting spirit and was on the run.

On January 31, the 62nd IB attempted to attack an NPA unit under the Roselyn "Ka Jean" Pelle Command-North Negros. The coordinated enemy attack was repulsed when the NPA ambushed the soldiers in Hacienda Lope, Barangay Andres Bonfacio, Cadiz town. Based on initial reports from the NPA Apolinario "Boy" Gatmaitan Command (AGC), two troopers of the 62nd IB were killed and several others wounded in this firefight.

Days before this, the 303rd Bde had arrogantly claimed that it had "liberated" the Cadiz area from the influence of the New People's Army.

Meanwhile, at the South West Negros Front, Red fighters under the Armando Sumayang Command valiantly fought off a far superior enemy force composed of 47th IB troopers and Scout Rangers that had attempted to encircle them on January 28 in Sitio Akol, Barangay Manlocahoc, Sipalay City. The Scout Rangers lost four of their men and many others were wounded on the side of the fascist troops.

An NPA unit was then temporarily encamped in Sitio Akol when the enemy attacked. The military tried to conceal its casualties but the villagers were still able to see them.

Donald Diligdilig, a 21-year old Red fighter was martyred in this gunbattle. The AGC paid tribute to his heroism. AB

Palparan being coddled by reactionary system

The Aquino government's promise to arrest fugitive Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan Jr. is a false one. This has become increasingly apparent with the government's continued failure to do so almost two months after the Malolos Regional Trial Court (RTC) issued a warrant for the arrest of Palparan and three other co-accused.

Palparan, Lt. Col. Felipe Anotado, S/Sgt. Eduardo Osorio and M/Sgt. Rizal Hilario are facing criminal charges before the Malolos RTC for the abduction, detention and torture of University of the Philippines students Sherlyn Cadapan and Karen Empeño and peasant activist Manuel Meriño. Anotado and Osorio are both under military custody while Palparan and his right hand man Hilario are in hiding.

During the latest hearing last January 30, Palparan's lawyers tried one legal maneuver after another to delay and derail the trial, including raising questions on the court's jurisdiction and claiming that they had received information that Cadapan and Empeño were "still alive."

Palparan committed large-scale violations of human rights. He was involved in the extrajudicial killing and abduction of several peasants and workers, hundreds of cases of illegal detention and the enforcement of martial law-like policies in communities he had operated in, in Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Eastern Visayas and Cordillera.

Palparan mirrored the Arroyo regime's brutal rule through Oplan Bantay Laya. He continues to serve as a model of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in implementing Oplan Bayanihan. As

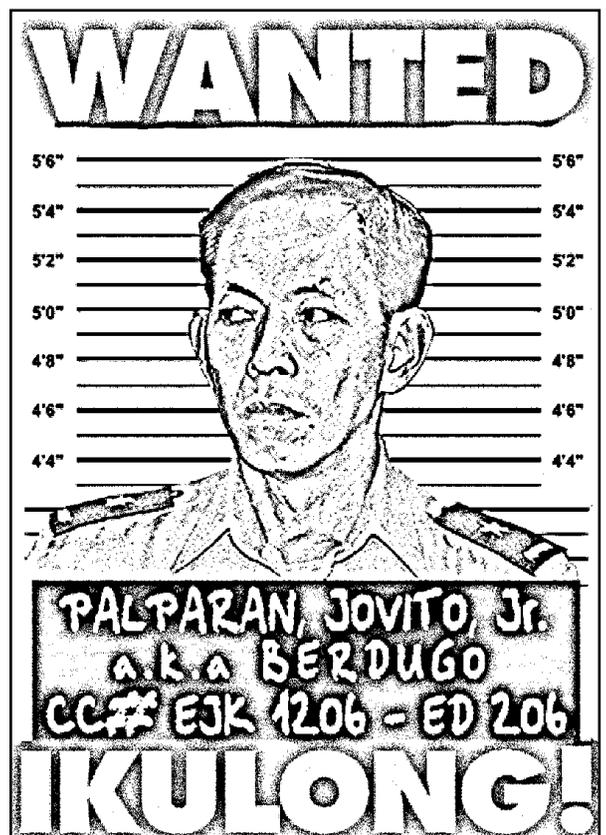
a rabid fascist, Palparan considered anyone who stood for and fought against oppression and exploitation as a "threat to national security." Palparan's views are advocated by the AFP through its document "Know the Enemy" and lectures conducted by military officers and men. These views guide them in their suppression of unarmed progressive forces and people in resistance who they accuse of supporting the revolutionary movement.

Despite condemnation from human rights organizations here and abroad, neither the Aquino regime nor the AFP has criticized or repudiated Palparan and his fascist views. In fact, the Aquino regime and the AFP are coddling him for his great service to the reactionary system. He is being accommodated through legal and illegal means the same way fascist criminals from Marcos to Arroyo have been given accommodation.

It is but just for the thousands of victims of Palparan's brutality to demand his punishment under the laws of the reactionary system. In the face of the Aquino

regime's continued failure to apprehend Palparan, Erlinda Cadapan, Sherlyn's mother has been moved to say that Aquino should have issued a "shoot to kill order" instead of offering a one million-peso bounty for his supposed capture.

Simultaneously, the people's democratic government has the right to exercise its political authority and state power to subject Palparan to revolutionary justice. The Communist Party of the Philippines has ordered the New People's Army to arrest Palparan should the opportunity present itself, and bring him before the revolutionary people's court to face trial and receive its verdict. As a representative of the democratic interests of the Filipino people, the people's democratic government has the capability and determination to give justice to all victims of crimes against the people and human rights violations. **AB**



NDFP consultant in the Visayas illegally transferred to another prison

The AFP has arbitrarily transferred a consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) to a military prison. Ramon Patriarca, one of 13 consultants currently incarcerated in various prisons of the Government of the Philippines, was transferred without benefit of a court order.

Patriarca had just come from a hearing on January 25 when he was suddenly brought to Camp Lapu-Lapu, the base of the AFP Visayas Central Command in Cebu City. The transfer was done without prior notice to either Patriarca or his lawyer. He had been previously detained at the Danao City Jail.

Patriarca was arrested by elements of the 78th IB on February 5, 2009 and brought to Camp Lapu-Lapu where he was tortured and held incommunicado for days. His family, lawyer and supporters were later able to secure his transfer to a regular detention facility.

The military claimed that Patriarca was brought back to Camp Lapu-Lapu because he was inciting other detainees at the Danao City Jail to rebel and because the NPA was allegedly planning to break him out of prison. He is currently being held incommunicado and guarded by 12 SWAT elements.

Patriarca has gone on hunger strike to protest his arbitrary transfer. AB

Military abuses in Calatagan, Batangas

KARAPATAN has exposed a series of major human rights violations by the AFP in a village in Calatagan, Batangas that is currently at the center of struggles against landgrabbing.

According to the results of a fact-finding mission conducted by KARAPATAN in Barangay Hukay, Calatagan in December 2011, there have been at least 67 cases of human rights violations in the village affecting 863 individuals, including 22 women, 643 children and 5,061 families. Among the violations documented were cases of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances occurring as far back as 2010. One of the most recent cases involved the attempted abduction of Isabelo Alicaya, 59, last November 18. The military has implicated Alicaya and another civilian Rufina Nolasco, 72, in a series of bombing incidents in Batangas. Alicaya and Nolasco, who are both fisherfolk leaders in Barangay Hukay have been falsely accused as terrorists by the military in the media and through leaflets circulated among the villagers.

Combined forces of the Philippine Army 16th IB and the Philippine Air Force 730th Combat Group began occupying Barangay Hukay in February 2010 under the Arroyo regime. These military units have set up detachments at the barangay hall and in areas near schools. AB

UP students harassed by military

Three students of the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development (UPCSWCD) were harassed by military elements in Katutubo Village, Barangay Planas, Porac, Pampanga on January 21. The student—Rafael Antonio Dulce, Ricardo Louis Flores and Marie Gold Villar—were on field work in the area as part of their course requirements.

They were on their way to Camias, an upland barangay, accompanied by four Aeta

children when they were accosted by AFP intelligence agents in plainclothes who were aboard a van. Four of the soldiers got off the van and demanded the students' names. The soldiers accused them of being organizers for the New People's Army and shouted accusations against them for the next hour. Dulce was even shoved by one of the soldiers who called himself "Chris" in an attempt to challenge him to a fistfight.

The students immediately

reported the harassment to the nearest police station. They have temporarily withdrawn from the area to ensure their safety.

The soldiers posed as employees of "DPWH Region 3" but the commander of the CAFGU detachment in Barangay Camias identified them as elements of the Military Intelligence Battalion.

The Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP) and the UPCSWCD have condemned the incident. AB

Peasants call for reopening of Mendiola Massacre case

MORE than 2,000 peasants rallied in Mendiola, Manila on January 22 to commemorate a bloody massacre 25 years ago and demand a reopening of the case.

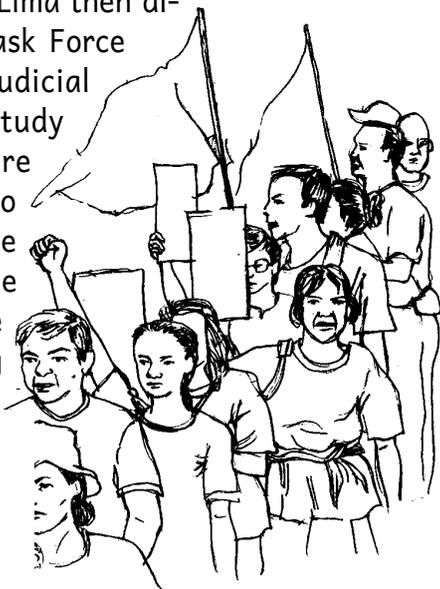
Among those calling for a reopening of the case is the mother of one of the victims of the infamous Mendiola Massacre, which occurred when thousands of peasants were fired upon on January 22, 1987 by armed minions of the regime then headed by Corazon Aquino, the current president's mother.

Thirteen peasants were killed—Danilo Arjona, Leopoldo Alonso, Adelfa Aribe, Dionisio Bautista, Roberto Caylao, Vicente Campomanes, Ronilo Dumanico, Dante Evangelio, Angelito Gutierrez, Rodrigo Grampon, Bernabe Loquindanum, Sonny Boy Perez and Roberto Yumul. More than 100 others were wounded when elements of the Western Police District (WPD), Integrated National Police and Philippine Marines opened fire.

On March 19, 1993, the Supreme Court cleared the Aquino government of any culpability for the massacre. Nonetheless, the court ordered the payment of damages to the victims and recommended filing charges against the perpetrators. But the court's orders were never implemented by the Aquino government or any other succeeding administration.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) secretary-general Danilo Ramos said they intend to file a petition before the Supreme Court to ask that the Mendiola Massacre case be opened.

The peasants held a dialogue on this matter last year with Justice Secretary Leila de Lima. De Lima then directed the Task Force on Extrajudicial Killings to study whether there was a basis to reopen the case. The peasants are still awaiting action from the Department of Justice.



Small coconut farmers demand return of coco levy fund

SMALL coconut farmers affiliated with the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) demanded that the coco levy fund be returned to them after reports came out in the media that the Aquino regime was already planning to spend it. Should the regime's plans push through, the coconut farmers will continue to be deprived of the right to claim their fund. KMP vice chair Willy Marbella decried that the fund would merely pass from one Cojuangco to another. Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco, who currently controls assets bought with money from the fund is Aquino's uncle. The coco levy was a tax forcibly exacted during the Marcos dictatorship from all coconut farmers selling copra.

The small coconut farmers scored an initial victory when the Supreme Court issued a decision on January 24 declaring them as the legitimate owners of the 24% shares of stock of San Miguel Corporation (SMC) bought by Cojuangco using the fund. A few days after the decision, the Aquino administration announced plans to transfer the multimillion peso coco levy monies to a trust fund to be managed by an inter-agency team composed of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Finance (DoF), banks, farmers' groups and members thereof.

The peasants are opposed to this plan, saying that the government is merely out to use the fund for its own interests. The small coconut farmers declared that they would not entrust the fund to DA officials who were involved in the "fertilizer fund scandal" under the Arroyo regime. Neither would they entrust the fund to officials of the DoF and the banks because they are the same entities responsible for the National Food Authority's severe indebtedness. Most of all, they refuse to repose their trust in the so-called farmers' representatives who will form part of the inter-agency team since they will end up being pawns of the team.

The KMP demanded that the coco levy fund be immediately retrieved from SMC and returned to the small coconut farmers. In this regard, the KMP called for the immediate enactment of House Bill 3443 filed by Anakpawis Rep. Rafael Mariano which aims to put up the "Small Coconut Farmers' Trust Fund" using the coco levy monies.

The 24% bloc of SMC shares now worth more than P753 million is part of the 47% bloc of shares of the beer conglomerate sequestered by the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) in 1986. The shares were among the assets identified as having been illegally acquired by Cojuangco, Juan Ponce Enrile and Maria Clara Lobregat, then high-ranking officials of the Philippine Coconut Producers Federation (COCOFED) and known dummies of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.