

ANG BAYAN

PAHAYAGAN NG PARTIDO KOMUNISTA NG PILIPINAS
PINAPATNUBAYAN NG MARXISMO-LENINISMO-KAISIPANG MAO ZEDONG

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EDITORIAL

TASKS AFTER THE MAY UPSURGE

May 1989 has witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of working class struggles, starting with the biggest May Day rally ever and culminating in a record-breaking and powerful nation-wide general strike.

The new upsurge marks a big leap in working class solidarity, organized strength and overall capability to deal bigger and more telling blows to foreign and comprador capital and its state instrument.

The working class struggles also show the way to other exploited and oppressed classes and sectors to fight the ever-growing burden of exploitation and oppression as the economic crisis deepens.

The events in May reveal in a striking manner that such is the intensity of the current economic crisis; the Aquino regime is so bound to US imperialist dictates and the class interests of the big compradors and the landlords that nothing less than general paralyzing actions and massive protest movements are needed even for such purposes as to push for some relief from the crisis.

But as the workers continue to broaden and intensify their economic struggles, as they continue to lead the way in the economic struggles of the entire people, they must also harness the strength and capability they have developed in addressing the major political issues of the day. In particular, they must take up general people's issues such as the US military bases, land reform, debt burden, political repression and the rapid rise of human rights violations.

In this connection, the trade unions must undertake vigorous and wide-ranging political discussions within their ranks. The militant labor center must issue timely position papers and statements that sharply define the anti-imperialist, antifeudal and antifascist line in various issues. Federations and trade unions must form broad alliances at different levels either on specific issues or a complex of interrelated issues.

The working class movement must take a bigger role in initiating, developing and organizing broad coalitions that are multi-sectoral in character and, more importantly, in launching broad mass mobilizations.

It must take the lead in presenting the national democratic agenda and the comprehensive solution to the intensifying economic and political crisis of the ruling system.

In addition to being in the vanguard of the revolutionary mass movement in the cities, the working class movement must now contribute more than it has given in the past to the armed struggle and the building of revolutionary political power in the countryside. It must deploy the most advanced workers to the regions to serve as fighters, commanders and political officers in the New People's Army, and as cadres and activists engaged in base-building and agrarian revolution in the guerrilla fronts.

More than ever, the working class is a wellspring of recruits for its advanced detachment -- the Party. New blood of cadres and activists of working class origin must continuously infuse and regenerate the Party and strengthen the ramparts of Party-led organizations.

For all the tasks that lie ahead, the political consolidation of the working class movement becomes all the more urgent and important if we are to create more working class upsurges that will lead to revolutionary storms of the people's struggles.

* * *

MAY 1, 1989: A HISTORIC DAY FOR WORKING CLASS

Some 200,000 workers throughout the nation staged militant rallies and demonstrations in Metro Manila and other urban centers last May 1 -- in a Labor Day celebration full of historic significance for the working class movement in the country.

In Metro Manila, 130,000 workers under the leadership of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) gathered at the Luneta Grandstand in the biggest May Day rally ever. In Davao City, where vigilante terror has reigned since the Aquino regime came to power, 20,000 marched down the streets. In front of the Nestlé plant in Cabuyao, Laguna -- where strikers defending their picketline have often battled armed troops and goons -- 8,000 workers from different parts of the Southern Tagalog provinces converged.

Throughout highly militarized Central Luzon, some 15,000 came out to take part in demonstrations. Nearly 16,000 rallied in several cities in the Visayas (10,000 in Bacolod, 5,000 in Cebu and 700 in Iloilo) even as intense counterinsurgency operations

raged just beyond their peripheries. Big numbers also joined in the cities of Baguio (4,000), Iligan (3,000) and Cotabato (1,000).

The May 1 mass actions occurred in the midst of a campaign for a higher minimum wage. It was the wage issue which gave fire and broadness to workers' participation. The rallies expressed the workers' resolve to take the road of militant struggle in pushing for their economic demands and were a portent of the powerful general strike that was to come.

Though the wage issue was the most prominent one, the May 1 celebration projected broader and deeper issues. These issues exposed more clearly the Aquino regime's bias and policies against the working class and the relationship of such policies with US imperialist impositions and domination over the economy.

The past year has been a tough and gruelling one for the working class. The US-Aquino regime and big foreign and local capitalists have stepped up their attacks against the labor movement, particularly its militant sections, in an attempt to weaken and destroy it.

The attacks consist of an escalating campaign of terror carried out on a wide scale. Vigilante death squads have been organized in the factories and communities and used to kill and kidnap labor leaders. In industrial sites, mining and logging areas and plantations where workers' militancy has been on the rise, military detachments have been set up and special military teams sent to conduct anti-communist seminars which union leaders and members are forced to attend. Police, troops and goons have violently broken up picketlines and other workers' actions.

Such brutal suppression of the workers' rights and struggles has been legalized with the passage of a law which puts Aquino's labor code into final form. Known as the Herrera Law or RA 6715, it not only retains all the fascist labor laws of the Marcos dictatorship but also places more restrictions on the right to strike and imposes greater sanctions against genuine unions and union leaders who exercise this right in defiance of the law. The Aquino labor code thus institutionalizes more and greater repression of labor.

All these have been done and are being done to enforce an economic program dictated by foreign monopoly capitalists and banks through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). Embodied in the Letter of Intent (LOI) and Memorandum of Economic Policy (MEP) submitted by the Aquino government to the IMF, the specific policies of this program are intended to ensure the repayment of the country's \$28 billion foreign debt. But they are unleashing disastrous effects on the workers and the rest of the people in the form of uncontrolled price increases, continuing peso devaluations and heavier taxes, and are leading to greater foreign control over the economy.

The workers' struggle for a P30 increase in the daily minimum wage is a response to the rapid erosion of the real wage being caused by the IMF-imposed policies. At the same time, it seeks to counter the Aquino regime's move to implement the policy of government non-intervention in the setting of wages and to do away with the minimum wage law -- a move in line with the IMF-approved economic recovery program dependent on foreign loans and foreign investments.

The attack on the right to strike and to unionize, the scheme to abolish the minimum wage law, the increasing hardship and poverty being caused by the LOI-MEP, and the intensifying and widespread militarization directed against the workers, their unions and their struggles were the four main issues raised last May 1. The wage struggle was linked to the general struggle against the LOI-MEP. The reactionary attacks on the workers' movement were seen as part of the US-Aquino regime's total war on the Filipino people.

It is the May 1 tradition that the working class not only takes up and fights for its own economic and political demands but also those of the entire people. In this year's May Day celebration, the workers' conditions were constantly linked to the larger problems confronting the nation. However, the people's issues and demands, in particular, those related to agrarian reform, repression and militarization in the rural areas, were not sufficiently projected. It should be noted though that in some cities and towns outside Metro Manila, where urban and rural struggles are more closely meshed, the issues affecting the peasant masses such as the total war in the countryside stood side by side with workers' issues such as wages and the right to strike.

The May Day celebration demonstrated not only how the working class grasps the issues confronting itself and the whole of society but also the course of action it is taking to resolve these issues. It amply showed that militant, resolute action -- in which the workers are placing themselves in direct confrontation against reactionary rule -- is the path which the working class movement has decisively taken.

The May Day rallies also struck a blow against the bloody and vicious campaign of repression and total war being waged by the US-Aquino regime against the working class and the people.

In Mindanao, where vigilante terror has been in full swing for the past three years, the mood of the May Day marches and rallies, particularly in Davao City, was one of defiance. Unfazed by intense enemy operations, especially in Bulacan and Bataan, workers turned out in large numbers for Labor Day throughout Central Luzon. In Cebu, the demonstration spearheaded by militant unions expressed their determination to resist the violence of vigilante death squads. The killing of genuine labor leaders,

the armed assaults on strikes and the raids on workers' communities and factories in Metro Manila also led not to a subdued but to an outraged and combative working class last May 1.

The fighting mood of the workers owes much to the revolutionary leadership and orientation which has gained ascendancy within their ranks over the past several years. This has steadily pushed down the yellow labor aristocracy which kept the labor movement weak, disunited and docile. The revolutionary forces have led the way in defining the tasks, line, slogans and forms of action of the working class movement, resulting in concrete advances and victories even in the midst of increasing repression.

May 1, 1989 reaffirmed and strengthened the leadership of the revolutionary forces. Red was the overwhelming color of the day. The huge KMU-led demonstration at the Luneta towered over the much smaller rallies held by trade union forces under the leadership of reactionary social-democrats and the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) and exposed their shrinking mass base.

Earlier, the revolutionary and progressive forces had rebuffed an attempt by reactionary social-democrats to have their reformist, compromising political program adopted by the broad labor alliance. The program contained a watered-down anti-imperialist and anti-feudal line and skirted direct attacks against the Aquino regime. By making the program appeal to what they perceived to be the lowest level of political consciousness within the trade union movement and proposing it while plans for May 1 were on the agenda, the social-democrats hoped to isolate the national democratic forces within the alliance and put a damper on the May 1 mobilization. Their scheme failed, but they were able to delay, at least in the short term, the adoption of a comprehensive political program by the working class movement.

A sign of its increasing isolation from the working class, the Aquino government did not dare sponsor an official labor rally. Even the Labor Day breakfast meeting at Malacanang to which Aquino had invited labor leaders was a fiasco -- boycotted by the KMU, it earned neither applause nor praise from those who attended.

The revolutionary consciousness, readiness for revolutionary action and reaffirmation of revolutionary leadership that were expressed by the working class on Labor Day make it a great threat to the entire ruling system being defended by US imperialism and the local reactionaries.

The revolutionary forces must prepare the working class to beat back more intense enemy attacks and to raise their struggles to a higher level. This can only be achieved by assiduously attending to the ideological and political consolidation of the working class movement. Mass education on the national democratic line and program and on socialist principles must be undertaken. Party building and the promotion of Marxist-Leninist studies must be given attention. The revolutionary orientation of the trade unions must be strengthened.

In this way, the entire working class can be further developed into a powerful force in the vanguard of the struggle for national and social emancipation.

* * *

MAY 26-31 GENERAL STRIKE: MORE POWERFUL, MORE SUSTAINED THAN IN 1987

The Filipino working class unleashed a powerful nationwide general strike from May 26-31 and won a substantial economic gain for itself despite vehement opposition from big foreign and local capitalists and the Aquino regime's commitment to an economic program dictated by imperialist and comprador interests.

During those days of May, about 200,000 workers in practically all the major urban centers throughout the nation paralyzed operations in 700 industrial, transport and service companies, at a cost of five million man-hours to the capitalists. Not content with setting up picketlines and unfurling red banners in front of the factories, tens of thousands marched down the streets and staged demonstrations in plazas and before Congress. They demanded a P30 across-the-board increase in the daily minimum wage for all workers, opposed a wage regionalization scheme that would have virtually abolished the minimum wage law, and pressed Congress to act immediately on their demand.

The 700 participating unions comprised 60 percent of the 1,200 active unions all over the country -- undeniable proof that the general strike covered majority of unionized workers. It was felt most strongly in Metro Manila, where some 140,000 workers in more than 500 unions joined in, and in Central Luzon, particularly in Bulacan and Bataan, where 25,000 workers in 57 companies were involved.

There were also varying degrees of work stoppages and forms of protest actions in Mindanao, Southern Tagalog, Visayas and Northern Luzon. These affected 69 enterprises in Mindanao (mostly in the Davao provinces and Iligan City), 11 in Southern Tagalog, 22 in the Visayas (including the June 1 action in Cebu) and three in Northern Luzon.

The general strike hit hardest those companies engaged in the manufacture of garments and textiles, food, metals and metal products, drugs, chemicals and steel -- where the industrial proletariat, the most advanced section of the working class, is heavily concentrated. The strike also broke out in a number of bus and shipping lines, export crop plantations, mining and electronics firms, department stores and hospitals.

In majority of these companies, total paralysis of operations was brought about. But in scores of others, workers expressed their support for the general strike through brief walk-outs, attendance at rallies and marches, slowdowns or partial stoppage of work in certain divisions and plants.

1989 strike shows greater sustaining power

The May 26-31 general strike is the second launched under the Aquino regime. In terms of numbers and scope of participation, it has only a slight edge over the October 1987 general strike, with even some regions showing a better performance in the latter.

The May 1989 general strike, however, is a remarkable leap over the one in 1987 in terms of sustaining power. The 1987 strike was strongest on its first day, then declined both in magnitude and in sweep in the succeeding days. The 1989 strike started with a few early outbursts (the walk-outs in 16 factories in Iligan on May 23 and in 18 factories in Metro Manila and Central Luzon on May 25), unleashed its full force on the day it was officially begun (May 26), then sustained that level of strength for four to five days (until May 30).

Workers in a considerable number of factories even held on until May 31, when the general strike was officially declared ended. A sizeable bloc (16 unions in Cebu, including that in the Atlas mines) failed to participate in the previous days due to a mistake in timing but were set to go on with their strike on June 1.

The workers in Metro Manila and Central Luzon, in particular, demonstrated admirable toughness and tenacity, with 208 unions in Metro Manila (compared to 62 in 1987) and 54 in Central Luzon maintaining their picketlines for at least five days. They made up 40 percent of all striking workers. More than 80 percent sustained their work stoppage for at least two consecutive days.

More than in the 1987 strike, the huge mass of workers that poured out from the striking factories launched concentrated actions that served as congealing points for the general strike and that projected the struggle as it developed. On May 22, some 6,000 workers gathered in front of the Batasan and on May 24, the same number massed up in front of the Senate.

Providing constant focus for the general strike was the strike camp in front of the Batasan from May 29-31, where some 4-5,000 workers congregated daily. The camp acted as a pressure point on Congress, which had been hedging on the wage bill for more than two months. At the same time, it was a central meeting ground for workers from different factories, where they conducted political discussions, cultural shows and other activities that strengthened class solidarity.

This year's general strike is also distinguished by the appearance of a popular form of organization representing grassroots participation in decision-making, planning and command. Called the General Strike Council (GSC), it captured the democratic broadness of the strike movement, sparking off the enthusiastic response and revolutionary energy of the working class at all levels.

The GSC was composed of representatives from about 200 participating unions. Leaders of various federations and labor centers constituted the presidium, the highest level of the organization. At the municipal and district levels, local strike councils organized activities. Such local counterparts were set up in Valenzuela, Caloocan, Malabon, Parañaque, Taguig, Makati, Pasig and Quezon City.

Although the federations did their part in preparing and mobilizing the unions and providing a certain level of coordination and leadership over the struggle, the General Strike Council and local strike councils played the larger role in fulfilling these tasks. It was the GSC which reflected the popular breadth and militancy of the general strike.

Progressive unions march at the forefront

The progressive unions under the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) marched at the forefront of the general strike and accounted for 90 percent of striking workers. The KMU led the way by setting off the first bursts of factory walk-outs, waging the most militant and sustained actions, and harnessing to the full its massive numbers and nation-wide reach.

From the beginning of the campaign, a broad array of trade union forces had thrown their support behind the wage demand and recognized the general strike as the weapon for victory. The Labor Advisory and Consultative Council (LACC), in the main, played a positive role in broadening this class solidarity. But what decisively pushed the LACC to take and maintain a tough stance was the leadership, initiative and consistency of the progressive unions in forwarding the workers' demands and pursuing the fight.

For within the LACC's ranks were wavering trade union federations like the Federation of Free Workers and Lakas ng Manggagawang Pilipino, which were under the influence of the counter-revolutionary social-democrats. They showed great trepidation in conducting a general strike, knowing the power of such an action to weld class unity and provide the workers with revolutionary experiences, fearful of the growing dominance and rising strength of the revolutionary forces in the working class movement, and realizing the confrontational character of this weapon vis-a-vis the state. They were the principal source of vacillation within -- temporizing on dates, raising doubts on the workers' zeal, determination and capability, and putting too much emphasis on the reactionary regime's processes.

The yellow trade unions and the social-democrats within their ranks showed a sectarianism that constricted working class unity. To screen their unions from what they saw as "Red contamination," they worked against the proposal of the progressives to set up municipal wage coalitions -- a proposal meant to tighten workers' unity at the grassroots level. Of course, they found the local strike councils and (GSC) an even more intimidating form of organization.

However, the yellow federation leaders were unable to dam up the outburst of class enthusiasm for the general strike. Scores of unions within their ranks joined in and coordinated at different levels and in different ways with the mainstream. Knowing that isolation from the workers was the only other alternative, these yellow federations decided to support the general strike.

On the other hand, the bankrupt Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), a Marcosian remnant in the labor movement, was thoroughly isolated and swept aside in the course of the general strike. Its attempt to confuse the dates for the strike and its proposal to delay it to June 1 were exposed as a device to sabotage the action, undermine working class unity and sap its energy, and give up the initiative in favor of the reactionary Congress.

A number of TUCP unions, however, defied the leadership's command. Left out in the cold, the TUCP tried to downplay the workers' victory by saying that the concessions extracted were not enough and that it would push through with its own general strike. But its display of bravado ended in a whimper.

The miserable performance of these yellow federations in the general strikes of 1987 and 1989 has proven once and for all that they really have no intention of matching their militant posturings and rhetoric with militant deeds. The genuine militants have learned not be taken in by their maneuverings and instead work to expose the vacillation of the yellow leaders and their efforts to prevent working class struggles, neutralize and eventually isolate them, and win over their mass membership.

A highly significant victory

The victory won in the May 1989 general strike was highly significant in that it forced the US-Aquino regime to grant a concession that went against its own declared policy. The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) was vehemently against any wage hike beyond P10, saying that it would result in a slowdown in the rate of economic growth, mass lay-offs and a high inflation rate. The big foreign and local capitalists insisted that government should not intervene in the setting of wages -- a policy contained in NEDA's medium-term economic plan -- and warned of the dire consequences of doing otherwise.

However, the resounding working class clamor for a P30 wage increase and the looming general strike caused the Aquino regime and even the capitalists to back down from their initial adamant positions. Hoping to dampen the workers' enthusiasm on the issue and to break up their unity, Aquino and her secretary of labor, Franklin Drilon -- after a behind-the-scenes consultation with the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) -- came up with a P15-P6 wage offer (P15 for workers in Metro Manila and P6 for those in the provinces).

The workers roundly rejected the Aquino-Drilon-ECOP proposal such that even Congress could find no means of pushing it through. The House of Representatives took the coward's way out: arguing that a legislated wage increase could not be enforced in majority of the enterprises, it refused to pass any wage bill at all. Meanwhile, the Senate was trying to hammer out a P20-P10 staggered wage increase (P20 to be effective immediately and the P10 in January 1990).

But the general strike erupted and swept away everything in its path. Drilon's claim that it was a flop, the ECOP's move to declare it illegal, the anti-strike mechanisms of the Herrera Law, the attempts of the TUCP to derail it and of the social-democrats to render it effete, even the dilly-dallying of Congress -- all were overturned by the power of the strike.

On the night of May 30, both houses of Congress agreed to enact a law providing for P25-P20-P15 increases in the daily

minimum wage (P25 for workers receiving P100 and below in industrial firms and large plantations; P20 for those in semi-large plantations; and P15 for agricultural workers and those in small-scale industries). This left the executive isolated and on the defensive, with no choice but to approve the congressional compromise.

Without doubt, the key factor in the success of the May 1989 general strike is the correct leadership of the revolutionary forces. They guided the general strike to victory by providing the correct line and correct tactics which raised the determination, unity and keenness of the working class in countering the US-Aquino regime's divisive ploys, the capitalists' threats and harassment and the labor aristocrats' sabotage.

There was also a long and sufficient preparation for the struggle. The wage campaign encompassed three months of propaganda and agitation and organizational work, which raised the capability of the working class to engage in sustained paralyzing actions.

During the campaign and actual struggle, painstaking alliance work and correct alliance tactics helped to organize the broadest class solidarity behind the general strike. This involved consolidating the progressive forces, winning over the mass membership in yellow-led or influenced unions, neutralizing the wavering yellow federations, and defeating the TUCP's pernicious schemes.

There was strong and broad public support for the workers' demand as well as for the general strike. This was mainly due to the correct projection of the wage issue and its linkage to the larger economic issues affecting the whole people. The justness of the workers' demand and their general strike was further highlighted by such developments as the impending increases in the prices of petroleum products and the steadily rising price of rice.

It was this overwhelming popular support, in addition to the workers' own resolve to push on with their action, that caused a split among the ruling classes on how to deal with the wage problem. The workers were able to take advantage of the differing positions of the executive and both houses of Congress on the wage measure and to exploit critical points and elements in the process of decision-making. They were thus able to isolate the Aquino regime in its stand on the wage issue and force it to give a concession in direct conflict with its commitments to foreign and local capitalists.

Important economic and political gains

The general strike wrested an important and palpable economic gain for the working class. It was a major blow, not only against the wage policy of the US-Aquino regime, but also against the entire range of state policies which are embodied in the Letter of Intent and Memorandum of Economic Policy (LOI-MEP) dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

During the campaign for higher wages, the pro-imperialist and pro-comprador bias of the Aquino regime and its economic recovery program was exposed. The general strike and the victory it won brought home the point that only mass struggles on a large scale can extract concessions that would blunt the ruinous effects of the IMF conditionalities on the people.

But the mass struggles for economic demands such as the May 1989 general strike have an impact greater than mere relief from the worsening hardship and poverty engendered by the economic crisis. By greatly straining the ability of the US-Aquino regime to pass on all the effects of this crisis onto the backs of the masses, they further bring to the surface the inherent flaws of an economic system that is designed to suit imperialist and comprador interests. These economic struggles therefore have the capacity to undermine one of the pillars of the exploitative and oppressive ruling system.

The general strike also dealt a stinging blow to the joint scheme of foreign and local capital and their reactionary state to halt the forward march of the revolutionary trade union movement through a new set of repressive laws added on to those retained from the Marcos fascist labor code. Despite the anti-strike provisions in the Herrera Law and the howls of the big capitalists for punitive action against the striking workers, the legitimacy of the general strike and the determination of the working class to go on with it could not be dented.

Indeed, the working class has developed the capability to challenge and roll back the reactionary forces on economic issues. The 1989 general strike represents a higher level of class solidarity and coordinated struggle than was shown in 1987. From the experiences of the workers in this high level of confrontational struggle with the state and the capitalist class, they have gained even more confidence in waging collective struggles in behalf of their class demands.

Furthermore, the general strike has set into motion a momentum of struggle that is sweeping through not only the backward sections of the working class but also the rest of the people. It has shown the other exploited and

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There remains much to be done to bring this about. For one thing, the revolutionary forces within the working class movement must further develop the general strike as a form of struggle -- to make it bigger, wider, sharper and more sustained. This requires propagating the valuable lessons of the recent general strike to the greatest number of workers; continuing a vigorous strike movement at the factory and higher levels; and developing a broader, stronger unity within the labor movement based on a course of militant action and a program with a revolutionary orientation.

While developing the fighting capabilities of the working class for tactical battles, the revolutionary forces must intensify all-round revolutionary education of the masses of workers. They must at all times relate the specific workers' issues and demands to the issues and demands of the people, link the particular problems and conditions of the working class to the entire system of exploitation and oppression that prevails in Philippine society, propagate the national democratic alternative and program as the political agenda which must be taken up by the working class movement, and place the working class always in the forefront of the struggle for national independence and democracy.

Now is also the time to propagate boldly and widely among the workers the study of their own world outlook, Marxism-Leninism, and their own socio-economic system, socialism. This rich body of theory and practice, to which the revolutionary proletariat of different countries and generations have contributed, including the Filipino proletariat throughout its history, serves as their guiding light towards complete victory in the struggle to liberate their class and the Filipino people.

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OVERSEAS FILIPINOS REMAIN EXPLOITED AND OPPRESSED

(This is the first of a two-part series on overseas Filipinos.)

Jocelyn G. Guanezo, 26, left the country three years ago to work as a dancer in a nightclub at Kichijima Uozo City, Toyapan, Japan.

Yesterday, Guanezo arrived home from Osaka...like a "living dead"...

Her arms carried the telltale marks of a drug user. Her skin is sallow, and she could not even control her saliva dribbling from her mouth. She could not talk, and according to the doctor who examined her, she was apparently drugged...

--Phil. Daily Globe

- - -

KUWAIT --- Alice, a 23-year-old Filipina, suffered eight months of beatings as the servant of an Arab family that have shattered her dream of a better life in the oil-rich gulf.

"When I came here, they told me I had a beautiful smile. All my teeth were nice. Now, they're all broken," she narrates in an interview from her hospital bed where she lay with a broken jaw, fractured elbows and a leg broken in three places.

--Phil. Daily Inquirer

- - -

NICOSIA - A Filipino woman and three Yemeni men were beheaded in public in Saudi Arabia after Holy Muslim prayers on Friday.

The woman, Rina Linda Nida, was beheaded in Riyadh after being convicted of strangling a young Saudi girl...

--Phil. Daily Inquirer

- - -

News reports like the ones above, about our compatriots abroad who in their journey to realize the dream of prosperity meet misfortune, are no longer new to us.

True, this is not the complete picture of the situation of overseas Filipinos; there are also a number of "success stories." But reports of Filipinos being beheaded in Saudi, raped in Japan, murdered in Singapore, maltreated in Hongkong, forced into

prostitution in Lebanon, are grim reminders that working abroad is no heaven, and if your luck runs out, you realize that there is also hell abroad.

It is not difficult to understand why every year thousands dare go abroad. The situation of the Filipino masses in their own country is like being in purgatory, if not already in hell. Indeed, what will they lose if they venture out?

Nevertheless, being separated from one's country is rather difficult, however temporary. And a considerable number of our compatriots, including those already considered successful, feel this kind of homesickness. There are also many who understand and act to resolve the basic problem of their homeland which is the root cause why there are now millions of millions of Filipinos who travel abroad.

Product of crisis in the Philippines

In a most recent estimate, there are 3.5 million Filipinos scattered in 120 countries all over the world. The number is continuously increasing because there are 500,000 Filipinos who leave the country every year to work or reside permanently abroad.

The number of Filipino immigrants is largest in the United States (US) and Canada. Next in number are the Filipino workers in the Middle East, Western Europe, Asia-Pacific and Africa, including seamen aboard foreign ships. Aside from these, many more of our compatriots are political exiles and refugees fleeing from intense militarization like the Moros in Mindanao who evacuated to Sabah. (See chart)

20 COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE THE LARGEST CONCENTRATION OF OVERSEAS FILIPINOS

COUNTRY	NUMBER	COUNTRY	NUMBER
US	1,600,000	South Korea	42,000
Sabah	350,000	Singapore	40,000
Saudi Arabia	300,000	Guam	37,500
Canada	200,000	Bahrain	30,000
Kuwait	100,000	Libya	30,000
Japan	90,000	England	30,000
United Arab Emirates	80,000	West Germany	30,000
Italy	80,000	Oman	25,000
Spain	80,000	Qatar	20,000
Hongkong	46,000	Others	245,000
Australia	44,000	TOTAL	3,500,000

The phenomenon of great numbers of Filipinos going abroad to seek their means of livelihood is a direct result of the economic crisis in the country. Ever since, poverty has been widespread. For the growing multitude of jobless people, there is no chance to move up. Those already employed, including professionals who finished college, have very little opportunity to improve their lives owing to their meagre salaries. Meanwhile, the wealth of the nation is concentrated in the hands of a few who belong to the few ruling class.

Apart from economic reasons, the last priority given to the development of science and technology impels scientists and science experts to look for countries which need their profession and can further enrich their knowledge.

This kind of situation, compounded by political turmoil, only means an uncertain future for the Filipino people. That is why many will grab outright any opportunity to leave the Philippines.

History of outmigration

The first wave of large-scale outmigration began during the period of US colonialism (1900-1940). The destination then of migrating Filipinos, who were mostly workers and peasants, was the US, where many states lacked manpower.

In 1906 the first group of Filipino immigrants arrived in Hawaii. They were 15 Ilocanos who found work in the sugar plantations. By 1934 some 120,000 had followed their lead. In the US mainland, there were 55,000 Filipinos, mostly workers in fruit and vegetable farms. This big wave of migration to the US, however, came to a stop due to restrictions in 1934.

The life of Filipino workers then in the US was very harsh. They worked 10 hours a day and the majority received wages from

\$30 to \$75 a month. If there was no work in the plantations, many of them sought jobs as bellboys, dishwashers, gardeners and drivers. Racial discrimination was integral in American society and on many occasions racial differences led to race riots, especially during the time of the Great Depression. In January 1930, for example, about 500 white men went on a rampage in Watsonville, California. They burned down buildings and Filipino homes, murdered two Filipinos and injured scores of others.

From World War II up to the decade of the '60s, the influx of Filipino workers into the US slowed down compared to the preceding period. However, many still worked in war reconstruction projects and in building US military facilities in the Pacific isles like Wake, Guam and Okinawa. Likewise, a large number of Filipinos were recruited into the US Navy. (There are 22,000 Filipinos today in the US Navy -- more than the entire force of the Philippine Navy!). War brides -- wives of American and Filipino soldiers (who served in the US military) -- swamped the US too.

During this period, a big number were employed as seamen or went to the United Kingdom and various countries of Europe and became domestic helpers, nurses and hotel and hospital workers. It can be noticed that at this stage, those going abroad were mainly skilled professionals.

From the decade of the 70s up to the present, migration of Filipinos, both inside and outside the country, surged anew. This time around, political exiles and Moro refugees in Sabah emerged, reflecting the intensification of the political and economic crisis. The nation's wealth was massively looted by the Marcos clique and their imperialist cohorts. Those who fought against their greed were severely suppressed.

In the countryside, the sheer lack of opportunities for the peasant masses provided the impetus for their migration to the cities, especially Metro Manila. In many instances, however, jobs could hardly be found in the cities. And so, going abroad was just too tempting.

During this time, a large number of Filipino migrants went to the Middle East and other parts of Asia and majority of them were skilled. Government participation in the export of Filipino labor intensified under Marcos. In fact, manpower export became a policy. The Marcos dictatorship took advantage of the boom in the construction industry in the Middle East and exported thousands of contract workers and professionals there. According to government statistics, out of the 2,702,973 Filipinos who worked abroad from 1975 to 1987, 2,140,429 were in the Middle East.

But the migration to other destinations like America, Europe, Africa and even Asia continued just the same. In the US, from 1975 to 1979, Filipinos had the second highest rate of immigration (next only to Mexicans).

Now the market for Filipino workers is bottoming out mainly because of the decreasing requirements of the construction industry in the Middle East. But because there is no relief in sight in their own country, Filipinos continue to look for jobs abroad. The government is scrambling to find other countries which will accept its manpower export. Recently, the Aquino government announced plans to export workers to the Soviet Union to share in the labor demand in Siberia.

Implication of Filipino labor export

For the Marcos dictatorship then, wholesale manpower export was made a stopgap to worsening unemployment. In addition, remittances and taxes of overseas workers aided the bankrupt economy, especially in reducing the balance of payments deficit. For 10 years since 1977, migrant workers officially remitted \$6.359 billion. The government scooped some \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion in taxes every year.

The system of manpower export during the time of Marcos is being continued by the Aquino regime. This is because the economic crisis continues and government gains from overseas workers remain big. Based on initial data for the first months of 1989, \$835 million has been remitted by overseas Filipinos. And these dollars pay 25 percent of the country's external debt.

For the country, however, the export of Filipino manpower is draining its human resources. Majority (80 percent) of those who go abroad are skilled professionals. For example, while we now lack doctors and nurses, the Philippines leads in the export of doctors and nurses throughout the world.

For Filipino overseas workers, their life is an endless struggle against problems common to their sector and against various types of oppression and exploitation. A considerable number are successful. But the likes of Alice, Rina and Jocelyn are not so few either. What is most painful is that they are neglected by the government which profits from their taxes and remittances.

Even before they set foot on foreign soil, our compatriots are already squeezed dry by recruiters and unscrupulous government agencies. Once abroad, their suffering does not end.

Filipino migrants face a litany of problems: homesickness or loneliness caused by separation from loved ones, friends and homeland, which is a factor in the nervous breakdown of some of our compatriots; hard working conditions like long working

hours, being treated like slaves (as among domestic helpers), or unfavorable climate (such as in places in or near the desert); non-payment of correct wages or worse, non-payment of wages at all; sexual and physical abuse, especially among those working as domestic helpers in Hongkong and other countries and as "cultural workers" in Japan; and racial discrimination.

Most bitter of all, upon return to their own country, migrant workers are not sure of getting employed except when they set up a business of their own. They are trapped in a vicious cycle.

But our compatriots are not completely helpless. In many parts of the world -- in Hongkong and America, in Greece and Saudi Arabia -- the voice of struggle of overseas Filipinos can be heard. Not only do they oppose conditions which engender Alices, Rinas and Jocelyns, they also participate in the revolutionary movement of overseas Filipinos in order to fight for their democratic rights and advance the revolutionary struggle of the Filipino people for democracy and freedom. Ultimately, the liberation of our compatriots abroad lies in the eradication of the ills that plague their own homeland.

(NEXT: The struggle of overseas Filipinos)

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INTIFADA: A MILESTONE IN THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE

The Palestinian *Intifada* (Arabic word for uprising) in the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is now on its eighteenth month. Since December 8, 1987, over 500 Palestinians, young and old, have been killed by the brutal Israeli Zionist occupation forces; thousands wounded; and thousands more imprisoned or exiled. But the spirit of the *Intifada* burns on.

The glorious Palestinian uprising has won the admiration and support of peoples everywhere. The uprising is just and popular. All strata of the Palestinian people are involved in the uprising.

A popular uprising in action

The uprising is characterized by the Palestinian people's open defiance of the Israeli occupation troops through demonstrations, street barricades, general strikes, partial and total civil disobedience. In the forefront of this popular uprising are the brave young Palestinians whom Yasser Arafat calls the "children of the stones."

In their bid to quell the uprising, the Israeli forces have resorted to harsh repression and brutal terror -- they have killed and wounded hundreds of Palestinians, many of them young people; beaten up those arrested; detained thousands in Israeli camps; forced many into exile; destroyed the houses of suspected leaders of the Palestinian uprising; imposed preventive curfews in Palestinian refugee camps and residential areas; and used the Israeli settler-vigilantes to harass, kill and grab the lands of the Palestinian Arabs. All these actions have failed to break the will of the Palestinian people.

All over the world, the word *Intifada* has become familiar and is associated with popular resistance, heroism and firm determination. Freedom-loving peoples everywhere sympathetically monitor news reports about the valiant actions and the legendary steadfastness of the sons and daughters of Palestine against the brutal Israeli occupation forces and the racist Israeli settler-vigilantes. The Palestinian people are determined to win and finally see the Palestine flag hoisted over their sacred homeland. There is no stopping the course of history.

A glorious history of struggle

The Palestine uprising is part of the glorious history of the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination and an independent statehood. For centuries Palestine has been exposed to foreign rule, of which the Israeli occupation is merely the latest.

Before World War I Palestine was occupied by the Turkish Ottoman empire. However, the British forces defeated Turkey, the ally of Germany, during that war. Thus, the victorious British forces became the new colonizers of Palestine.

In 1916 the British government promised independence to most of the eastern part of the Arab world, including Palestine, in exchange for their support during the war. Yet, the pledge of independence was betrayed the year after it was given when the British government issued the Balfour Declaration offering a "Jewish national home" in Palestine to the Israeli Zionist movement in Europe. British imperialism intended to use the Jewish immigration as a counterweight against the growing nationalist sentiments of the Arab people.

Despite Palestinian appeals and protest actions, the British government continued to implement the Balfour Declaration. But when it could no longer hold on, British imperialism turned over its "mandate" over Palestine to the United Nations (UN) after World War II.

Through the UN Partition Plan of 1947, the state of Israel was established. The plan allocated more than half of the country (the most fertile) to the Zionist state. To consolidate their hold on the land where Palestinians outnumbered the Jewish population, the Zionists perpetrated a number of massacres. The Zionists uprooted and drove the Palestinian Arabs away from the cities and villages.

While the UN General Assembly did pass resolutions supporting the rights of the Palestinian people, the Israeli Zionists with the backing of US imperialism arrogantly refused to heed these resolutions. In fact, the Israeli Zionists launched a war of aggression in June 1967, annexing the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

To ensure an organized and effective resistance against the Israeli Zionists, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established in 1964. A year after, the Palestinian people launched their armed resistance. Since then, the resistance movement under the leadership of the PLO has grown and developed despite severe hardships and setbacks. Thousands of Palestinians have met heroic deaths in the course of their struggle.

In 1982 PLO forces in Lebanon experienced a major setback when a far superior Israeli army invaded Lebanon. Thousands of Palestinian fighters and civilians as well as their Lebanese allies were killed. And the PLO forces under Yasser Arafat had to leave Beirut to preserve their remaining forces. US imperialism and Israeli Zionism thought that they had decisively broken the PLO structure and with it, the Palestinian resistance. But they were wrong. The PLO remained intact, and a stronger and more united Palestinian resistance emerged.

Significant gains of the uprising

Today the estimated five million Palestinians, more than half of whom live in exile while the rest live in the Israeli-occupied territories, mark a major turning point in their struggle to establish a sovereign Palestinian state. Since the start of the heroic Palestinian uprising, the Palestinian people have won several significant victories.

First, an independent Palestinian state was formally declared. On November 15, 1988 the Palestine National Council (parliament-in-exile of the PLO), under the leadership of Arafat, proclaimed the independent state of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Second, under the leadership of the PLO, the Palestinian struggle has won the recognition and support of the majority of the member-countries of the UN. This has further isolated US imperialism and Israeli Zionism, both of which have continued to malign the PLO as a terrorist organization.

Despite attempts by US imperialism to prevent the PLO leader from addressing the UN body, Arafat successfully presented the case of the Palestinian people before the special UN General Assembly session in Geneva, Switzerland last December 13, 1988.

Arafat set as a major condition for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Arab lands occupied since 1967. And he proposed the convening of a representative international conference with the participation of the UN Security Council members and all the parties concerned, including the PLO, to peacefully resolve the issue.

Offering the hand of peace to Israel, Arafat said: "...I ask the leaders of Israel to come here, under the sponsorship of the United Nations, so that together, we can forge that peace...our people, who want dignity, freedom and peace for themselves and security for their state, want the same things for all the states and parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict...." Arafat's peace initiative received the overwhelming applause and support of peace-loving and freedom-loving peoples from all over the world.

Socialist countries, newly-liberated countries, national liberation movements and other progressive and anti-imperialist forces everywhere have fully supported the heroic uprising and the Palestinian struggle to finally establish a Palestinian state in the Israeli-occupied territories. The Palestinian struggle is an integral part of the world-wide movement against imperialism and other reactionary and racist forces.

Arafat has aptly put it, "By waging its hard-fought battle for existence, the Arab people of Palestine are upholding the cause of all honest and freedom-loving peoples of the world. That is why we say that our revolution has a Palestinian face, an Arab heart and an international character."

Arafat has emphatically expressed the Palestinian people's steadfast solidarity with the national liberation movements. "We

think highly of cooperation with all the liberation movements in the world; it is diversified and reaches out to Latin and Central America, Asia and Africa. The Palestinian revolution has deep roots: we are a bough of a big tree, the tree of freedom."

Since Arafat's appearance before the UN body, over 90 countries have officially recognized the existence of the state of Palestine. And many of them have already granted the PLO the right to an embassy in their respective countries. Here in the Philippines, the Aquino government, following the unpopular stand of US imperialism, has yet to extend official recognition to the newly-created state of Palestine and open diplomatic relations with it. Despite the urging of some senators, the Aquino government has remained silent on the recognition of the state of Palestine.

Third, the Palestinian uprising has resulted in greater unity among Arab countries, highlighted by the mediated ceasefire between Iran and Iraq and Egypt's return to the Arab League. The entire Arab League is solidly behind the Palestinian struggle and fully supports the newly established Palestinian state.

Fourth, the uprising has further isolated the Israeli ruling clique from the Israeli citizens. Progressive and peace-loving Israelis have denounced the brutalities of their soldiers and have pressured their government to recognize the Palestinians' legitimate and sovereign right to a Palestinian state. Some members of the Israeli parliament have even met with PLO representatives in defiance of the Israeli government's "no talks with the PLO" policy. An undetermined number of Israeli soldiers have refused assignment in the Israeli-occupied territories of the Gaza strip and West Bank. Moreover, ordinary Israeli citizens are getting increasingly critical of their government because the financial cost of suppressing the uprising is taking its toll on Israel's economy.

Above all, the uprising has shown the courage, determination and unity of the Palestinian people. Despite malicious attempts by US imperialism and Israeli Zionism to sow intrigues and disunity among the Palestinian patriotic forces, the Palestinian people have remained united under the leadership of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The ability to sustain the uprising for the past eighteen months reflects the high level of unity and organization achieved by the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The Palestinians have organized themselves into popular committees to ensure sustained, well-coordinated resistance against the repression and terror of the Israeli Zionist forces.

People's committees composed of representatives from all social strata and all occupations have been established in every community to guide the mass actions and to replace the administrative unit of the Israeli occupation force. When members of these committees are arrested, their places are immediately taken over by new men or women. If a committee is suppressed anywhere, a new one springs up in its place. A joint national command of the uprising has also been organized to coordinate the work of the popular committees.

While the uprising may not be enough to defeat and expel the Israeli troops, it has served to gain the support of majority of the UN member-countries for an independent Palestinian state and a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict. As a result of the overwhelming international public opinion in favor of the Palestinian cause, the US government has now begun to dialogue with representatives of the PLO.

In a bid to cool down the uprising and deflect mounting international pressure, Israel has unveiled the "Shamir plan" which calls for elections and limited autonomy for the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. This is totally unacceptable to the PLO and the Palestinian people. Further intensification of the Palestinian struggle, greater international pressure and growing criticism within Israel should eventually make Israeli leaders realize the futility of their unjust and unrealistic position. If Israel's leaders sincerely want peace in the occupied territories and in the whole Middle East, then they should now accept Arafat's peace offer and recognize the right of the Palestinian state to exist alongside the state of Israel in peace and mutual respect.

The glorious uprising and heroic Palestinian struggle will forever serve as an inspiration to peoples struggling for national self-determination and independence in other parts of the world. The Philippine national democratic movement has much to learn from the experience of the Palestinian people in the conduct of their struggle both inside and outside the Israeli-occupied territories; in the forging of unity among the various Palestine organizations; in the proper combination of unarmed and armed actions; and in their successful international and diplomatic work.

The Palestinian people are determined to continue the *Intifada* until victory. Their victory is the victory of all progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the world.

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SINO-SOVIET SUMMIT STRENGTHENS UNITY AMONG SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

The Sino-Soviet summit last May 15-17, the first since 1959, is a welcome development towards forging greater unity among fraternal socialist countries and anti-imperialist forces all over the world.

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders in Beijing to reestablish normal ties between the two socialist countries after three decades of strained and abnormal relations. The successful summit meeting was the culmination of a long process brought about by the spirit of new thinking and major changes sweeping both countries.

The new thinking, which calls for innovation and creativity in the search for the appropriate and effective approaches to building socialism, has resulted in profound changes -- *perestroika* (restructuring), *glasnost* (openness), democratization, modernization and socialist renewal -- in the two countries as well as in other socialist countries. And this has also influenced changes in their policies on foreign relations, including relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). *Glasnost* or openness in international relations has meant peaceful coexistence, good neighborliness and detente.

In the past three years there has been a warming of relations between the two socialist countries. Sincere and concrete moves have been undertaken to restore normal relations. In 1986, in a speech at the Pacific port of Vladivostok, Gorbachev declared, "The Soviet Union is prepared, at any time, at any level, to discuss with China the question of additional measures for creating an atmosphere of good neighborliness." This was received favorably by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese people. China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen later visited Moscow. In return, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze visited Beijing early this year.

Recent positive developments finally paved the way for the realization of a Sino-Soviet summit. Most significant of these were the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the announced withdrawal of some 200,000 Soviet troops in the Sino-Soviet border, and the projected complete pull-out of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea by September.

The summit has filled the peoples of both countries and everywhere with great expectations and hopes for peace and development. Soviet leader Gorbachev echoed this sentiment in his arrival statement: "We hope that the meetings and talks we are going to have with the Chinese leaders will mark a watershed in relations between the USSR and the People's Republic of China and in the further development of these relations on the basis of universally recognized principles of interstate relationships and good neighborliness."

For his part, PRC's President Yang Shangkun voiced out the Chinese people's expectations during a dinner in honor of the Soviet President: "Today, China and the Soviet Union have decided to distance themselves from the past and to open a future, embarking on a quest for ways to establish relations of a new type based on the five principles of peaceful co-existence."

On the second day of the summit, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping formally announced the restoration of normal relations between China and the USSR. "We can take this opportunity to announce publicly the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations," Deng Xiaoping declared. Deng also said that the summit signified the normalization of relations between the communist parties of the two countries.

The summit is not expected to resolve at once all problems in Sino-Soviet relations which have accumulated over the past 30 years. However, this historic meeting shows that it is possible to find solutions even to the most complicated issues. It is the view of the Communist Party of the Philippines that conflicts between two socialist countries are basically non-antagonistic and should be resolved peacefully on the basis of the principles of socialist internationalism.

Other socialist countries and newly-liberated countries, national liberation movements and progressive and anti-imperialist forces the world over have hailed the normalization of relations between the two countries. Lessons have been gained from the errors and misunderstandings of the past. Communists and anti-imperialist forces now look forward to greater unity and cooperation towards peace and progress in the world.

By reestablishing friendly relations, both countries can now concentrate more resources to pursue their own economic and political reforms geared towards successfully building socialism in their respective countries. Each triumph in socialist construction in one country is a victory for communists everywhere. For this will contribute to the strengthening of the socialist system in the world as well as serve as an inspiration for other peoples striving to build socialism in their respective countries.

Moreover, the strengthening of socialism in China and the USSR will enable them to give greater moral and material support to national liberation movements and underdeveloped countries. And this will pave the way for the liberation of more people from the oppression and exploitation of imperialism and other reactionary forces.

An important point of the Sino-Soviet summit is the normalization of relations between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Communist Party of China (CPC). Both parties share common interests. Both parties are now facing

essentially common problems: the carrying out of reforms in the economy and the political system, the promotion of openness and democracy in the party and socialist society, the handling of ethnic relations, and the all-round advancement of the well-being of the people.

An exchange of experiences in handling these problems, joint discussions on the correct approaches to building socialism on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, and joint efforts in the settlement of major global and regional issues will not only benefit both parties but also the cause of world peace, security and progress.

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===== **LETTER** =====

CONTEMPORARIES OF TATANG

*This is a feedback to the book by Tatang which we reviewed in the last issue of **Ang Bayan**. The letter is interesting so we decided to share it with our readers.*

Dear Tatang,

I've just finished reading your autobiography -- *Sa Tungki ng Ilong ng Kaaway*. I did not stop until I had reached the end.

The story of your life in struggle serves as a good supplement to a study of the history of the Party. In a concrete way, your book showed me why the new Party is the true inheritor of the revolutionary cause of Crisanto Evangelista. It increased my interest in learning from the experiences of cadres like you. I wish we could have the opportunity to share stories.

For me, you are a living example of the truth that the toiling masses will themselves produce their own leaders in the course of the struggle. Your continued devotion to the cause, even when the old people's army had been defeated, speaks of the great qualities of the masses.

I salute your readiness to take up heavy responsibilities though already advanced in age. As it is, you could have told our comrades: "I have served for a long time and now my bones are aching. I leave the work to those of you who are yet young and strong." But by your example, you showed what it is to be a true proletarian revolutionary.

Let me tell you about some of your contemporaries from the old Party and people's army who joined up with the new revolutionary movement in the Southern Tagalog and Bicol regions. I remember four of them.

Among them was Ka Fidel, who belonged to the Bagul-bagol family in San Antonio, Laguna. He fought together with Asedillo, who in the 1930s decided to go up to the mountains and fight against the reactionary government. Asedillo built his base in the Laguna-Quezon part of the Sierra Madre, covering the towns of Lucban, Sampaloc and Mauban in Quezon and also Cavinti, Pagsanjan, San Antonio, Pakil and other towns in Laguna. Ka Fidel kept in his care a red flag used by Asedillo.

When the new Party began to set up guerrilla zones in Southern Tagalog in 1970, the barrio in San Antonio, Laguna where Ka Fidel lived was among the first to be visited. It was in Ka Fidel's house where Ka Nestor (Reynaldo Cruz), the first cadre deployed by the Party to the area, stayed. Because Ka Fidel was well respected in his barrio and the adjoining villages, it was easy to organize the masses there. When martial law was declared, he became a full-time organizer.

Like you, Ka Fidel was well on in years. But even then, he could outwalk any comrade in the mountains. He knew like the back of his hand every secret passage and camping ground in the forest. One of his daughters, Ka Sylvia, became a Red fighter in the New People's Army.

In the Quezon-Bicol boundary, we were able to link up with three old fighters of the HMB (Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan) -- Ka Pater, Sendong and Tarsan. They had all been imprisoned at Muntinlupa (where political prisoners were mixed together with convicted criminals) until the mid-'60s. According to Ka Pater, Amado Hernandez was his teacher in the prison's high school.

Upon release, the three together set up homesteads in the forested part of the Quezon-Camarines Norte boundary. This was where an NPA unit got into contact with them in 1973.

Ka Pater is the son of an organizer in the Pambansang Katipunan ng Magbubukid (PKM) in Albay. His father volunteered him

for schooling in a cadre school in Reco 5 (Regional Command-Bicol) of the HMB. After his schooling, Ka Pater became a courier in the old Party. He met Ka Mariano Balgos but only learned the latter's real identity when Balgos was killed by the enemy in Manito, Albay in 1954.

Ka Sendong and Ka Tarsan (from the Alvarez family) were from the northern part of Camarines Sur. The HMB got in touch with them during its expansion work in Bicol in the 1950s. Apart from the HMB forces from Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog led by Ka Mariano Balgos, the HMB was reinforced by recruits from Bicol itself.

According to these two, at the peak of HMB strength in Bicol, it had five field commands (each one not less than company size) which covered the territories from Camarines Norte in the north to Sorsogon in the south. Ka Sendong and Tarsan were among the first recruits of the HMB in Camarines Sur. Ka Tarsan was an ordinary Red fighter while Ka Sendong was a platoon commander.

In the early part of 1973 a Party cadre reached Ka Pater's barrio in the mountainous area of Tagkawayan, Quezon. Ka Pater immediately sent the news to Ka Sendong and Tarsan, who were then living in a barrio in Labo, Camarines Norte near the Quezon boundary. All three jumped with joy. They remembered the promise of the old Party leadership that it would once more link up with them when it resumed its revolutionary work. They had waited in vain. But they had heard news that the New People's Army had been born.

Like you, Tatang, these three comrades remained ready to accept revolutionary tasks. Ka Tarsan decided to move to Ka Pater's barrio in order to be in close contact with the comrades. The two of them joined the barrio organizing committee (BOC). Meanwhile, Ka Sendong started organizing in his barrio, which became the base for expansion in Camarines Norte.

In Christmas of 1973 their barrio was reached by the first armed propaganda unit (APU) of the NPA in the Quezon-Bicol boundary. A mass meeting was held in the barrio to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the CPP's reestablishment. The BOC to which Ka Pater and Tarsan belonged led in mobilizing the masses for the meeting and ensuring the security of the APU in their barrio.

Also like you, Tatang, these three comrades did not find it hard to understand the difference between the new Party and people's army and the old Party and people's army. They themselves laid bare their own sad experiences in the latter. That is why they were pleasantly surprised when the APU which arrived in their barrio did not only call for a mass meeting. Its members also helped in planting camote in an area in the mountains which had been reserved and cleared by the BOC to serve as a production base for the people's army.

Ka Tarsan found it difficult to walk because of a knee wound he had sustained in a clash between his HMB unit and enemy troops. But he would still offer to carry the heavy sacks of camote for the comrades whenever the NPA unit would come to his barrio. He would regale us with stories of his experiences in the HMB. We spent many a pleasant hour listening to them.

"The NPA is truly different from the HMB," observed Ka Tarsan. "You give first place to organizing the masses. In our time, we lacked in our understanding of the masses. That is why they also lacked in support for us," he explained.

Led by Ka Pater, the masses in their barrio set up chapters of the peasant, youth and women's organizations, and also the militia unit. Apart from its support for the activities of the people's army, their barrio also became a rich source of Red fighters and Party cadres.

Although they had been HMB fighters for quite some time, Ka Sendong and Tarsan never became members of the old Party. This was surprising, since Ka Sendong was already a platoon commander. One could understand Ka Tarsan's great joy when, one day in 1975, a member of the Party branch in his barrio asked him to join the Party.

One time, the enemy conducted operations in their barrio and Ka Tarsan was arrested. As he was being walked to the PC camp by his captors, he grew depressed at the thought that he would not be able to complete the biodata for his membership application in the Party. "If I am killed by the enemy, I might be forgotten by the comrades because I am not yet in the roster" was his silent sorrow.

Fortunately, he was released from detention. And immediately after he reported to his comrades on what had happened to him, he finished and submitted his biodata. Such was the value he placed on the Party.

In 1976 these three comrades became full-time cadres who helped in our expansion work in Camarines Norte and Camarines Sur. Together with Ka Pater, his young daughter, Ka Nelda, also went full-time.

Ka Fidel, Sendong and Tarsan were among the first to give up their lives for the sake of advancing the revolutionary struggle in the Southern Tagalog and Bicol regions.

I hope, Ka Tatang, that your having written down the story of your life serves as an example to other comrades to tell their own stories of life in the struggle.

A long life to you!

Comradely yours,
Ka Anton

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