



Special Issue

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## Urgent Challenges for Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

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**T**he revolutionary forces in the countryside are happy with the successful demonstration launched by hundreds of thousands in EDSA calling for Estrada's resignation or ouster. We hope that this demonstration signals even bigger demonstrations in the coming days.

It is good that anti-Estrada reactionaries are now defecting to the other side. But it is more imperative to launch more and ever-bigger demonstrations in the streets in synchrony with various forms of collective action including workers and employees' strikes, student boycotts and others. It is certain that no matter how tenaciously Estrada clings to power, he will be forcibly ousted by the throngs of millions who will surround Malacanang to collectively demand his resignation.

It is but fitting for Gloria Arroyo to prepare to be the new president of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. There is already a growing consensus among anti-Estrada forces that Arroyo will replace Estrada. Even US imperialism has given its blessings to Arroyo.

In drafting the new government's program, we urge the formation of a committee or council composed of the representatives of anti-Estrada forces. There is need to ensure that mass organizations will be well-represented

here, especially organizations of the basic masses on whom Estrada inflicted graver suffering.

More than the reactionary politicians who only turned against Estrada recently, Arroyo should listen to organizations that have, from the very beginning, stood their ground and resisted the antipeople and antipoor Estrada government.

The widespread protests of the people against the Estrada government prove their desire to resolve the social crisis and lift themselves from their extreme poverty. Still fresh in the people's memory are their shattered hopes for change after the 1986 EDSA uprising. Thus, they will no longer so easily allow the government to once more trample on their aspirations for justice and a better life.

Towards this goal, it is imperative for Arroyo's government to confront and address the following people's demands:

**1. Arrest Estrada, the Marcoses and their cronies and make them pay for their plunder of the people.** Estrada should not be allowed to escape like Marcos. He should be arrested and his ill-gotten wealth and properties confiscated along with that of his main partners and cronies, including the Marcos

family, Lucio Tan and Danding Cojuangco. Estrada should be made to stand trial for his all-out plunder and squandering of the nation's coffers especially in the midst of such widespread poverty and deprivation. Aside from corruption charges, it is also fitting for the victims of human rights violations under the Estrada government to file a class suit. At the same time, it is imperative to decisively hold the Marcos family liable, especially Imelda Marcos, for the proven crimes of the Marcos dictatorship.

**2. Lower the prices of petroleum products and other basic commodities.** At the soonest possible time, the deregulation law should be repealed and steps to control the prices of petroleum products and other basic commodities should be put in place.

**3. Grant a just wage increase.** The more or less P26-increase in the daily wage ordered by the Regional Wage Boards in October is patently insufficient. It is only just that there be a special order or law granting the demand for a P125/day across-the-board wage increase.

**4. Stop the all-out anti-Moro war in Mindanao.** As commander-in-chief of the AFP, Arroyo can immediately order the military to stop its offensive operations in Central and Western Mindanao. At the same time, just indemnification should be accorded victims of human rights violations including the hundreds of thousands who have been forcibly displaced by military operations.

**5. Scrap Oplan Makabayan.** Arroyo should repudiate this fascist legacy of Estrada. In the past two years of its implementation, Estrada surpassed the record of the Marcos dictatorship in terms of brutality and relentless violations of human rights especially in the countryside. Relatedly, and as a humanitarian gesture, Arroyo can order the release of all political prisoners including Donato Contiente and Juanito Itaas who both have been in prison for more than 12 years because of their political beliefs. Likewise, all negotiations with the Marcos family should cease and indemnification to martial law victims immediately granted.

It would do Arroyo good to carry out these policies that address the immediate interests of the people. As long as these are not carried out, Arroyo will have to face bigger, broader and more intensified workers' strikes, as well as surging peasant struggles in the countryside. Should Arroyo fail to address and resolve the people's urgent demands, it would not be far-fetched for her to meet the same fate currently being suffered by the Estrada government.

In order to arrest the sharp economic downfall, Arroyo should scrap IMF policy-dictates, especially the liberalization, deregulation and privatization programs which were unrestrainedly carried out by Estrada. Specifically, she should put a stop to the blind implementation of the policy to do away with all tariffs and other protection for local industry. The all-out privatization of hospitals, schools and other service institutions should be halted as well, as with ongoing land-use conversion that is displacing tens of thousands of peasants.

The Party and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines are ready to talk to the representatives of the Arroyo government to study the possibility of resuming the peace negotiations between the NDFP and GRP. Still, this rests principally on Arroyo's readiness to uphold previous agreements including The Hague Joint Declaration of 1990 and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL, 1998). If the new government ratifies the CARHRIHL, talks on the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (the first item in the substantive agenda of the peace negotiations) can proceed.

It is clear to all revolutionary forces that the overthrow of Estrada, like the overthrow of Marcos, contributes, but is not tantamount to, the strategic objective of overthrowing the ruling oppressive and exploitative system. Towards this goal, the revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party of the Philippines will continue to intensify the revolutionary struggle to establish a social system that truly addresses and advances the national and democratic interests of the people, especially the toiling masses.