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Editorial

## The Arroyo regime's desperate schemes to perpetuate itself in power

The moribund Arroyo regime has become increasingly desperate with the further intensification of the country's economic and political crisis. It is resorting to various maneuvers and schemes in order to perpetuate itself in power until 2004 and beyond. But in the main, all its maneuvers and schemes are a failure and are backfiring on the regime.

Arroyo paved the way for, and rode on the scheme to impeach Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. which was set into motion by Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco's minions in Congress. Arroyo hoped that Cojuangco would not oppose

but rather support her in the forthcoming election. But as a result of the big backlash created by their collusion and scheme, Arroyo ended up dissociating herself from the scheme and rode on the Supreme Court declaration that the impeachment went through an illegal process.

The factor of violence is ever present in the maneuverings and struggles between the Arroyo clique and the anti-Arroyo reactionaries for political power. However strained the move, anti-Arroyo politicians recently tried to use the failure of the impeachment scheme to take advantage of the destabilization it generated and plan a coup. Even as they prepare for the 2004 election, they are likewise attempting to seize power even before the election.

One of the schemes to rock the Arroyo regime was a demonstration attended by several tens of thousands on November 12. On Arroyo's own orders, the rally was violently dispersed on the flimsiest excuse that the demonstrators exceeded the time limit by a few minutes. Policemen truncheoned the demonstrators, bombarded them with water cannons and lobbed tear gas, quickly breaking up their ranks.

Meanwhile, in the countryside, intense military operations and the use of state vio-



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lence against ordinary peasants continue. This is the regime's principal means to suppress the growing opposition by the revolutionary forces and the people.

At the same time, the regime is carrying out filthy and cunning schemes to cover up its corruption and other transgressions against the people, build up its image, stop destabilization measures and coups d'état, disarm Arroyo's other opponents in reactionary politics, and weaken criticisms against it. Through all this, Arroyo wishes to stay in power beyond 2004.

The latest of the regime's schemes involves its offers of "total reconciliation" to all its adversaries, including the Marcos family, ousted president Estrada, Danding Cojuangco, Sens. Panfilo Lacson and Gregorio Honasan, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Arroyo says she wants to reach an understanding with them before the 2004 election.

The offers of "reconciliation" to her rival factions and politicians among the ranks of the reactionary ruling classes all involve secret and

dubious dealings and agreements to the detriment of the people.

So far, the offer of "reconciliation" with Estrada has consisted of the withdrawal of government prosecutors from their previous objection to Estrada's request from the Sandiganbayan to seek medical treatment in the US. This is but part of what Arroyo and Estrada have been discussing through their intermediary, Housing Secretary Mike Defensor. An even bigger secret exchange revolves around how Estrada could evade his plunder cases in exchange for his non-support for destabilization schemes and for Arroyo's opponents in the coming election. Meanwhile, as Arroyo grants him concessions, Estrada keeps on playing hard-to-get and has been upping the ante to prolong the negotiations until 2004 and thus put more pressure on Arroyo.

"Reconciliation" with the Marcoses has attendant propositions aimed at blocking the payment of indemnification to political prisoners who were victims of Marcos' martial law. This includes the formation of a "Truth Commission" which, in reality, will only add obstacles and make it more difficult to attain justice for victims of martial law.

"Reconciliation" with Cojuangco has long been the subject of repeated schemes between Arroyo and Cojuangco despite strong opposition

by the people. The main content of their collaboration involves the reversal of the Supreme Court decision on the public nature of the coco levy funds. In this regard, Cojuangco has been able to claim an additional 27% of San Miguel Corporation stocks held by the government, apart from the 20% restored to him by the Sandiganbayan because of a minor technical shortcoming on the part of the Presidential Commission on Good Government. This is in exchange for Cojuangco's support for Arroyo in the coming election.

Negotiations between Arroyo and Lacson are aimed at putting an end to the government's prosecution of the Kuratong-Baleleng case, and on Lacson's part, halting Part 3 of the Jose Pidal exposé as well as his attacks on the Arroyo couple. Meanwhile, the government has been dangling before Honasan the bait of dismissing cases filed against him in relation to the July 27 coup, in exchange for desisting from such projects and confining himself to "political means of reso-

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lution."

All of the cases mentioned show Arroyo's intent to strike a compromise with persons who have committed grave crimes against the people instead of ensuring, endorsing and speeding up their trial and punishment. Arroyo will do everything, including running roughshod over human rights and denying justice to the people, just to stay in power.

However, even if Arroyo's opponents openly accept her offers of "reconciliation," she could never be certain that they will desist from hatching schemes against her. Instead of a show of strength, Arroyo has only succeeded in manifesting her profound weakness and desperation.

While the principal targets of Arroyo's "reconciliation" scheme are her reactionary political opponents, she also hopes that luring the revolutionary forces into biting her "reconciliation" efforts through the resumption of the suspended peace talks will likewise help her overcome the crisis and prevent her steady political decline and defeat.

But this will all be for nought if the Arroyo regime is not serious about pursuing the peace negotiations with the NDF and the MILF. The regime has long been running roughshod over peace talks with the NDF by having declared the CPP-NPA and Comrade Jose Maria Sison as "terrorists" and filing all kinds of trumped up criminal cases against Comrade Sison. The regime has also disregarded previous agreements and is forcibly defin-

ing the "final peace agreement"—which it has one-sidedly drafted and contains nothing but the surrender of the revolutionary forces—as the framework for the talks. Meanwhile, it continues to wage intense military operations on the revolutionary forces' bases.

In the case of the MILF, aside

from forcing the use of a similar version of the "final peace agreement" to secure its capitulation, the regime has opened the GRP-MILF peace negotiations to complete intervention by the US through the US Institute for Peace.

In the meantime, the crisis of Philippine society continues to worsen. Despite Arroyo's various efforts to abort her steady political decline, she is unable to do anything effectively to relieve the crisis. The end of her regime draws nearer and becomes more certain. AB

## **Coconut farmers file charges against Danding Cojuangco**

**C**oconut farmers filed a plunder case against Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco with the Office of the Ombudsman on November 13. The case principally involves Danding's use of P130 billion in coco levy funds to purchase First United Bank (FUB) stocks in 1975.

The coconut farmers filed the case at the initiative of the Pinag-isang Lakas ng Magbubukid sa Quezon and the Bicol Coconut Planters Association Inc. Also named as respondents are Juan Ponce Enrile who then chaired the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) and Maria Clara Lobregat who was then a director of the agency.

The complaint states that in 1975 the respondents bought 72.2% of FUB's (now the United Coconut Planters Bank) authorized capital stock. It was the PCA that paid for the stocks, with the cost later reimbursed from the coco levy funds. Sixty-four point ninety-eight percent (64.98%) of the stocks were placed in the name of the PCA supposedly for the benefit of the coconut farmers. Cojuangco took direct control of the remaining 7.7%.

Said the coconut farmers' lawyer Atty. Jobert Pajilda, "we believe that Cojuangco and the other respondents are still committing plunder because they continue to benefit from their earlier illegal acts." Thus, there is basis for filing a case even if the recently enacted Plunder Law could not be applied retroactively.

Earlier, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) appealed to the Sandiganbayan to reverse its recent decision nullifying the sequestration of Cojuangco's stocks in the San Miguel Corporation (SMC).

The KMP said that the court must immediately resolve the issue and reverse the decision to prevent the conspiracy to plunder the coco levy funds. AB



# Southern Tagalog successfully convenes Second Mass Work Conference

The Second Conference on the Conduct of Mass Work in the Countryside held in August is another big milestone in the history of the revolutionary movement in Southern Tagalog. It is a big victory considering that it was held amid the escalating campaign of military terrorism in the region's countryside. According to a comrade, "This conference is a big blow to the enemy that has been trying to undermine the strength that the revolutionary movement and its mass base have achieved."

In the process, the conference served as a big school where revolutionary forces conducting painstaking mass work in the region were able to share experiences. It set the direction that the revolutionary movement must take to realize its objective of setting up bastions of the revolution in the countryside—mass bases that the enemy cannot destroy despite its intensifying counterrevolutionary war.

The conference discussed the peasant masses' present condition and level of consciousness, and the level of open and underground mobilization and organizing among their ranks. The conference likewise starkly presented the peasants' worsening conditions and the intensifying forms of feudal and semifeudal exploitation they suffer from. Such conditions are the result of efforts by landlords, merchant-usurers and big local and foreign corporations to reconcentrate land under their control.

Landgrabbing has led to growing cases of peasant displacement and an increase in the number of semi-proletarians in the countryside. However, the emergence of such a condition has not changed

the prevailing mode of production. On the contrary, it has merely intensified feudal and semifeudal exploitation.

Studies on the mode of production in crop lines such as coconut, rice, sugar cane and coffee and in the fishery sector have reaffirmed the Party's analysis of the ruling feudal and semifeudal system and the line of people's democratic revolution. The entire revolutionary movement in the region also united on the policy of nationalizing all landlord, comprador bourgeois and imperialist landholdings in the countryside.

The conference identified the problems faced by the revolutionary forces in consolidating the mass base. Discussions focused on the various forms of conservatism in the conduct of mass work that serve as obstacles in consolidating the mass base and advancing agrarian revolution. Both the open and underground mass movements have gained levels of strength far exceeding those of the past. Solid organizing, however, has as yet failed to keep in step due to conservative outlooks and methods in



mass work. The conference became a channel for summing up the experience of every province and pinpointing weaknesses that hamper the consolidation of the revolution's mass base.

Efforts to cull lessons from both positive and negative experiences in the conduct of mass work were fruitful. Tearing down the barrier of conservatism in order to advance revolutionary work in the countryside became a challenge to all.

At present, the New People's Army in the region faces the enormous task of resolving the inertia wrought by conservatism in mass work at a time when state terrorism and the threat of US imperialist armed intervention looms in the countryside. The state is painfully aware of the revolution's dramatic advance in the region and is thus employing all means to destroy the Red political power of the people's democratic government.

Such conditions challenge the

revolutionary forces to strive to consolidate the revolutionary mass base. Strengthening the revolutionary mass movement and invigorating the antifeudal and antifascist movement in the countryside is currently an urgent task. We must launch big tactical offensives to make the enemy pay dearly for its attacks on the mass base.

The present situation also challenges revolutionary forces to be creative in their means of organizing

and mobilizing the masses. The current situation has already rendered obsolete certain old methods of operation.

At the close of the conference, the comrades brought with them the lessons and challenges of how to further invigorate mass work and establish bastions of the revolution in the countryside. All this proves that the vast countryside is a big school where one never ceases to study and learn. AB

## Prevalent forms of exploitation in the Southern Tagalog countryside

*Only 845 landlords control 48% of agricultural land in all of Southern Tagalog. The following article is based on documents of the recently concluded Mass Work Conference in Southern Tagalog and discusses how land monopoly is maintained through a number of stark and growing forms of feudal and semifeudal exploitation in the region.*

The heat of the sun has waned and soon, it will be dark. But Ka Selmo remains submerged in mud and continues to clean the patch of rice field that he tends. He needs to work to the hilt because staying on the land he has been cultivating depends on it. The moment he fails to please his master, he may be evicted from the land.

Ka Selmo's tenure is uncertain. His master regards him only as a servant (*katulong*). Any time his landlord wishes, he may be evicted from the land. Ka Selmo is helpless because those are the terms of the agreement he entered into as the caretaker of his master's land.

Ka Selmo is but one of hundreds of thousands of farm workers who suffer severe exploitation under the "servant system" (*sistemang katulong*) that is now becoming prevalent in Occidental Mindoro.

Landlords in the province use the "servant system" to deceive peasants fighting for their right to the land they till. Instead of taking in tenants, they hire farm workers they call "servants". Under these conditions, landlords

deprive farm workers of any guarantee that they could continue working the land. They merely agree on their respective shares of the harvest. At present, servants usually get seven to eight cavans per harvest.

Landlords are able to get away with this kind of extreme exploitation because the number of farm workers competing with each other for work has burgeoned. Out of desperation, they are

forced to swallow onerous agreements to ensure their families' subsistence.

The "servant system" is but one of the forms of feudal and semifeudal exploitation currently becoming widespread in the rice-growing areas of the Southern Tagalog countryside. Such forms have emerged as a result of the





efforts of landlords to exempt their lands from the hollow Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law.

Among the other types of exploitation are *hununan*, *porstyentuhan* or *kontratahan*, *pakyawan*, *takai*, *kabesilya* and *tampa*.

*Hununan* is a system of sharing where only 20-25% of the entire harvest is given by the landowner to the farm workers. In Laguna, however, the prevalent arrangement involves paying farm workers cash equivalent to what they used to receive as *palay*.

Under the *porstyentuhan* or *kontratahan* system, the landowner lets the farm workers work his paddies from the preparation of the land to harvesting the crop. He pays the farm workers 10% of the earnings from the harvest.

In the *pakyawan* system, the landowner pays the farm workers a lumpsum for working the land from the planting to the harvest season. Landowners pay farm workers eight cavans or P1,500 per hectare.

The *takai* system is another practice now prevalent in Occidental Mindoro. *Takai* refers to a 25-square meter plot of land contracted out by the landowner to a farm worker for the amount of P100-P150. Exploitation in this kind of system is particularly intense because it usually takes a farm worker two days to finish one *takai*. Thus, his daily wage amounts to a mere P50-P75.

Farm workers also suffer intense exploitation from the *kabesilya* system. A *kabesilya* is a person in charge of a group of farm workers. Landowners approach him when they want to contract farm workers to work on their land. As head of the group, the *kabesilya* merely gives orders to the workers and has no part in production. Aside from the wage he receives from the landowner, the *kabesilya* also earns by shaving P2-P5 from the daily wage of each farm worker.

The *tampa* system is an adjunct of the *kabesilya* system. During times when a farm worker is unemployed, he approaches the *kabesilya* to borrow rice. Farm workers give one day's work for every *salop* (three liters dry measure) of rice (worth P45) borrowed. On payday, it is the *kabesilya* who draws the farm workers' share of the harvest. Thus, the farm worker earns a daily wage of only P45.

These new ways of intensifying exploitation have further worsened the wretched condition of farm workers like Ka Selmo. As they continue to be mired in poverty, they have nowhere else to go but to take action and forge ranks to advance genuine land reform through the people's democratic revolution. 



*The NPA's cultural work*

## A potent weapon of the revolution

In May 1999, military forces conducting an operation in Lobo, Batangas mercilessly killed four civilians suspected of being members of the New People's Army (NPA). In October 2000, nine NPA fighters were slain by the military in Haliging Kanluran, Batangas City. These incidents wrought intense terror and anxiety among the people of the entire province.

This posed a big challenge for the revolutionary forces in Batangas to find ways of helping the masses overcome their fear and rouse their militant spirit. They saw the importance of effective, intelligent, creative and persuasive propaganda as a means of rapidly arousing, organizing and mobilizing them.

Thus, they began to assiduously prepare and incorporate cultural presentations during mass meetings held in the barrios. They usually perform songs and plays and recite poetry during special activities such as education sessions or the celebration of anniversaries.

Aside from this, the comrades also saw the effectiveness of art and literature in the daily conduct of work among the masses. Red fighters strove to improve the productions until such productions

became part of their daily work among the masses.

The creation of skits is one type of production that they have effectively developed in the conduct of mass work. The skits they have created depict the ordinary lives of peasants, the conditions they face such as militarization, and the relations between themselves and their army.

As a result, the peasant masses warmly welcome the skits created by comrades. Thus, the message of the productions are better imbibed by the masses. The short skits are also suited to the masses' attention span. They are able to move the sentiments of the masses more easily because the masses see themselves and their very own situations in the stories and characters portrayed in the plays.

The plays have become a medium for imparting the revolutionary movement's analyses and stand concerning issues related to the conditions of the masses. They have also become a vehicle for enlightening the masses on the importance of advancing agrarian revolution, resolving problems among the people, and ultimately, even the consolidation of their ranks.

According to Comrade Mao Zedong, "An army without cultural work is a dull-witted army, and a dull-witted army cannot defeat the enemy." Comrades in Batangas have proved that every guerrilla front is a broad theater of struggle not only in the politico-military sense, but also in the cultural sense. Cultural work is a potent weapon that empowers the people to vanquish the enemy. AB

## Anti-peasant Hybrid Commercialization Program assailed

The Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid ng Pilipinas-Cagayan Valley (PKMP) strongly assailed the Hybrid Commercialization Program (HCP), the new scheme of the Department of Agriculture (DA), as a program utterly meant to deceive the peasants. The DA has been pushing this program to propagate hybrid plant varieties among the peasants. The varieties are mainly genetically modified "suicide" or "terminator" seeds that cannot produce fertile seeds for the next planting season.

The imperialist companies pushing this program aim to eradicate traditional varieties and replace them with these "terminator" seeds that require expensive fertilizers and pesticides produced by these same companies.

The DA took advantage of the devastation of peasants' crops by successive typhoons to hasten the propagation of these hybrid seeds. The DA has been making the pitch that peasants can acquire these seeds from seven corn hybrid products of Monsanto, Syngenta and other international agribusiness companies at very low prices.

Under the auspices of the imperialist policy of "globalization," gigantic international agribusiness companies are stepping up their efforts to realize complete control over the entirety of the world's agriculture from the production and sale of seeds, the production and supply of agricultural implements, crop production and the production of animal feeds, meat processing and other aspects of agriculture, up to food production and distribution. Even the prices of agricultural products are controlled by imperialists. The price of corn is set at no less than the New York Stock Exchange.

To safeguard the imperialist agribusiness companies' monopoly over biotechnology, they ensure that the country enacts appropriate laws, in collusion with the puppet government. One such law is RA 9168 (Plant Variety Protection Act), which grants foreign agribusiness corporations exclusive rights to seeds and other products they claim to have discov-





ered. This places at a disadvantage peasants, indigenous people, local scientists and inventors who have nurtured, enriched and developed local seeds adapted to the country's conditions.

Through such pro-imperialist agricultural laws and programs under the Arroyo regime, peasants are condemned to become even more dependent on seeds and products developed by imperialist companies. Peasants are likewise denied the right to regenerate and sell the seeds that they have cultivated and developed.

According to the PKMP-CV, the current influx of new seeds is reminiscent of the Masagana 99 and Maisagana experience during the Marcos dictatorship. These programs forced peasants to use imported high yielding variety seeds and huge amounts of the corresponding production inputs. With the large volume and exorbitant cost of new seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and other inputs, peasants were saddled with debts more than ever. These previous programs likewise destroyed native seed varieties that were more resistant to diseases and pests and were more suited to the country's soil and climate. But actually, what the HCP is doing is far worse than that.

The PKMP also related a similar experience in Mexico. With Mexico's inclusion in the North American Free Trade Alliance (NAFTA) in 1994, the US forced the country to become a dumping ground for new corn hybrids. Mexico was also forced to sign an agreement on Plant Variety Protection. Although corn is Mexico's principal product, at present, one-third of the corn consumed in Mexico is imported from the US. The price of local corn has already fallen by 70%, but Mexicans still cannot compete with the cheap US corn imports. The incomes of 15 million Mexicans who depend on corn have drastically shrunk.

The puppet regimes from Ramos up to Arroyo which have upheld imperialist "globalization" have merely condemned the Philippines to be at the suffering end of GATT and WTO strictures and other pro-imperialist agreements in agriculture and trade. Instead of upholding the interests of the country's peasantry, they have only further opened the country's local market, trade and agriculture to the imperialist agribusiness companies' unrestrained intervention and domination. The country's markets have been flooded with imported agricultural products and inputs. The imperialist agribusiness companies have been given complete control over agricultural technology. This is now leading to the wanton destruction of the country's agricultural and food security, self-reliance and development.

In reality, not only peasants but the entire Filipino people are the victims of the Hybrid Commercialization Program.

Let us oppose imperialist intervention in the country's agriculture and the puppet government's collusion with them. Let us promote an agriculture that scientifically promotes and develops appropriate local know-how and technology, ensures the country's agricultural, food and overall economic security and self-reliance, and upholds the country's interests and not those of the imperialists and their minions. AB



## Occupation of Iraq, a growing burden to the Bush regime

It has not been long since the US attacked and occupied Iraq. But the US already reels from the growing problems and increasing burdens of sustaining the occupation of the country.

On November 15, up to 17 American soldiers were killed when two US Black Hawk helicopters collided in mid-air as one of them tried to evade rocket-propelled grenades fired by the Iraqis. With this development, five US helicopters have been downed by the Iraqis in the last three weeks.

So far, over 400 US forces have been killed since the US attacked Iraq. Over 150 of them were killed after Bush declared the end of the war on Iraq on May 1.

The number of American casualties in Iraq in the last eight months has already exceeded the number of US casualties in the first three years of the Vietnam War. Aside from those killed, over 1,500 US soldiers have been wounded in the fighting in Iraq. The number excludes those traumatized by increasing and intensifying attacks by Iraqi guerrillas. Iraqi offensives against US troops now come to 25 to 30 a day.

The American people are now deeply troubled by the amount that the US spends each month to sustain its occupation of Iraq (over \$4 billion).

As time goes by, the anger of the Iraqi people against foreign occupation troops intensifies and becomes more widespread. Iraqi guerrillas enjoy broad and deep support from the people who assert that the US must



immediately be driven out of Iraq.

Even other US-led coalition forces are being attacked and have sustained casualties. On November 12, 18 Italian troops were killed and more than 80 wounded when a truck bomb exploded at their Multi-Specialized Unit (MSU) station. This is the largest number of Italian war casualties since the end of the Second World War.

Consequently, a growing number of Italians are shouting "A casa!" or bring the troops home from Iraq. Italy has 2,400 soldiers in Iraq.

Meanwhile, because of their growing security fears and the negative effect on their country's politics, the Japanese government has been further hedging on its long-delayed decision to send several hundred Japanese "non-combat" troops to Iraq.

The Bush regime is reeling from the increasingly heavier burden of sustaining the US occupation of Iraq. It is becoming the biggest factor in the American people's negative perception of Bush and his diminishing chances of winning the US elections in 2004.

Consequently, Bush declared his decision to hasten the establishment of a puppet regime in order to reduce the number of US troops in Iraq. He came out with this decision shortly after an emergency meeting with Iraq Governor Paul Bremer, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense Sec. Donald Rumsfeld on November 13 to assess the situation in Iraq. Instead of completing the original two-year timetable, Bush decided to hold elections for the formation of a puppet government in Iraq in June 2004. Bush wants to declare the "victory" of the US in Iraq a few months before the elections.

This is easier said than done. Bush continues to ignore the enormous problems long identified in forming a puppet regime in Iraq. Many of those hand-picked by the US to sit in the puppet transitory Governing Council had long been in exile from Iraq and returned only when the US occupied the country. They do not have sufficient links with the people and cannot expect support from them. Infighting among themselves is also quite intense. In particular, the question of how to form an effective Iraqi puppet army is a huge quandary.

AB

## BAYAN launches "Junk GMA" Movement

THOUSANDS of members of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) and its allied organizations marched to Malacañang on November 20 to assail Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo because of serious corruption cases. Police blocked them at the corner of Morayta, around 500 meters from Mendiola, so the demonstrators held their program there. The rally kicked off the "Junk GMA!" movement which calls for the rejection of Arroyo in 2004.

Meanwhile, Vice President Teofisto Guingona led the launching of Bangon!, a new multisectoral group against crime and corruption in government. Among those who attended Bangon!'s founding meeting was Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo.

## Investigate both Cojuangco and Davide—Anakpawis

CRISPIN "Ka Bel" Beltran of the Anakpawis party called for the continued investigation of Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco and Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. after the Supreme Court dismissed the impeachment case against the chief justice on November 10.

Beltran stated on November 11 that an investigation must be conducted on the collusion between Cojuangco and Pres. Arroyo to pressure Davide to reverse the Supreme Court decision on the public nature of the coco levy funds that Cojuangco has long coveted.

Ka Bel also called for the continued investigation of Davide for the disappearance of P300 million in judiciary development funds (JDF). He said that as head of the Supreme Court, Davide is the JDF's custodian and the person most responsible for accounting for the fund's whereabouts.