



ANG

Bayan

Pahayagan ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas
Pinapatnubayan ng Marxismo-Leninismo-Maoismo

English Edition
Vol. XL No. 6
March 21, 2009
www.philippinerevolution.net

Editorial

Justice for Rebelyn Pitao and all other victims of fascist killings!

Rebelyn Pitao, daughter of Leoncio "Ka Parago" Pitao, head of the 1st Pulang Bagani Command of the New People's Army in the Southern Mindanao Region has been buried.

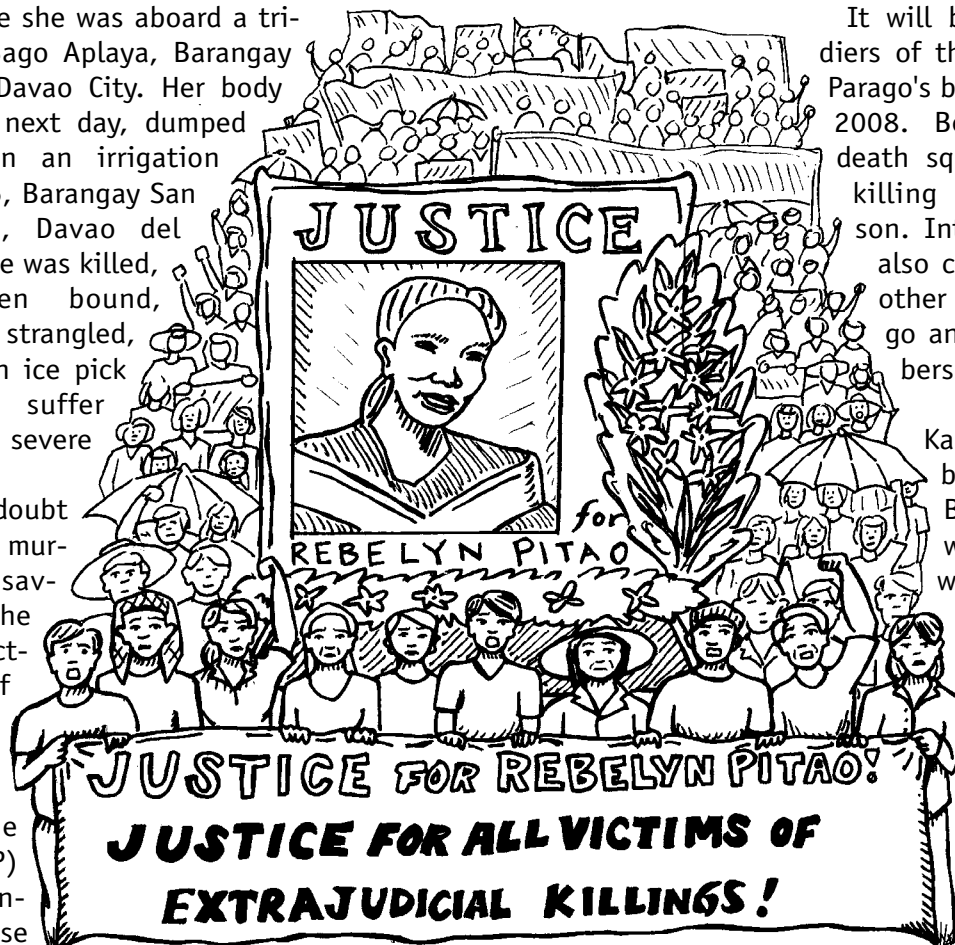
Rebelyn was abducted on the evening of March 4 while she was aboard a tricycle in Sitio Bago Aplaya, Barangay Bago Galleria, Davao City. Her body was found the next day, dumped and floating in an irrigation canal in Purok 5, Barangay San Isidro, Carmen, Davao del Norte. Before she was killed, she had been bound, gagged, raped, strangled, stabbed with an ice pick and made to suffer other forms of severe torture.

There is no doubt that Rebelyn's murder and the savagery that she had been subjected to are part of the dirty war being pursued by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) under Oplan Bantay Laya. Because

it could not apprehend the guerrillas and because of the reactionary military's successive losses in the hands of the NPA, the AFP has been mercilessly targeting civilians. It has now made its dirty war even filthier by targeting the families of revolutionaries.

It will be recalled that soldiers of the AFP had killed Ka Parago's brother Danilo in June 2008. Before this, an AFP death squad narrowly missed killing Ka Parago's eldest son. Intelligence agents are also closely surveilling another daughter of Ka Parago and other family members.

The AFP is targeting Ka Parago in particular because the Pulang Bagani Command which he leads has won a string of victories in the battlefield. Military thugs have been terrorizing Ka Parago's family under orders from their commanding officers and as part of a desperate campaign to crush his determi-



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nation and that of the Red fighters of the NPA to advance the people's revolution.

The fascist army has simultaneously been targeting what it believes to be the mass base of the 1st Pulang Bagani Command in Paquibato District, Davao City. Civilians in the area have been subjected to terrible atrocities for the past several months. Not a few peasants have been beaten up and suffered other forms of abuse in the hands of the fascist military. One of the most recent victims was a mass leader who was killed for leading the fight against military brutality in Paquibato.

The Filipino people and all the revolutionary forces in the country are enraged and roundly condemn Rebelyn's abominable murder. The Communist Party of the Philippines has ordered the NPA to arrest those identified to have been responsible for abducting, raping, torturing and killing her.

Preliminary investigations have revealed that 11 AFP intelligence operatives were involved in Rebelyn's killing. These operatives came from various AFP units, proving that the crime was not initiated by

the local military. It was a project coordinated at the highest levels of command of the fascist AFP. The Arroyo regime and the AFP cannot feign ignorance over their responsibility for this crime.

In the final analysis, it is Gloria Arroyo and her fascist butchers led by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita who are ultimately responsible for Rebelyn's brutal slay. It is an outright insult to the people's intelligence for the regime and its fascist military to insist that they had nothing to do with Rebelyn's murder.

Claims by Malacañang and the AFP that they would have Rebelyn's killing investigated is pure nonsense. How can the Arroyo regime be sincere in attaining justice for Rebelyn when no less than Gloria Arroyo herself has paved the way for, and instigated, the occurrence of such crimes in the course of the counterrevolutionary war she has been waging? The praises she has heaped on her most fascistic and bloodthirsty generals and the promotions and rewards she has given them constitute a direct encouragement to the AFP to commit such heinous crimes.



Rebelyn's killing merely draws attention anew to the reactionary puppet regime's countless other fascist crimes against the Filipino people—the extrajudicial killings and other atrocities committed against civilians the regime regards as combatants in the raging civil war.

By targeting civilians, the Arroyo regime once again demonstrates its utter cravenness and lack of any moral basis to govern.

The barrage of condemnation now bombarding the regime and its armed forces for Rebelyn's brutal slaying has isolated them all the more from the Filipino people.

Rebelyn has been buried but the strength and determination of Ka Parago, the New People's Army, the revolutionary movement and the Filipino people live on. The revolutionary forces are determined to hunt down the perpetrators, put them on trial and punish the criminal fascist thugs responsible for Rebelyn's death.

The path of revolution burns red with fervor with Rebelyn's blood and that of all the revolutionary martyrs and innocent victims of Arroyo's dirty war. Their memory strengthens the revolutionary movement's resolve to overthrow the murderous Arroyo regime, advance the revolutionary struggle to victory and build a society that enjoys genuine freedom, justice and peace. AB



Vol. XL No. 6 March 21, 2009

Ang Bayan is published in Pilipino, Bisaya, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Waray and English editions.

It is available for *downloading* at the Philippine Revolution Web Central located at:

www.philippinerevolution.net.

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Ang Bayan is published fortnightly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines

Widespread condemnation for Rebelyn Pitao's murder

About 5,000 people joined the funeral march for Rebelyn Pitao on March 14. The general sentiment was that of intense grief and rage as people marched through the main streets of Davao City. Many came from as far as Davao Oriental, Davao del Sur, Davao del Norte and North Cotabato.

One of those who paid their last respects to Rebelyn was Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, who had earlier declared the city government's withdrawal of support for the Armed Forces of the Philippines' campaign against the New People's Army (NPA) in Paquibato District. He said that the military's campaign only targets hapless civilians. The NPA unit led by Rebelyn's father operates in Paquibato District.

The gruesome crime committed by the fascist military against Rebelyn has earned widespread condemnation within and outside the country.

The fascist enemy did not at all anticipate the massive outrage generated by the abduction and brutal murder of Rebelyn, daughter of Leoncio Pitao (or Ka Parago) of the 1st Pulang Bagani Command. Only a day after the brutal slay, posters were seen all over the streets of Davao City, blaming the armed mercenaries of the US-Arroyo regime for the gruesome crime.

The militant women's group GABRIELA assailed Gloria Arroyo during its commemoration of International Working Women's Day on March 8, calling Rebelyn's merciless murder Arroyo's bitter gift to women. GABRIELA, for its part, vowed that the women will not relent in pursuing justice for all vic-

tims of sexual abuse like Rebelyn.

On March 10, members of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) gathered at the Welcome Rotunda in Quezon City, demanding justice for the brutal murder of their fellow teacher Rebelyn. She had been teaching for five months at St. Peter's College in Toril, Davao City before her abduction. ACT said that aside from Rebelyn, there had been 10 other teachers who had become victims of political killings and abduction perpetrated by the military agents since Arroyo came to power in 2001.

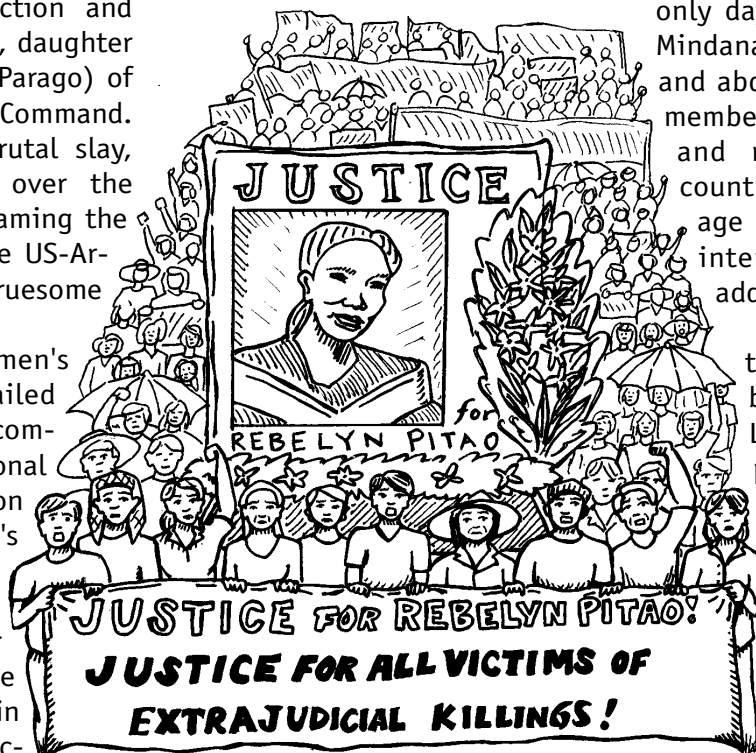
Reps. Satur Ocampo and Teddy Casiño of Bayan Muna, Rep. Liza Maza and Luz Ilagan of GABRIELA Women's Party and Rep. Rafael Mar-

iano of Anakpawis also pushed for the immediate investigation of the case. In the Senate, Sen. Francis Escudero, who chairs the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights called for the immediate arrest of the identified perpetrators.

Likewise, Ambassador Alistair MacDonald of the European Delegation to the Philippines said that the European Parliament passed a resolution on March 12 calling on the Arroyo government to put an immediate stop to abductions and extrajudicial killings in the country and investigate these atrocities. MacDonald announced this during the inauguration of the ASEAN Human Rights Institutions Website Forum on March 16 at the office of the Commission on Human Rights in Quezon City.

MacDonald added that the international community is saddened by the brutal murder of Rebelyn and the subsequent killing of antimining activist Eliezer Bilanes as well as the attempt on the life of journalist Nilo Labares. These incidents, which occurred only days apart, all took place in Mindanao. The continuing killings and abductions of activists, union members and leaders, journalists and religious leaders in the country have worsened the image of the Philippines in the international community, added MacDonald.

On March 12, Amnesty International condemned the brutal killing of Rebelyn. Likewise, Auckland Philippines Solidarity, a New Zealand-based human rights organization demanded the immediate cessation of financial aid by New Zealand, Australia, the European Union and the US to the Philippine police and military. **AB**



Growing protests against VFA and Balikatan

The Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) spearheaded the inauguration of the Junk VFA Movement (JVM) on March 17 to further intensify the campaign to scrap the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). JVM is composed of progressive groups, senators, congressmen, lawmakers and known personalities demanding the immediate pullout of all American troops from various parts of the country and the withdrawal of US military aid and political support to the Arroyo regime.

JVM was launched a day before Malacañang announced that Gloria Arroyo and US President Barack Obama had agreed, in a telephone conversation, to uphold the VFA amid growing calls to terminate the unequal agreement. JVM assailed Obama for reaffirming his commitment to the controversial VFA and upholding the interventionist policies of his predecessor George W. Bush.

Continued protests. More than 10,000 protesters trooped to Mendiola on March 8 to commemorate International Working Women's Day and oppose unequal relations between the Philippines and the US. They also demanded that convicted rapist Daniel Smith be transferred to Philippine custody. (*See related article*)

The GABRIELA Women's Party had earlier called for the cancella-

tion of the Balikatan exercises and the abrogation of the VFA. To support its demand, Rep. Luz Ilagan cited cases of gross abuses of American soldiers in Mindanao where the Balikatan exercises had earlier been held. Most of these cases remain unresolved and some have never even been investigated.

In 2006, Bizma Juhan sustained shrapnel wounds when US troops detonated a bomb during military training in Indanan, Sulu. In 2004, American troops on a test mission shot, wounded and maimed Arsid Baharun of Zamboanga City. In 2002, an American soldier illegally joined an AFP operation in Tuburan, Basilan to arrest Buyongbuyong Isnijal who was accused of being an Abu Sayyaf member. Isnijal was arbitrarily shot by the American soldier.

These are but a few of the atrocities committed by American troops against hapless civilians.

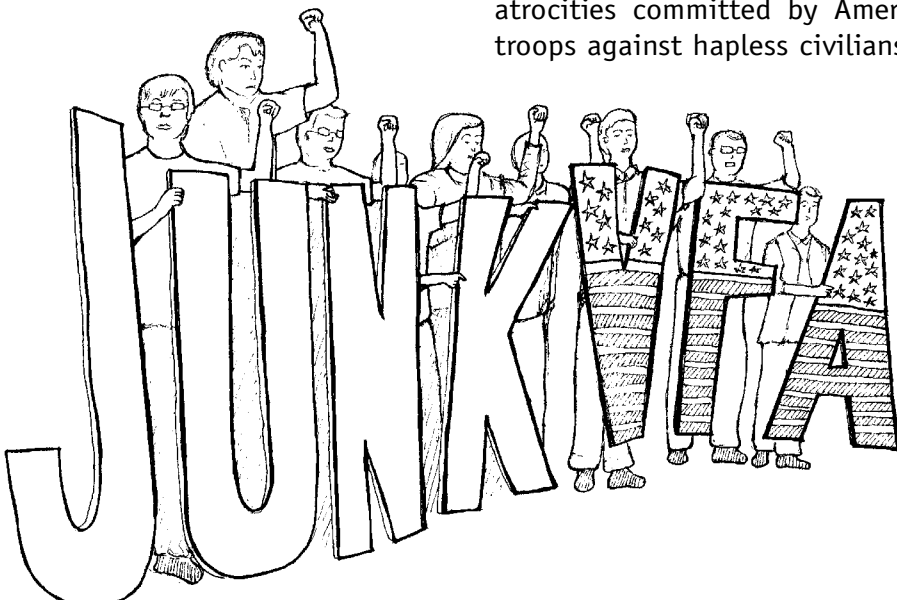
A resolution has been filed in Congress assailing the Balikatan war exercises in Bicol. House Resolution (HR) 985 filed on February 4 noted in particular the increasing number of human rights violations and abuses committed against women in relation to the joint military exercises. It also said that Balikatan will only be used as cover for plans to survey and explore the region's natural resources. Another resolution, HR 417, zeroed in on the US' blatant contempt for Philippine sovereignty and constitution. It cited the stubborn refusal of the US government to surrender custody of Daniel Smith who was convicted to life imprisonment way back in 2006. It also made mention of a similar case in Okinawa, Japan where both a US court martial and a civilian court dismissed a rape case involving a US serviceman and another Filipina (dubbed "Hazel" by the press).

On March 11, an alliance called Women's Movement Against Balikatan or WOMB was launched in Bicol. WOMB symbolizes the nurturing character of women who are willing to give their all to protect their children against harm.

WOMB cited the issues of prostitution and drugs, saying these were bound to worsen with the presence of US soldiers in the region. It cited 97 cases of rape and sexual abuse filed since 1990 against American troops in Subic and Clark, Pampanga. Fifteen of the victims were children. This is over and above the 3,000 cases of sexual abuse against women and children reported from 1980 to 1988. Not one of these cases was solved and not a single American soldier punished.

On March 6, thirty militant mothers, including their children, staged an anti-VFA protest in Manila.

AB



Nicole, a victim of injustice once again

The Obama and Arroyo governments exerted tremendous pressure on Suzette Nicolas (more popularly known as "Nicole"), the Filipina raped by an American soldier in Subic, Olongapo City in November 2006, to force her to retract her earlier accusations against the soldier. Nicolas' former legal counsel Atty. Evalyn Ursua announced the retraction on March 17 alongside the launching of the Junk the VFA Movement, where Ursua is one of the convenors.

In her new affidavit, Nicolas raised doubts on whether Lance Corporal Daniel Smith had forced himself on her, or whether she had consensual sex with him. Smith was the American soldier convicted of raping her. Nicolas' new affidavit weakens the case against Smith.

The US and Arroyo governments are now using Nicolas' "retraction" to render inutile the mounting calls to junk the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). The rape by an American soldier of a Filipina and the US' consistent refusal to surrender the convicted rapist so he

could serve his sentence in a prison under Philippine jurisdiction served as one of the burning issues behind the Filipino people's intensifying demand to scrap the VFA.

The Obama regime rode on Arroyo's desperation to seek the new US president's attention. But before Obama granted the wishes of his puppet to receive even a simple phone call from him, the US first made sure that the Arroyo regime had taken all the necessary steps to uphold the VFA and reduce the intensity of the issues against the one-sided agreement.

On March 12, Nicole was made to sign three documents: in the first, she dispensed with the legal services of Ursua, who served as

Balikatan: Bane on people's lives and livelihood

Ban Balikatan, a regional alliance opposing the Balikatan exercises in Bicol said that the military operations being staged in preparation for the entry of American troops participating in the Balikatan exercises in the region in April are a bane to the lives and livelihood of the Bicolano people.

One of the provinces most battered by military operations is Albay. The 49th IB has been stationed in Barangay San Francisco, Legazpi City to serve as a security force for Balikatan.

Their presence severely affects the peasants' livelihood since the latter could no longer work on their farms for fear of being targeted by soldiers conducting operations.

Militarization has likewise intensified in communities where the Special Operations Team of the 901st IB is deployed. Aside from enforcing a curfew, the military has also been holding mass meetings in the villages to warn residents

against joining anti-Balikatan protests. The 901st IB has also called all barangay captains in Sto. Domingo to a meeting. Over 50 barangays are affected by such harassment perpetrated by these special forces.

The military has declared these areas as "hot spots" due to the purported presence of the New People's Army.

In Tabaco City, military troops have saturated the villages of Baranghawon, Bongabong, San Roque, Quinastillohan, Bantayan and Tabiguian. A detachment has also been set up in Barangay Salvacion, causing fear among residents.

The military has also been forc-

ing Tiwi town residents to attend their meetings. Military presence is maintained along the coastal barangays of the towns of Malinao, Malilipot, Bacacay and Manito.

Worse, as part of so-called security measures, a fishing ban is now being enforced in areas near ports where US warships are set to dock. Ban Balikatan added that the fisherfolk are already gripped with fear and going hungry long before the US ships' arrival.

On March 3, militant groups staged a protest in front of the Department of Agriculture in Quezon City to expose and oppose the nine-hour curfew that has been enforced since February 23 along the coastal towns of Tiwi, Tabao and Malilipot and the impending implementation by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of a six-month fishing ban starting April 16. According to Fernando Hicap of Pamalakaya, this is clearly an attack on the fisherfolk's livelihood all in the name of the RP-US Balikatan exercises and the VFA. **AB**

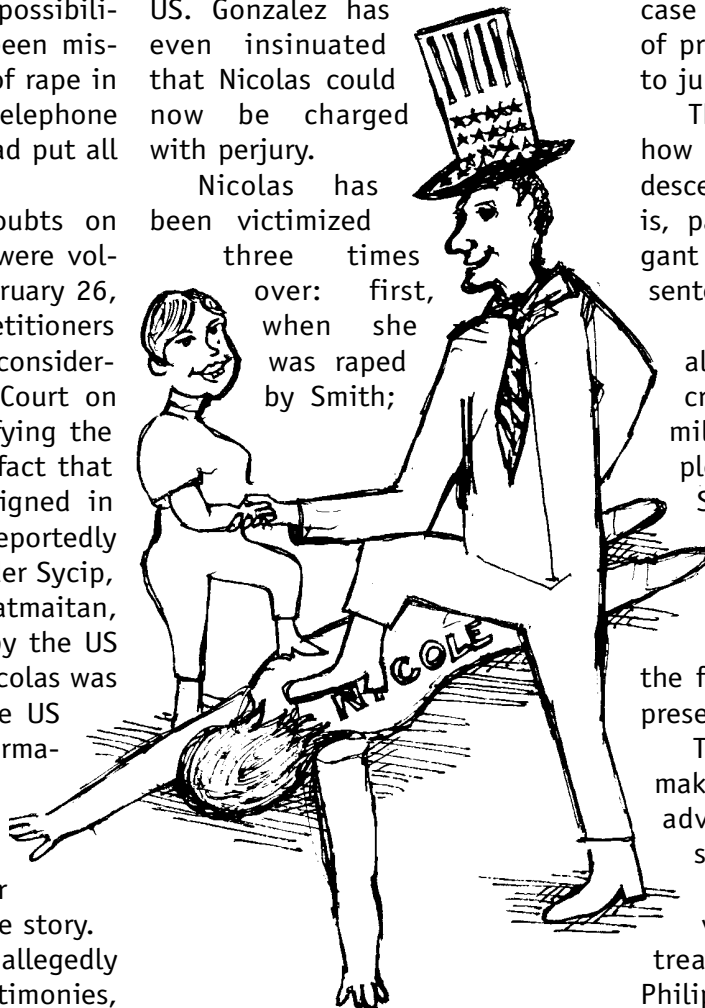
her lawyer in the trial against Smith; in the second, she acknowledged receipt of ₱100,000 in damages from Smith and said that she was freeing the soldier from any other civil liability in the future in connection with the case; and in the third, she raised the possibility that she might have been mistaken in accusing Smith of rape in 2006. Obama made the telephone call to Arroyo after she had put all these things "in order".

Many have raised doubts on whether Nicole's actions were voluntary. As recently as February 26, she was among the petitioners who filed a motion for reconsideration with the Supreme Court on its previous decision ratifying the VFA. Also noted was the fact that the documents Nicolas signed in Makati City were also reportedly prepared by attorneys under Sycip, Salazar, Hernandez and Gatmaitan, the law firm contracted by the US to handle Smith's case. Nicolas was subsequently flown to the US where she was granted permanent residency status, far away from the media, her lawyers and supporters, and no longer able to sail her side of the story.

Now that Nicolas has allegedly recanted her previous testimonies,

officials of the Arroyo regime are having a field day vilifying her with Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez taking the lead. She is now being portrayed as a money-grubbing opportunist who also seized the chance to go to the US. Gonzalez has even insinuated that Nicolas could now be charged with perjury.

Nicolas has been victimized three times over: first, when she was raped by Smith;



second, when the governments of the US and Philippines connived with each other to spirit away Smith from the Makati City Jail to the US Embassy; and third, now that the US and Malacañang are hellbent on burying the Subic rape case in order to frustrate all efforts of progressive and patriotic forces to junk the VFA.

The Subic rape case highlighted how unequal, interventionist, condescending and repressive the VFA is, particularly with the US' arrogant refusal to let Smith serve his sentence in a Philippine prison.

But the fight for justice for all victims of rape and other crimes committed by the US military against the Filipino people does not end with Nicolas.

Said Ursua: "Nicole is every Filipina who was and will be raped by American soldiers." She furthered that another Nicole could arise and the fight against the VFA and the presence of US troops must go on.

That Nicolas has been subdued makes it all the more important to advance the Filipino people's struggle against the VFA and all one-sided, unequal, interventionist and oppressive treaties and relations of the Philippines with the US. AB

Women march to demand work

About 10,000 women marched towards Mendiola on March 8, International Working Women's Day to demand jobs and equal relations between the US and the Philippines. Spearheading the march was GABRIELA which also celebrated its 25th anniversary. Carrying purple, white and red banners, its members strongly denounced abuses of women's rights and escalating unemployment among women workers.

The women demanded immediate support for the husbands and wives of workers who lost their jobs as a result of the financial crisis. They said for every 100 re-

trenched workers here and abroad, 70 to 80 are women.

The women protesters also cried for the junking of the Visiting Forces Agreement and condemned

the abuses committed by American soldiers against Filipino women.

The demonstrators came from various regions—Metro Manila, Laguna, Bicol, Baguio, Bacolod City, Iloilo City, Roxas City, General Santos City and Davao City, with some even coming from other countries like the US, Hong Kong, Australia, Japan and Italy.

A rally was simultaneous held in New York City, USA attended by over 100 women and men. AB



Fascist military kills 10 civilians

Ten civilians have been murdered by fascist military elements in a week. Among them was a prominent mass leader in Far South Mindanao, eight villagers in Davao Oriental and a fisherman in Camarines Sur. In a separate incident, five antimining activists belonging to a national minority group in Surigao del Norte were abducted and remain missing.

March 9. Eliezer "Boy" Billanes, 47, leader of an alliance opposed to imperialist mining in the country particularly in Mindanao was mercilessly killed by two henchmen from the 27th IB. It was 4 p.m. when Billanes was gunned down while he was riding his motorcycle in front of a public market in Osmeña Street, Koronadal City, only 100 meters away from the city hall. The assailants, who were aboard a motorcycle were wearing masks. Before his brutal death, Billanes had been receiving death threats due to his political struggles.

Billanes, a resident of Marbel, Koronadal City was an officer of the Farmers Association of South Cotabato, spokesperson of the South Cotabato Peoples' Alliance for Nationalism and Democracy (Socpand) and a member of Bayan Muna. He also headed the Socssargends Alliance for Genuine Development (Socssargends AGENDA), a regional alliance in Far South Mindanao Region that has been waging stiff resistance against Tampakan Copper-Gold mining projects in South Cotabato. For two decades, he has been a staunch defender of the environment, the ancestral lands of the B'laan national minorities and the rights and welfare of the people in Far South Mindanao.

Elements of the 27th IB committed the brutal slaying in collusion with the local governments of Kiblawan, Davao del Sur; Tampakan, South Cotabato; and Columbio, Sultan Kudarat under Task Force Kitaco and the multinational company Xstrata-SMI.

March 8. Eight civilians, including a three-year old child were killed from bombs dropped from OV-10 airplanes in Barangay Batiano in Baganga, Davao Oriental.

Among the fatalities were Edna Cagutom, 3, and Merly Pakidungan, 38. The bombing also left several wounded. The indiscriminate artillery attacks were part of the military's pursuit operations and retaliatory measure after three soldiers were killed in a clash at dawn.

That same day, elements of the Philippine Army 42nd IB shot to death farmer Paciano Bables in Barangay Del Carmen, Lagonoy, Camarines Sur. The killing, which occurred at 3 a.m., was carried out by PA and CAFGU elements belonging to the Reengineered Special Operations Team (RSOT) of the 42nd IB. After the murder, the fascists planted evidence and concocted the story that he had grabbed a gun and fired it, and that he was allegedly an NPA member. Bables

was even photographed holding a gun to justify the killing.

March 3. Three men in uniform attempted to enter the office of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) in Bulalacao, Mankayan, Benguet, where its local chapters MAQUITACDG and APIT-TAKO also hold office. They forced a CPA local chapter member to open the door of the office but the member refused.

MAQUITACDG and APIT-TAKO have long been struggling for the rights of peasant national minorities in Mankayan, in the nearby town of Tadian in Mt. Province and in neighboring province of Ilocos Sur. They have also been actively opposing widespread mining in the area.

As part of its harassment, the military has begun conducting a survey in Bulalacao, ostensibly asking about small projects needed by the barangay. Meanwhile, in Licuan, Abra, soldiers conducting the survey have set up military camps in civilian houses. They have deliberately prolonged their presence in the area, causing fear among the people.

January 29 to present. Five Mamanwa minorities, believed to have been abducted on January 29, the first day of a community protest against large-scale mining, remain missing to this day. Some 400 Mamanwa have been barricading the streets in Barangay Taganito, Claver, Surigao del Norte connecting four huge mining companies to the local seaport. The five minorities disappeared after leaving their barricade to look for food after they helped set up temporary shelters for the protesters. Their companions have not seen them since.

AB



NPA military actions

The New People's Army (NPA) launched a number of military actions in the second week of March.

March 14. A soldier from the 1st Special Forces Battalion was killed and another was wounded when their unit attempted to besiege a temporary encampment of the NPA in Barangay Remedios 2, Mauban, Quezon. The unit is under the 2nd Infantry Division.

March 12. Fourteen armed mercenaries of the Arroyo government were wounded, among them 12 policemen and two paramilitary elements, in two separate tactical offensives launched by the Jose Rapsing Command of the NPA-Masbate.

The first clash occurred when NPA Red fighters ambushed 14 troops of the 506th PNP Provincial Mobile Group at around 11:45 a.m. in Barangay Pinamangkaan, Mandao, Masbate. Seven policemen were wounded including their leader, Chief Insp. Ronald Fulo.

The number of wounded grew when police forces from the nearby town of Balud attempted to send

reinforcements. Before they could arrive at the area of the encounter, however, they were ambushed in Barangay Paguiran where the chief of police was wounded along with four other policemen and two elements of the 202nd CAA.

The enemy evacuated its casualties aboard a helicopter and brought the wounded to the Masbate Provincial Hospital, while those in critical condition were brought to Legazpi City.

March 11. An NPA unit harassed a PNP Regional Mobile Group detachment in Barangay Taysan, Legazpi City at 7:20 p.m. The guerrilla forces were positioned 20 meters away from the barangay hall that had been serving as a police detachment. The surprised policemen were too frightened to return fire.

March 9. Three soldiers and an element of the Citizens' Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) were killed in a clash between NPA guerrilla forces and military troops of the 67th IB in Baganga, Davao Oriental at around 4:30 in the morning. The NPA confiscated an



M16 rifle, a communications radio and other military equipment.

The military was launching clearing operations for the construction of a road linking Mati, Davao Oriental to Lingig, Surigao del Sur. Residents from the adjacent towns of Baganga, Cateel and Boston vehemently oppose this government project because only multinational corporations, plantations and mining companies would benefit from it. AB

AFP sets up detachments in churches, schools

The use of civilian facilities as military detachments by elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines is widespread in Northern Luzon, according to testimonies received by the House Committee on Human Rights in a hearing held in Baguio City on March 19.

Witnesses testified that military forces conducting operations

often set up camp at schools, day care centers, barangay centers and even churches. The witnesses came from Mountain Province, Abra, Benguet, Kalinga and provinces in the Ilocos region. They also said that villagers and barangay officials are forced to vacate these facilities to give way to the soldiers.

The witnesses also complained that they were frequently branded

as communist supporters. Peasants were also prevented from tending their fields so that the area could be cleared for aerial bombing.

Sixteen cases of military abuse in the region were also reported to the committee, ranging from forced disappearances, harassment, assault and surveillance to hamletting. AB

Agrarian struggle against Arroyo crony

The struggle continues for the tenants and farm workers of SL Agritech Corporation (SLAC) against the SLAC management's exploitative practices. This is in spite of the corporation's maneuvers to derail their struggle and prevent them from achieving their demands. SLAC is a big agro-corporation that produces and markets hybrid rice seeds. It is owned by Henry Lim, a crony of Gloria Arroyo. It has a 593-hectare seed farm located in Banaybanay and Lupon, Davao Oriental.

On June 11, 2008, three hundred tenants picketed the SLAC offices in Lupon to oppose plans by the company to convert the tenants and sharecroppers into wage workers. The protesters also demanded that wages for contractual farm workers be raised from ₱80 to ₱200 a day.

The picketing lasted five days despite intense harassment and threats from SLAC security guards and Lupon police. In the end, management was forced to face the pickets. After a drawn out negotiation and debate, management withdrew its plan to turn the tenants into wage workers.

SLAC built its seed farm in Banaybanay in September 2006. Various local landlords agreed to rent out their rice fields to SLAC for ₱25,000 per hectare per year on condition that the company would not evict their tenants.

Under SLAC, the tenants began to be called "maintainers" even though they had exactly the same work responsibilities as before. They prepare the seed beds, spray pesticides on the seedlings and repair dikes that had been run over by

tractors. Those responsible for irrigating the rice fields were called "water management controllers".

The "maintainers" receive ₱4,500 per hectare based on prevailing sharecropping rates in the area where tenants receive 15% of the gross income per hectare. Ordinarily, this is equivalent to fifteen 50-kilo sacks of palay (unhusked rice) worth ₱4,500 based on the usual ₱7.50-₱8.00 price per kilo of palay. Because each "maintainer" usually tends three hectares, they each earn up to ₱13,500 per harvest. The SLAC management wants to do away with this system and pay the "maintainers" only ₱80 per day. Aside from depleting the "maintainers'" incomes by more than a thousand pesos per harvest, the SLAC will be requiring them to work long hours, thus depriving the tenants of the opportunity to en-

gage in side occupations to augment their income.

SLAC also manages to avoid giving benefits to its workers by hiring them on a per project basis through a labor contractor or *kabo*. It maintains only 26 regular employees who

serve as "team leaders." It is the "team leaders" who bargain with management regarding the cost per hectare of the work to be done (like planting, for example).

Although they are hired on a per project basis, the workers only get to be paid a daily wage of ₱80. Whatever amount is left all goes to the team leader, even if he only acted as a contractor and did not take part in the actual work. Following this system, SLAC is able to claim that its seed farm workers are not in its employ and is thus able to avoid giving them benefits.

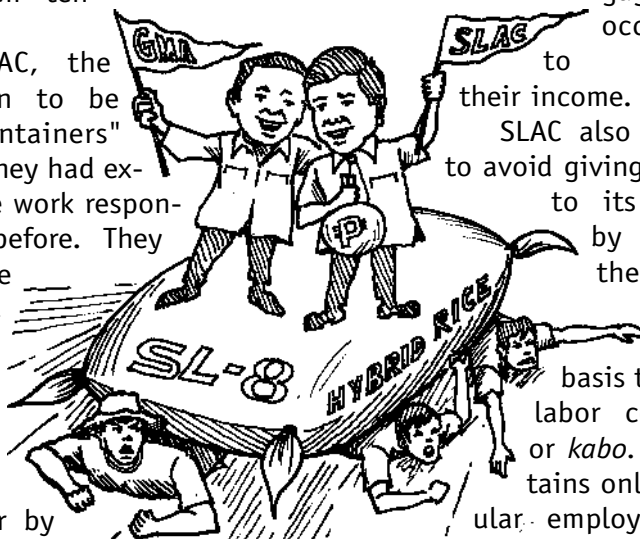
The petition to raise the daily wage of SLAC's contractual workers to ₱200 has been pending at the Sangguniang Bayan of Lupon for months. But the workers' continuing mass actions have spurred management to implement gradual raises even in the absence of a signed agreement. The workers currently receive ₱100 per day. **AB**

Who is behind SLAC?

SSLAC's owner Henry Lim is a close crony of both Gloria Arroyo and Arthur Yap, secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

SLAC was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on January 11, 2001 with an initial capitalization of only ₱510,000.00. It suddenly grew and aggressively expanded its operations within and outside the country under the Arroyo regime.

In December 2008, Arroyo approved SLAC's application for an eight-year tax holiday, citing the company's allegedly huge potential to increase



its capitalization.

SLAC is currently the number one distributor of hybrid seeds in the country. It also exports to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh. It has surpassed other giant agro-corporations like Bayer, HiRice, and Monsanto even if it has only been in this business for a few years.

Henry Lim is also a member of the governing council of the DA's Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) and played a major role in conceptualizing the regime's GMA Rice Program.

Under this rice program, SL-8, a special hybrid seed product of SLAC, is the only brand distributed by the DA. It comes with a subsidy of P1,500 per sack from the DA, with peasants paying only P2,500 for a sack of seeds worth P4,000.

Farmers who used SL-8 this past planting season in Nueva Ecija were angered no end when the seeds flowered prematurely and produced dwarf-size rice plants. The peasants have been saddled with extra expenses after they were forced to uproot the poorly grown crop and buy new seeds to plant. **AB**

11 million workers unemployed in the Philippines

THERE were 4.3 million workers who were unemployed or actively looking for work in January, not 2.9 million as reported officially by the Arroyo regime. This is on top of the 6.2 million people previously reported as unemployed or looking for work last year. Overall, the unemployment rate in the Philippines is 11.2% (equivalent to almost 11 million workers) and not 7.7% as reported in the latest Labor Force Survey of the National Statistics Office. Coming on top of this are the more than 1.5 million new college graduates this month.

The unemployment rate in the Philippines is one of the highest in South-east Asia, despite the fact that 25% of the entire labor force is working in other countries.

Currently, the regions with the highest rates of unemployment are Metro Manila (14%) and Southern Tagalog (10.9%), where many companies engaged in the export of semi-manufactures (mainly electronics, garments and furniture) have been closing down or reducing their workload. Retrenchments are continuing and are worsening in different sectors of the economy nationwide. There is also a slow but steady increase in the number of retrenched migrant workers being sent back home to the Philippines.

15 million jobless in the US

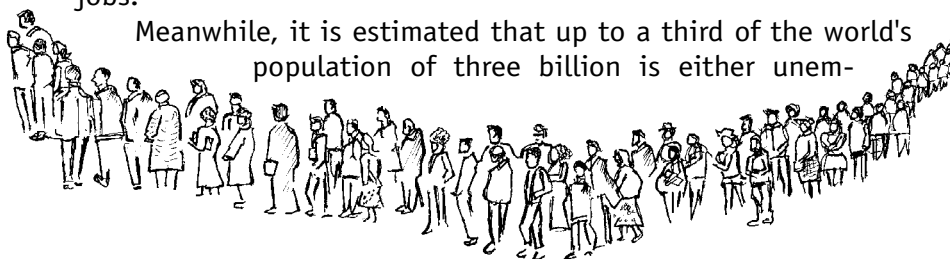
JOB layoffs in the US are on the rise and turning for the worse, with 2.6 million workers terminated since December 2008 (or an average 650,000 retrenchments each month). These numbers are the highest in the US since World War II. Overall, up to 5.1 million have lost their jobs since the recession started in the last quarter of 2007.

According to official US statistics, there are currently 13 million jobless workers (representing 8.1% of the entire labor force). There are actually more than 15 million unemployed in the US (equivalent to 9.3% of the labor force) if one were to add the 2.1 million who are no longer included in the labor force because they failed to find work after more than a year. There is also a significant number of underemployed workers (8.6 million as of February). The unemployment rate is expected to breach the 10% mark this year.

Meanwhile, 18 states in the US (including 11 states that have the worst unemployment rates) have cut unemployment benefits by 11% to 17%. Budgets for social services have been frozen in 12 other states.

With the worsening economic crisis, rising unemployment and loss of government assistance, more and more impoverished Americans have been lining up in soup kitchens. More have joined the ranks of the homeless, spending the night on the streets and in parks after being evicted from houses whose payments they were no longer able to keep up with after losing their jobs.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that up to a third of the world's population of three billion is either unem-



ployed or underemployed, with more than two-thirds of them in Asia.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has estimated that 10 million people around the globe lost their jobs last year (putting total worldwide unemployment figures at more than 190 million). They expect this number to swell by 40 million this year. On top of this, there are half a billion underemployed people worldwide who earn less than \$1 a day, which is way below the threshold needed for their families to live decently.

3 million strike in France

THREE million people have been holding street protests in various French cities since March 19 to condemn the Sarkozy regime's inaction in the face of the French people's suffering.

The massive strike led by various unions throughout the country began with work stoppages at train stations. Schools, offices, hospitals and other transport soon followed suit.

The workers demanded wage increases, an end to layoffs in the government, job security and personal income tax cuts.

Unions and factories also vehemently condemned the government's bailout of banks while people went hungry and were suffering.

Two million have already lost their jobs due to the recession, with the number expected to rise by the end of this year.

The government has brought in hordes of military and police especially to Paris, the French capital. Protesters are truncheoned, tear-gassed and bombarded with water cannons, and many have been arrested and jailed.

Workers picket LCMC office

Workers of the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company (LCMC) and their supporters picketed the LCMC's head office in Makati City last March 3 to denounce LCMC's unjust practices and the expansion of operations of the country's biggest gold mine.

They also demanded the repeal of the Mining Act of 1995. Their protest coincided with the anniversary of the law's enactment.

The protest picket was organized by the Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP), a national alliance of national minority organizations. Among the protesters were leaders of the Lepanto Employees Union (LEU), representatives of MAC-QUITACDG, APIT-TAKO-Mankayan, Tugnayan dagiti Babbai iti Minasan a Lepanto (TBML), Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), environmental activists and other militant groups. They demanded that the company immediately put a stop to the destruction of the environment and livelihoods of the Cordillerans.

LEU representative Junibong Saldo said that adding to the hardships caused by the Mining Act of 1995 is the current world financial crisis which has led to a 10-15 day work reduction. Moreover, LCMC has not been remitting the contributions deducted from their wages to the Social Security System, Philhealth and Pag-ibig. The company has also failed to pay them the back wages they had won in their last strike.

Officials of the mining company refused to confront the workers. They ordered the LCMC office gates closed and blocked by the Makati police.