



EDITORIAL

Expand and strengthen the workers movement and union struggles

Amid sharp deterioration of the toiling masses' livelihood, the masses of workers urgently need to lead the struggles to advance the people's interests, welfare and aspirations. The Communist Party of the Philippines should focus its attention and strength to overcome the obstacles to the workers' advance to collectively fight intensifying exploitation and oppression, and fascist repression.

We must look back to the history of the labor movement, from its growth at the outset of the 20th century, to the rise and further growth over the next few decades, in order to draw inspiration and lessons that would serve as guide to current efforts to advance.

Although there were yet no big enterprises then, the working class in the Philippines—workers in print shops, sugar mills, cigarette factories, as well as shoemakers, carpenters, barbers and others—showed their determination to unite and de-

fend the interests of the toiling masses and the whole people. Their social and political power arose from the hundreds of guilds, associations and unions and took the form of widespread strikes, general strikes and people pouring on the streets in their hundreds of thousands.

With the expansion of colonial and neocolonial trade, and operations in mines and plantations, manufacturing, assembly and packing owned by big bourgeois comprador and landlords, the number of workers in the Philippines grew, and with

it, their unions and collective strength. Economic and political struggles of the militant labor movement erupted in the 1930s, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, and in the early and latter part of the 1980s, even in the face of fascist restrictions and repression.

Since the 1990s, the rate of unionized workers and the number of strikes have diminished. Neoliberal attacks against the labor movement intensified marked by massacre of regular work, "no union, no strike policy" in the enclaves and export processing zones (since the 1970s), and all-out and systematic "flexibilization" (contractualization, "two-tier wage system," "compressed work week" and the like) especially in the 1990s.

Despite the situation being favorable for widespread agitation and mobilization, in general, the union movement and workers' struggles weakened and retreated instead during the past three decades. Ill-advised and overstretched strikes (incited by urban insurrectionism), and the opposite face of legalism, reformism, economism, collaborationism, as well as corruption, dealt a blow and weakened the union movement. This was worsened by fascist suppression of unions and strikes.

These errors were criticized and repudiated during the Second Great Rectification Movement. To continue



to move forward, workers must get rid of all remnants of these errors and firmly take hold of basic principles of militant unionism.

The strength of workers is based on the size and number of unions. Workers wield unions as weapons to defend their welfare against the capitalists. All rights that workers enjoy—higher wages, better working conditions and job security—were attained not through capitalist initiative nor good-heartedness, but through difficult, and often life-and-death union struggles. The moment a union becomes weak or breaks up, the profit-hungry capitalist would take back and deny these rights and benefits won by workers.

Unions need to grow and gain strength. These should be built in the biggest number of factories, especially in the largest enterprises where big number of workers are concentrated, including those in the labor enclaves where repression and exploitation are most intense. Workers should be militated across the different cities in the country. All obstacles to union organizing should be overcome, including legal standards that limit union membership to regular workers. Unite and mobilize all workers in unions, association of contractual workers and

other forms of organization.

With the decline in the economy and living standards, it is timely and urgent to generate a widespread movement to organize and wage workers' struggles to fight for wage increases and for better working conditions. A widespread propaganda and education campaign must be conducted. Courageously, daringly and creatively build, galvanize and strengthen the unions and various forms of the workers' organization. Strengthen the trade union movement by severalfold within a given timeframe.




The labor movement is key to advancing the mass movement in the cities. Workers' widespread actions serve as an anchor for widescale efforts to build organizations, guilds and other types of associations of various democratic classes and sectors, to defend their interests and welfare.

From their factories, workers should take to the streets to manifest their strength in fighting for the interests of the entire class and the people. Thus, unions serve not only the interests of the workers in a workshop, but also serve as organization for taking part in social struggles. Above all, the worker's movement should consciously link up with the peasant masses in the countryside against feudal and semifeudal exploitation and fascist oppression.

Cadres and members of the Party must serve as the steel core of the labor movement. They should serve as models of discipline, enthusiasm, indefatigability, courage, determination and revolutionary optimism. They should lead the masses of workers as they march on the streets, and trek the path to the countryside to serve as fighters and commanders of the people's army.

The political and class consciousness of the workers should be raised to realize their leading role in the revolutionary struggle for national freedom and democracy, and the socialist future.

AB

 <p>ANG Bayan</p> <p>Vol LIII No. 22 November 21, 2022</p> <p>Ang Bayan is published in Pilipino, Bisaya, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Waray, English and Spanish. Ang Bayan welcomes contributions in the form of articles and news items. Readers are encouraged to send feedback and recommendations for improving our newspaper.</p>	<h2>Contents</h2> <p>Editorial: Expand and strengthen the workers movement and union struggles 1</p> <p>A retrospect into the 1980s strike movement 3</p> <p>Is inflation rising because demand is increasing? 4</p> <p>Military arrests 14-year-old girl 5</p> <p>Day of Remembrance for martyrs 5</p> <p>NPA mounts four offensives 5</p> <p>People's army hold LitNum classes in Isabela 6</p> <p>Protests 6</p> <p>In short 7</p> <p>Landlessness of Surigao del Sur farmers 8</p> <p>3 batches of AKP classes 8</p> <p>Filipino seafarers face hardships 9</p>
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A retrospect into the 1980s strike movement

The strike movement and protest actions of workers and their supporters were temporarily suppressed when Ferdinand Marcos Sr imposed martial law across the country in 1972. But when the economic crisis intensified, it was unable to stop the eruption of strikes which started in La Tondeña in 1975. It continued to develop alongside the anti-fascist struggle that overthrew the US-Marcos fascist dictatorship in February 1986, and even in the early years under Corazon Aquino's regime.

These years were marked by widespread strikes and factory struggles, unity of progressive and militant unions at the lead of the labor movement, the broad consciousness of workers about union and national issues, and the active participation of thousands of workers in political actions who bravely led the whole democratic and patriotic movement.

The labor movement grew relentlessly. In 1981, when the dictator threatened to enforce Batas Pambansa 170 to stop workers' strikes, textile workers at the Solid Mills and International Pants Corporation in Parañaque and Litton Mills in Pasig, Metro Manila, immediately responded with strikes.

Earlier, 6,500 miners at the Benguet Mining Corporation in Cordillera rose on January 5 and 7, 1981. For nine months, they paralyzed mine operations in Antagan, Acupan, Balatoc, Kelly and Atok-Big Wedge. They demanded a ₱1 increase in their daily wages in the first year of their Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). On March 31, 1981, a series of 50 strikes was mounted to push for implementation of wage increases and allowances based on Marcos' decree. Among those who went on strike were 10,000 workers of the Novelty Corporation.

In Central Luzon, operations at the Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company were paralyzed on April 4, 1981 when 1,100 workers mounted a strike in 13 warehouses in Pampanga, Bulacan, Bataan, Zambales and Nueva Ecija. The strikers asserted: release the christmas bonuses which

they have not received since 1975. Seven thousand Bataan Export Processing Zone (BEPZ) workers disobeyed the no strike policy at the foreign companies' "paradise." On July 31, 1981, workers at the Ford Ensite LTD, Mariveles Apparel Corp., Integrated Electronics Inc., Monasteria Knitting Inc., and Mattel Phils Inc. mounted a general strike.

In Negros Occidental, more than 1,000 workers belonging to the National Federation of Sugar Workers in the Central Azucarera de la Carlota staged a strike after the company refused to give them their 13th month pay in the past few years.

Workers in 120 factories in Metro Manila simultaneously mounted a strike on April 16, 1984 to denounce fascist attacks and repression of strikes and pickets. On the same day, thousands of workers marched in the funeral of two strikers in the Foamtex Industries who were killed on April 7, 1984 while in

the picketline. The strikes expanded to the Far Eastern University, Philex, Quezon Development Bank (in Quezon and its eight branches in Laguna, Batangas and Naga City), Milky Way Manufacturing and Chemical Manufacturing. Meanwhile, 5,000 Meralco workers left their jobs and marched around their office in Pasig.

For the third time, a massive strike broke out in the BEPZ on May 28, 1984. It was joined by 15,000 workers from 18 unions. The previous strikes took place in June 1982 and October 1983.

Thousands of workers staged strikes in 144 companies in Metro Manila on March 10, 1984. These included workers in Rubberworld-Adidas (6,900), Yupangco Cotton Mills (3,000), Dai-ichi (4,000) and South Harbor (3,000).

By 1986, the strike movement had further developed, marked by sustained activity through the year. The number of strikes increased by 30% in 1985 from 282 in 1984 to 366. The number of workers who took part in the strikes rose by 67%, from 65,000 to 109,000.

On November 13, 1986, Ka Rolando Olalia, chairman of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) and the Partido ng Bayan (People's Party), was abducted and killed, with unionist Leonor Alay-ay. Up to half a million workers joined Ka Lando's funeral on November 20, 1986. In sympathy, 15,000 workers paralyzed 28 of 31 companies in the BEPZ.

Up to 200,000 workers joined militant rallies and demonstrations in Metro Manila and other urban centers to celebrate the historical labor day on May 1, 1989. They gathered at the Luneta Grandstand in Manila under the KMU. This is one of the biggest labor day rally that signaled the start of the general strike from May 26 to 31, 1989. It was joined by 500 unions



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Is inflation rising because demand is increasing?

The toiling masses were not surprised over news that inflation shot up to 7.7% last October. They know very well how their wages and income are dropping, as their families suffer from hunger pangs.

They were dumbfounded, however, by the proud claims of economic growth made by state officials purportedly as a result of a rise in household spending as people "returned" to "pre-pandemic life." This supposedly created an "increase in demand" which they point as reason behind the continuing rise in commodity prices.

"Buwaon! Hirap na hirap na mga tawo didi, nanun insasabi nila na lumalaki ang demand?" (Lies! People here are so hard up, what increased demand are they talking about?) This was the reaction of Mang Tani, a 37-year old farm-worker in a coconut farm in Sorsogon, when told about the matter.

The Bicol region registered a 7.2% regional inflation in October, up by 0.6% compared to September. As in other parts of the country, food prices in the region rose fastest.

These price increases are an additional burden on Mang Tani. He planted cassava on the land of his tenant parents to supplement their income. Even if he works a third job, he still doesn't earn enough. Throughout the region, wages in all

sectors are stuck at ₱345/day. It is far from the ₱1,119 daily living wage for a family of five.

The same is true of Mai Sinay, a grandmother with a 5-hectare coconut farm tended to by her family.

"Our income is grossly insufficient especially with the low prices of copra today," she said. She takes care of five grandchildren, ages five to 16-years old.

"Aside from food, electricity charges are heaviest," she said. "Then there are the children's school projects." Mai Sinay has nothing more to spend beyond their basic needs.

Like Mang Tani, Mai's family is not among those who caused a "rising demand."

"In fact, it has gone down because we have nothing more to spend," she said. "Our money also buys less things."

Incorrect analysis, incorrect response

The Ibon Foundation criticized the state for raising interest rates as way of controlling further rises in inflation. The Central Bank of the

Philippines has raised interest rates six times since July.

According to the group, increasing interest rates can further choke the economy, cause more unemployment and pull down household income. "The economy has been slowing, so-called job creation is mostly low-paying and informal, and household incomes are already suppressed."

Raising interest rates is not the correct way to control inflation, it said. This is because prices are increasing not because of an increase in demand. (In capitalist countries, inflation tend to rise when employment is high and working-class consumers have money to spend.) According to Ibon, what we are seeing is "cost-push" inflation. It is the rising cost of production that pushes up the prices of commodities.

In fact, household spending has gone down, as reflected in the state's data over the past three quarters. (Household spending is the sum of expenses of families for basic necessities such as food, clothing, rent, electricity, transportation, durable goods such as cars, medical expenses, recreation and other services.) In the Philippines, this form 80% of the gross domestic product, and is one of the main barometers of demand.

The workers' movement clamor for wage increases amid high inflation. Due to rising prices, the ₱570 minimum wage in the National Capital Region is now worth only of ₱494. Wages should long have been raised, especially since they were severely eroded by the past devastating lockdowns, price increases of petroleum products and so on. At the same time, the democratic sectors demand for the state to suspend or remove taxes imposed on commodities such as VAT and oil excise taxes. AB

From page 3

in Metro Manila, 57 companies in Central Luzon, specifically Bulacan and Bataan, Southern Tagalog (11), Mindanao (69), Visayas (22) and Northern Luzon (3).

Across the entire country, 700 manufacturing, transportation and service companies were paralyzed, in which capitalists lost 5 million mandays. They took action in the picketlines fronting factories, street marches and demonstrations in public squares and in

front of Congress. They demanded a ₱30 across-the-board increase in minimum wages for all workers.

On May 30, 1989, Congress passed a bill providing for a ₱25-₱20-₱15 increase in minimum daily wage. As a result, the government was forced to enact a wage increase law despite strong opposition from foreign and local capitalists and puppet Aquino I regime.

The working class achieved their successes through the strength of the strike movement! AB

Military arrests 14-year-old girl

The 94th IB arrested and interrogated a 14-year old girl named Jelca Ariola in Sitio Suba-Suay, Barangay Mahalang, Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental, last November 14 on the allegation of being a daughter of a Red fighter. Ariola was on her way home from school when she was accosted by soldiers and brought to the detachment. She was released after hours of pressure and threats. In the same city, the 94th IB beat Tata Balasabas in Sitio Pisok, Barangay Buenavista on November 11.

Farmer Charlie Lelis was illegally arrested on November 1 in Barangay Sangat, Gubat, Sorsogon, on false charges of murder and attempted murder. Lelis is accused of involvement in an encounter between the New People's Army and soldiers.

Soldiers of the 203rd Ibde fired an M203 and strafed parts of Barangay Rizal, Aguas, and Pitogo in Rizal, Occidental Mindoro, at 1 a.m. on November 6. The following day, the neighboring village of Manoot, Rizal was also strafed. Ap-

proximately 100 families evacuated to safety.

Military operations in Negros

Operations along the border of Binalbagan and Isabelita towns in Negros Occidental and La Libertad in Negros Oriental have been conducted since November 2 by 300-400 troops of the 62nd IB. These operations covered at least 10 barangays and 20 sitios. Soldiers imposed a curfew in some places. They encamped at village centers, residents' homes and other civilian

structures. They used drones whose noise caused fear among residents.

On November 5, Tonie Elod was illegally arrested after 62nd IB soldiers searched his home in Sitio Mabato, Barangay Talaon, La Libertad. They also arrested Joel Carpio, a pig trader from Barangay Cansumandi. A plastic bag was placed over his head while he was being interrogated.

Seven farmers were subjected to interrogation and threats by soldiers, who raided at least five homes with at least one ransacked, in Barangay Macasilao and Winaswasan in Calatrava, and Barangay Bug-ang and Magticol, Toboso on October 19. These violations were committed at the height of focused military operations in Northern Negros towns since October. AB

NDF-Mindanao holds remembrance day for revolutionary martyrs

LIGHTING CANDLES, RED fighters of the New People's Army (NPA) in Mindanao remembered and paid tribute to heroes and martyrs of the people's democratic revolution. This is in line with the Day of Remembrance of martyrs last November 7 led by the National Democratic Front (NDF)-Mindanao. This was made to coincide with the 1917 victory day of the Russian socialist revolution.

The activity was launched in memory of Jorge Madlos (Ka Oris), NPA national spokesperson, Antonio Cabanatan (Ka Manlimbasog), a member of the CPP Mindanao Commission, Menandro Villanueva (Ka Bok), NPA national commander, and many other splendid party cadres who gave their life to the revolution.

In Surigao del Sur, local masses and Red fighters gathered in a simple activity. The fighters and people in attendance gave messages. They also seized the opportunity to stage cultural performances for the audience.

"It is just that we support and play our part in the struggle until victory," said an attendee. Another one added, "the NPA is indeed the true defender and soldier of the oppressed masses."

The NPA unit also launched a similar gathering in Agusan del Norte and other parts of Mindanao. The gatherings were filled with emotion but in the end, everyone reaffirmed their determination to carry forward the struggle.

NPA mounts four offensives

THE NEW PEOPLE'S Army (NPA) ambushed CAFGU elements in Barangay Manlut-od, Placer, Masbate on November 7. Two elements were killed and two short weapons were seized, with several magazines, ammunition and other military equipment.

The ambush adds to the more than 20 guerrilla actions mounted in the province by NPA units this year. According to the unit, the casualties suffered by the reactionary armed forces is almost equivalent to a platoon.

Meanwhile, the NPA-Central Negros mounted successive military actions against 62nd IB's mercenary troops on November 12.

The first offensive was carried out around 5:32 p.m. against a military detachment in Barangay Budlasan, Canlaon City. On nightfall, the Red army fired at the 62nd IB soldiers at the gym of Barangay Trinidad National High School, Barangay Trinidad, Guihulngan City. A fascist was killed and two were injured in these armed actions.

"The military's presence and encampment in schools and other public places is a clear violation of the rules of war and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law," said the NPA-Central Negros.

In Abra, the NPA unit fired at a column of the 54th IB and 102nd IBde on November 4 in Barangay Mogao, Licuan-Baay. Three fascist soldiers were killed. They were among the troops conducting focused military operations in the province in recent months.

People's army holds LitNum classes in Isabela

Many of the Red fighters in Isabela in Cagayan Valley hail from the masses of peasants and national minority people. They are among the most oppressed and neglected sectors of society. As a result, many of them have not attended school, and have difficulty reading, writing and doing simple math, if they are even able to.

To correct this neglect and advance their right to education, a people's army unit developed in Isabela a Literacy and Numeracy or LitNum program designed for them. Formal classroom-style studies are undertaken where two or more students of equal ability participate.

This practice produced a curriculum for comrades who already know how to read and count to continue developing their skills. It is anchored in the tasks they perform within the people's army. It is designed to give them more confidence to lead political activities among both fighters like them and among the masses. Some of the main focus were: Reading and Comprehension, Listening and Understanding, Creative and Technical Writing, Basic Math, and Public Speaking. This was effectively taught through a variety of creative methods and cultural activities. There are also studies on science and history that are open to all Red fighters.

A proven effective method is "Song Analysis" that aims to train comrades in listening to and sharply analyzing the message of songs, news or studies. This is a favorite of music lovers. There was also a workshop on poetry and essay writing in line with revolutionary themes to monitor progress in the spelling of words and constructing sentences or verses.

Science and history classes are completed with tests that push comrades to listen carefully and take notes during discussions. Comrades who could not yet write are encouraged to copy words (in the visual aids) aided by those who know how to write. This helps in memorizing details especially when confronted

with new words.

There are also "Clue hunts" in which "clues" hidden in various parts of the camp are found by following instructions given in each one. They must find and answer all of them before the allotted time runs out.

"Skills sharing" are linked to production such as laying traps, skinning rattan, finding (vegetable) shoots, and others, in order to raise the spirit of learning from each other between teachers and students. Another way is developing a Dictionary of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism containing common words used in the studies. The student gives brief explanations based on his understanding, guided by his teacher. This significantly helps prepare students in taking the party courses.

Dealing with comrades with possible dyslexia

The instructors group developed a curriculum that is adapted to the reading difficulty of a comrade with dyslexia. (Dyslexia is a condition in which one finds it hard to identify letters and numbers making reading and writing difficult to learn).

To aid the learning process, a student is asked to use pieces of wood and strings to create shapes of letters and numbers that one forgets or cannot distinguish from each other when written. Since the comrade is also training as a medic, a large image of a thermometer and sphygmomanometer was drawn to help in numeracy training, along with many other visuals to help study acupuncture and names of drugs.

This happy experience resulted in a high appreciation for continuing study and a vibrant spirit of education. The unit quickly reached 100%

level functional literacy. The students were trained well in reading, counting, calculating and writing in just a short period of time. Criticism and self-criticism meetings helped both teachers and students in improving the materials and methods used in the LitNum Program. AB

Global Climate Strike. Protests were launched on November 12 in various parts of the world in conjunction with the COP27 (27th Conference of the Parties). In the Philippines, democratic groups gathered at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani raising the call Climate Justice Now and End Climate Imperialism.

Higher Wages, Lower Prices. Petitions and series of actions were staged by unions and workers' groups demanding the state to raise wages and lower commodity prices. A petition signing was initiated in Cubao, Quezon City on November 11. On November 16, they trooped to Congress to support the anti-union interference bill.

Additional funding for hospitals. Members of the Alliance of Health Workers staged a protest in front of the Senate last November 17 to demand additional budget for public hospitals, higher salaries and additional regular workers.

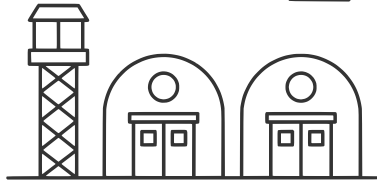
Unity walk against the ROTC. Hundreds of students from various universities in Metro Manila staged a "unity walk" on November 18, coinciding with the International Students Day. They opposed the return of the Mandatory ROTC program that Vice President Sara Duterte is pushing for.

1,480

families in Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan last November 7 after AFP-MILF clashes erupted.



additional US military facilities to be established in various parts of the Philippines.

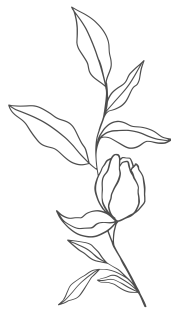


842

political prisoners in the Philippines, including 15 detained under the Marcos II regime.

11,000

workers fired this November by Meta Platforms (owner of Facebook and Instagram). Up to 10,000 workers are also set to be kicked out by Amazon.



Rolando "Ka Lando" Olalia



KMU chairman, together with Leonor Alay-ay, murdered by military agents on November 13, 1986. No one has been punished for the crime.



composed of human rights defenders in the Philippines who joined the United Nations Universal Period Review in Switzerland last November 14.

8 billion

world population as of November 16.



48,000

teachers and other workers of the University of California in the US staged a strike last November 14 against low wages and unjust work conditions.



Landlessness of Surigao del Sur farmers

Rice farmers in Surigao del Sur are deep in debt due to the high cost of production. The price of fertilizer, pesticide and petroleum products have risen but farmgate prices remain unchanged. Moreover, a large part of their income goes to land rent in the form of exploitative sharing schemes between them and landlords. The lack of land remains the greatest factor in their losses and suffering.

Landlord-tenant relationship

Tatay Bebot is a rice tenant. He has been cultivating a 2-hectare land for thirty years. He divided the land into 12 parcels and harvests 40 sacks per planting cycle.

A 50-50 sharing scheme exists between Tatay Bebot and the land owner. Tatay Bebot shoulders all the costs of production. This is the most exploitative sharing scheme in the province where a 70-30 scheme in favor of the tenant already exists, and 50-50 scheme, where the landlord pays for the cost of production. He could not complain for fear that he might get replaced as tenant.

In the last harvest, he earned ₱40,000 with palay bought at ₱1,000 per sack or ₱20 per kilogram. Under the 50-50 sharing scheme, he had to pay over ₱20,000 to his landlord as land rent.

During each planting cycle, Tatay Bebot spends ₱10,500 to pay for the farm workers he employs for land preparation, sowing, planting,

repairing dikes up to harvesting. He purchases seeds at ₱1,000 per sack. He spends ₱4,500 for pesticide. Fertilizer costs him ₱3,200. All in all, his expenses amount to ₱27,500 or ₱222.2 per day for a 90-day cycle. Not only does Tatay Bebot earn nothing, he ends up having to pay more.

"It is not enough," he said. "The income, everything goes to farming expenses. We only persevere and borrow money from our landlord." Like other tenants, they end up mired and unable to rise from unpayable debt.

He once dreamed of having his five children finish school. But because he always loses every harvest, he now thinks of asking them to stop schooling to help in the farm.

Away from "simple life"

Behind the romanticized "simple life" in the countryside is the extreme suffering of farmers, farm workers and their families.

In Tatay Bebot's case, he needs a daily minimum of ₱575 to cover only rice, viand and salt, his children's transportation costs and hygiene necessities such as soap and toothpaste.

In addition are the costs from time to time for children's school projects, cigarettes, cellphone load and more. He has no savings for emergency expenses such as illnesses. He will have nothing left if his farm gets destroyed by strong storms which often pass through their province.

To keep up, Tatay Bebot also works as a tenant in other farms, as a construction worker and sometimes engages in fishing. He earns not more than ₱300 from toiling the whole day from these jobs.

"Of course, like everyone else, I dreamed of having my own land so that I could somehow earn from the farm work I do," he said.

Genuine agrarian reform

Reforms in the sharing system are continually being pushed in the province, from the 50-50 and 70-30 sharing scheme to 75-25, in favor of the farmer. This is to alleviate the suffering of the tillers of the land as they fight for their right to the land.

Through collective action of peasants in the past, they have realized their demand for higher farmgate prices of palay, copra and hemp, principal crops in the province. The price of commercial wood has also been raised.

At the same time, farm workers have pushed for increases in their daily wages up to ₱350-₱400 from a very low ₱150-₱200. They also won their right to free lunch and snacks.

Today, these campaigns are being reinvigorated alongside the fight against the intense militarization of major parts of the province marked by arrests, detention and murder of peasant leaders. AB

Negros holds 3 batches of AKP classes

LED BY THE Communist Party of the Philippines in Negros Island, three batches of students completed the Party Advanced Course (AKP) in the first six months of 2022. The classes were held in the guerrilla fronts despite the intense and relentless military operations of the fascist 3rd ID.

There were rich discussions and exchange of ideas and experiences between students who hail from different economic classes. The completion of at least 40 students is significant after the first series of courses in early 2019.

AKP is part of the three-level Party course. The writings of great communist leaders Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao are studied here.

"I learned how to apply our theory to the practical problems of the revolution," said one student.

"My class standpoint is now more firm. Our graduation is a huge slap on the enemy's face!" added another.

Filipino seafarers face hardships caused by government

Filipino seafarers and sailors are drowning in a sea of problems. They face issues of unemployment, contractualization, exorbitant training fees, mandatory fees and more. They are neglected by government despite the remittances they send into the country.

Estimates of the Concerned Seafarers of the Philippines (CSP) show there are at least 750,000 registered seafarers and sailors in the Philippines. Of this number, only 400,000 get to board ships with a contract with a principal or company.

The Philippines is leading supplier of seafarers around the world, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development data in 2021. It is estimated that there is a Filipino seafarer for every four to five crew members of maritime vessels at any time.

That year, seafarers remitted \$6.55 billion or nearly 21% of the country's total \$31.42 billion remittances sent home by Filipino migrant workers. The total contribution of these remittances to the country's gross domestic product is estimated at 8.9%.

Unemployment and contractualization

It was reported recently that more than 50,000 Filipino seafarers face the danger of not being able to board European ships. This is a result of the Philippine government's failure to raise the level of capabilities and conditions of Filipino seafarers.

There are fears that the country might fail the evaluation this year by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) regarding training standards or the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for

the Seafarers.

Since 2006, EMSA has repeatedly criticized the Philippines and its agencies for the low capabilities of Filipino seafarers. In 2020, the EMSA's criticisms include lack of training equipment, inappropriate training and assessment policy, and 46 other "areas of concern." Despite this, no significant action was carried out by the government.

According to the CSP, the main culprit behind this failure is the government's negligence of maritime education and passing all responsibility for training seafarers to private schools. According to them, the state abandoned its role in the sector. Of the 76 universities that have a maritime program or course in the country, 58 are private.

The CSP retorted that tuition and fees for mandatory trainings set by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) are expensive, yet do not pass EMSA standards. At least ₱83,985 are paid by each seafarer for the mandatory trainings, apart from tuition (₱20,000-₱90,000 per year) and other educational costs.

Every year, 25,000 students graduate from maritime schools but only 5,000 of them land a job on commercial ships. If you are able to board a ship, majority are contractuels. Their work is limited to six months and they enjoy no benefits.



The salaries of low-ranking seafarers and ordinary seamen are pegged at \$400 (or ₱23,200 at \$1 = ₱58 exchange) per month.

The government is also milking them dry with the forced collection of PhilHealth (4% of their monthly salaries), Pag-ibig and the Social Security System which they rarely benefit from.

On top of these, the CSP criticized the government's intensified labor export policy. According to them, due to lack of employment in the country, Filipinos are forced to work overseas.

Unity and resistance

The CSP was formed as a seafarer's organization at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which exploitation of seafarers and sailors intensified.

In its assembly held on October 24, they strengthened their unity to assert the regularization of seafarers, provision of basic benefits, higher wages, and abolition of the age limit to work. They will also promote affordable education for seafarers, setting an 8-hour work-day and annual leave.

The group also expressed support to the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers or House Bill 4438 by Rep. Arlene Brosas of Gabriela Women's Party filed in September 2022. AB