



EDITORIAL

Fight negligence and corruption of the US-Marcos regime amid El Niño

Much of the country is now experiencing a drought caused by the El Niño climate phenomenon. This began in the middle of last year, and is expected to last until May or June this year. The drought is expected to affect up to 65 provinces and bring extensive damage to the livelihoods of the rural masses.

Reports by the end of February show crop losses of up to ₱941.7 million in 15,000 hectares of damaged agricultural land. Studies estimate that up to 250,000 hectares of agricultural land will be damaged. Hundreds of thousands of farmers are at risk of falling deeper into debt to merchant-usurers, and suffering intense hardships and hunger.

The drought will be most devastating for landless farmers, who have no money to invest, depend on rain and lack access to irrigation.

Hundreds of thousands of farm-workers will lose their jobs or source of income. The drought is causing fires in mountains, endangering the lives and livelihood of the masses of minorities.

The effects of El Niño's drought are exacerbated by environmental destruction, especially the loss of forests due to long periods of logging, mining and construction of dams and other infrastructure that destroy watershed and water sources. Large foreign companies

and the comprador bourgeoisie are the main perpetrators. Despite the intense damage they cause, the Marcos regime continues to favor the aggressive entry of these companies into the countryside.

For more than a year, the effects of El Niño have been expected in the Philippines, yet the Marcos regime made no concrete plans to help peasants whose livelihoods will be devastated. Despite the long-anticipated effects, reactionary government's agencies did not provide scientific advice, financial subsidy or alternative crops, and simply left the peasant masses to suffer and go bankrupt as their crops withered in the drought.

Worse, Marcos is now using El

Niño to provide huge funds to pocket kickbacks from infrastructure projects such as "solar-powered" irrigation which are actually long-delayed given that these are being built amid a drought when many places are already without water. Long-delayed as well, and done merely for media projection, are cloud seeding plans, tractor distribution, and small insurance payment for damaged crops.

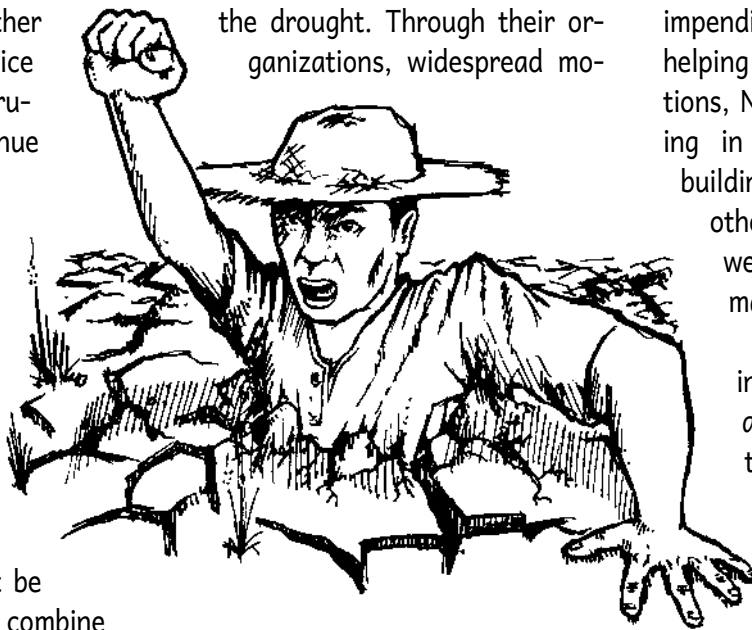
Despite an expected drop in production due to the drought, especially rice, the US-Marcos regime has done nothing to ensure the supply of food except to further open the country's door to import rice, as well as onions, garlic, and other agricultural products. Rice prices rose further this February and is expected to continue increasing.

In the face of the intense impact of the El Niño drought, the Party and the revolutionary forces must strive to unite and mobilize the peasant masses to defend their well-being, livelihood and economic and social rights. Peasant organizations must be built and strengthened to combine

their strength to fight for measures to provide immediate relief during El Niño.

The peasant masses should be mobilized in their numbers to demand necessary steps for immediate alleviation, including distribution of subsidies or emergency funding, suspension or cancellation of debts, non-payment of land rent, and implementation of urgent solutions to solve the water problem. They must act together to fight mining operations, plantations and other activities that damage the environment.

The peasant masses must also be united to revive their spirit of cooperation especially in the face of the drought. Through their organizations, widespread mo-



bilizations can be planned to collectively build or repair irrigation systems in their respective areas, in order to share (rather than fight over) water resources for their fields.

The peasant masses should collectively hold the US-Marcos regime accountable for its negligence, corruption and burdensome policies that worsen their conditions. All these anger the peasant masses and drive them to the path of protest and resistance.



Amid the drought, units of the New People's Army have been ordered by the Party to actively help the peasant masses cope with the impending disaster. In addition to helping build the peasant organizations, NPA units are directly assisting in production, digging wells, building irrigation systems, and other initiatives to address the well-being of the peasant masses.

The peasant masses are increasingly outraged that amid the intense drought, tens of thousands of AFP fascist troops are relentlessly launching extensive repression operations and armed offensives to crush the people's resistance.

Amid their misery, hundreds of millions of pesos are being squandered by the AFP with jet fighters and helicopters dropping bombs and firing shells in the fields and mountains.

AFP battalions are now launching all-out offensives nationwide, in accordance with the US-Marcos regime's order to defeat all guerrilla fronts by the end of March. These do not bring anything to the peasant masses but greater sufferings.

The neglect, corruption, oppressive policies, and fascist terrorism of the US-Marcos regime all serve as spark for the tinder of the people's indignation in the vast countryside. The prevailing situation is fertile ground for generating widespread protests by the impoverished masses, and further strengthening the armed resistance of the NPA. **AB**

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Bohol's land is fertile for advancing the revolution

The US-Marcos regime is mistaken in thinking that it could end the armed revolutionary resistance of the Bol-anon masses when it brazenly massacred five captured New People's Army (NPA) Red fighters and Party cadres in Barangay Campagao, Bilar, Bohol on February 23. The martyrdom of the five, who served the interests of the peasant masses in Bohol and the Filipino people, is undeniably a great loss. However, their lives and sacrifices inspire further perseverance in the revolutionary struggle in the province.



Since taking root in the 1980s, the revolutionary movement in Bohol has never been completely defeated by the reactionary state. Despite the repeated declaration of the province as "insurgency-free", the revolutionary fire in Bohol has never been extinguished. Amid continued oppression and exploitation, the revolutionary resistance on the island will never be vanquished.

Condition of the Bol-anon masses

The majority of the island's 1.39 million people, especially the peasant masses, are suffering. Rice and corn, as well as coconut, banana, cassava, saba and oil palm are the main products.

Of the total 482,100 hectares of land in the province, 273,950 are agricultural, while 101,271 are forested. It is called the "food granary" of Central Visayas because of its large food production. As of 2018, rice fields account for 26% or 70,117 hectares of agricultural land. Only 56% of these have adequate irrigation.

Farmers now fear the damage that El Niño will bring to their rice fields. Tatay Boying, a farmer in the province, doesn't know what to do with his farm due to the "dry spell" or abnormal rainfall conditions in Bohol.

"Irrigation is difficult because we only depend on rain...others have irrigation, but only a few benefit, then there is favoritism," he said.

This is in stark contrast to the ₱7.1 million that the local Bohol government boasted of in November 2023 purportedly to help farmers and people affected by the drought. Apart from being meager, piles of requirements need to be met to receive benefits.

El Niño is expected to bring severe losses to Bohol farmers. Tatay Boying laments he already earns nothing from the usual harvest, how much worse now with the lack of irrigation.

His total expenses for each planting cycle is at least ₱11,000. He harvested 456 kilos or 12 sacks of palay, two of which will go the landlord for rent. If he sells it, he will get only ₱9,120 with palay farmgate prices at ₱24 per kilo. Because of the heavy loss, and with skyrocketing rice prices in the market, Tatay Boying chose to no longer sell his crop.

The greater calamity for the Bohol-anon masses is the intensified and widespread land grabbing by private corporations and landlords with the complicity of the local government. This includes the land grab by the Bohol Cattle Corporation (BCC), owned by a Marcos crony, of the 622 hectares of land, which the Trinidad-Talibon Integrated Farmers Association (TTIFA) has been fighting for. The BCC ignores the farmers' documents in their drive to take over control of the 1,973 hectares it claims.

The oil palm plantations of the Philippine Agricultural Land and Mills Development Inc (PALM Inc), owned by the company AGUMIL Philippines, a partnership of Filipino and Malaysian investors, are also a burden on farmers. In 2012, at least 2,500 oil palm farmers went bankrupt as a result of the PALM Inc's scheme to charge extremely high interest rates while driving down farmgate prices of their fruits. During this time, the company bought oil palm fruits from farmers for as little as ₱2/kilo. Because oil palm plantations used chemicals, farmers could no longer use the land. PALM Inc plantations covered 6,000 hectares of land.

Fishermen, who make up 33% of the province's total population, are also mired in poverty. They suffer from constantly rising fuel, equipment and other costs. They also fear losing their livelihood due to the 650-hectare reclamation plan in Panglao Island, and the ongoing reclamation in Tagbilaran City.

The Bohol-anon masses cannot feel the local government's claim of a 7.1% growth in the province's gross domestic product in 2023, mainly from tourism. Despite money brought in by up to one million tourists annually, Bohol's toiling masses remain miserable and hungry.

Meanwhile, when the Bol-anon masses do not die of hunger, they

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Bohol Massacre, AFP-PNP bombing and abduction cases

The fascist war criminals in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), paramilitaries and the Philippine National Police (PNP), as well as its chief Ferdinand Marcos Jr, must be indicted and prosecuted for multiple violations of international humanitarian law and principles of civilized warfare during recent weeks.

Justice for the Bilar 5. Five Red fighters and Party cadres were massacred, not killed in an encounter in Bilar, Bohol on February 23. Domingo Compoc, Hannah Cesista, Parlito Historia, Marlon Omosura and Alberto Sancho were captured alive in the house they were using in Sitio Matin-ao 2, Barangay Campagao. The five were severely tortured before they were killed. A photograph showed Compoc being held by a soldier, indicating he was alive when captured. Witnesses said Compoc was hacked in the neck and abdomen. Compoc was in his 60s and suffered from arthritis.

Cesista and three others were forced to lie in the mud before being shot. Cesista was a lawyer who chose to serve the oppressed classes. Despite evidence and witness testimonies, the AFP and PNP insist that the five "fought back" when they

were "served" with arrest warrants.

Earlier, the military abducted a resident of the area named "Berting" and his two minor children, including a 4-year-old in the same barangay. He was beaten to reveal the whereabouts of the Bilar 5. They were forced into a white van. They were sent home after a day.

In Negros Occidental, on February 21, the 79th IB killed farmer Jose Caramihan who was tending his farm in Sityo Mansulao, Barangay Pinapugasan, Escalante City. The military said he was killed in an "encounter."

In Misamis Oriental, the 58th IB captured, tortured and killed Miguel Serino (Ka Bokir), an NPA-North Central Mindanao Region (NCOM) Red fighter, at the border of Barangay Calawag and Quezon in Balingasag on February 10. His remains showed he underwent severe torture.

Abduction. The police and military falsely claim that the abducted brother of Sorsogon peasant-leader Jose Marie Estiller "surrendered" on February 23. The military abducted him on February 20 in Santo Tomas, Batangas. He was accused of being the "second most wanted" in Bicol and charged with several criminal offenses.

Meanwhile, Anakbayan-Southern Mindanao reported last February 27 the abduction and disappearance by the military and police of Nelson Bautista Jr, an activist writer with a long record of service to the communities of Davao, and the arrest of his then companion Ademar Anciero Etol on January 25 at a house in Barangay Balingasan, Siay, Zamboanga Sibugay. Etol was charged with crim-

inal offenses and is currently detained at the Siay Municipal Police Station. Meanwhile, neither the police nor the military admit that they have Bautista. He remains missing to this day.

Bombing. A series of aerial bombings and artillery shelling conducted by the AFP have been reported in Negros Occidental, Iloilo and Bukidnon in recent weeks. These have caused great fear and trauma to civilian communities. It also has severely affected the livelihood of residents. Their use of very powerful bombs against guerrilla camps of the people's army also violates the principle of "proportionality".

In Negros Occidental, on February 21 and 22, the military carried out a series of indiscriminate firing, strafing and bombing at the border of Escalante City and Toboso town. This forced the evacuation of 1,000 residents. Classes were suspended in seven barangays in Toboso.

In Iloilo, the AFP dropped 500-pound aerial bombs on barangays of Torocadan, Dongoc and Langca in San Joaquin town on February 28. This was followed by a series of helicopter strafing and artillery shelling. Three Red fighters were reported martyred in the bombing.

In Bukidnon, the AFP indiscriminately shelled the mountainous area bordering the towns of San Fernando, Quezon and Valencia City 13 times from 2 to 5 p.m. on February 23. The AFP also shelled the same area 13 times on February 21. The shelling is part of the combat operations with simultaneous bombings since December 2023.

Meanwhile, the 81st IB bombed and shelled the villages bordering Tagkawayan, Quezon and Del Gallego, Camarines Sur at dawn on March 4. The bombs dropped near communities and almost hit three copra workers.

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are killed and repressed by the military and police. In recent years, the Bol-anon masses who are fighting for land rights have faced relentless suppression. There are currently 10 political prisoners in Bohol including 75-year-old Adolfo Salas Sr, co-founder of the provincial chapter of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas na Hugpong sa mga Mag-uumang Bol-anon (HUM-ABOL-KMP). The 47th IB and the so-called Task Group Bohol of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police are the main agents of state terrorism in the province.

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Back to EDSA to fight chacha

The 38th anniversary of the EDSA uprising was commemorated in various parts of the country and overseas through protests against the Marcos regime's charter change scheme or chacha on February 25.

About 5,000 people gathered in front of the EDSA Shrine in Metro Manila under the No to Chacha Network. The groups said one of the achievements of the EDSA uprising was the 1987 Constitution, which banned political dynasties, set term limits for public officials and provided other guarantees to ensure that the state had "checks and balances." They said this is what the Marcos regime wants to change, along with allowing 100% foreign ownership of land, key infrastructure and facilities in the Philippines.

The network also believes that instead of focusing on chacha, the government should address the people's demands for wage increases, lower prices, better social

services and so on. In its joint statement, the alliance said the chacha is "unnecessary, divisive, costly, and mainly focused on keeping those in power in place."

On the same day, anti-chacha alliances also launched protests in the cities of Naga, Legazpi, Cebu, Bacolod, Iloilo, and Davao. Meanwhile, joint actions and studies were held in Isabela, La Union, and Sorsogon. Overseas, Filipinos conducted activities in Los Angeles, New York, and Boston in the US; in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, and Canberra in Australia; in Hong Kong; and Canada.

Groups within the alliance organized widespread protests, gatherings and discussions before and after the commemoration.

In addition to the No to Chacha Network, broad alliances of youth and women were also formed, as well as alliances at the city and provincial levels.

Despite widespread opposition, Marcos' henchmen continue to advance their chacha scheme. A series of hearings were held at the House of Representatives on February 27 on Resolution of Both Houses 7 (RBH7), a counterpart to the Senate's RBH6.

According to the joint resolution, only three provisions are supposed to be amended when the Lower and Upper Houses are formed into a constituent assembly with separate voting. Foreigners will be given the right to outright ownership of public utilities (Article XII, Section 11); educational institutions (Article IX, Section 4); and advertising (Article XVI, Section 11). AB

Gabriela greets Women's Month with protests

SIMULTANEOUS PROTEST ACTIONS were carried out by women under Gabriela on March 1 at the beginning of Women's Month. Their call: Livelihood, Human Rights, Sovereignty, not chacha for foreigners and the few!

That day, Gabriela Youth members, together with other youth groups, marched to Mendiola in Manila to express their opposition to the Marcos regime's charter change scheme.

A similar action at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños was led by Gabriela Youth-UPLB. According to the group, their action is in solidarity with the planned Purple Day of Action.

Women workers also launched a dance-protest under Women Workers United and Kilusang Mayo Uno for wages, jobs, human rights and an end to violence at work. Gabriela-NCR also launched a protest in Manila on March 5. AB



Protests hound Marcos presence at ASEAN in Australia. Filipino migrants and progressive groups in Melbourne, Australia hounded the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit and the participation of Ferdinand Marcos Jr from March 4 to March 6. Led by the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan)-Australia, the protests disrupted the ASEAN Summit and Marcos' activities.

Justice for the Bilar 5 and victims of the fascist AFP-PNP. Youth and progressive organizations of Central Visayas gathered at the University of the Philippines (UP)-Cebu Amphitheater on March 3 to pay tribute and honor the Bilar 5, the five Red fighters massacred by state forces after their capture Bilar, Bohol on February 23. Meanwhile, UP Cebu youth staged a candlelight protest on February 29. They called for justice for the Bilar 5.

On March 5, human rights groups protested in front of Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City to condemn the series of abductions, bombings and targeted killings of AFP-PNP activists, progressives and revolutionaries.

Repeal the Philippine Mining Act. Katribu, Kalikasan PNE and other democratic groups staged a protest before the Department of Environment and Natural Resources on March 4 to demand the repeal of the 1995 Philippine Mining Act. In its 29 years of existence, the law has caused unprecedented damage to the environment and indigenous communities and farmers.

6.3%

of Filipino women, age 15-49, have sole or shared ownership of land



29.5% only have sole or shared ownership of land

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

58

killed in the bogus war on drugs under the Marcos regime

from January 1 to February 29.

112

Palestinians killed while queuing for flour aid from the UN when Israeli forces fired bullets in Northern Gaza on March 1.

₱41.2B

damage to livelihood and environment caused by the MT Princess Empress oil spill in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 28, 2023.



A subsidiary of San Miguel Corporation contracted the ship to deliver oil to Petron.

Source: Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development

The number of Palestinians killed in Israel's genocide since October 7, 2023 now exceeds 30,000.

10.6%

the share of wages in the total production cost of Philippine businesses.

Thus, the effect of wage increase is minimal and do not necessitate prices increases or worker lay offs.

₱38/DAY

meager wage increase granted to Region XI (Davao) workers.

This raised the minimum wage to only ₱443/day, while living wages in the region rose to ₱1,163/day in January.

104%

steep growth in the net income of the 1,000 largest Philippines corporations between 2020 and 2021.

Conwep, defenders of foreign capitalist

In a congressional hearing last February 29, the Confederation of Wearable Exporters of the Philippines (Conwep) threatened widespread layoffs in the garment industry if even the slightest increase in workers wages is approved. In its letter to the Marcos regime, it warned that up to 120,000 or 70%-80% of its 160,000 workers will lose their jobs if any increase is passed in the Senate and Congress. They will be on top of the 21,912 workers slated to be laid off this year due to "lower international demand."

Conwep is an association of big capitalists specializing in the production of clothes for the biggest "global brands," also called "high quality fashion." These include Ralph Lauren, Coach, Michael Kors, Adidas, Dillard's, Marks & Spencer and Ann Taylor. Its main export market is the United States, followed by European Union countries, the United Kingdom and Japan. The association is dominated by foreign companies, the smallest of which employs 1,000 workers. Two of the largest compa-

nies here operate 6-7 factories and employ 22,000-24,000 workers. These companies also have operations in other parts of Asia (Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam). Before the pandemic, the industry employed up to 220,000 workers.

Majority of workers in the industry are women, relatively young, and are contractuals. In general, they are paid 17%-25% less than men.

Shrinking industry, intensifying exploitation



Since the 1990s, the Philippine garment industry's share in the international clothing trade has been shrinking. By 2020, the country had only 200 factories for manufacturing clothing, 240 traders and more than 1,000 subcontractors. It employs more than 490,000 workers in various capacities, the majority or 69.4% of whom are women.

In 2020, Conwep used the Covid-19 pandemic to carry out mass layoffs, wage cuts and increased labor flexibility. It put thousands of

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The struggle of women workers in Bataan

Inside the Freeport Area of Bataan (FAB), the first export processing zone in the Philippines, women workers dared to struggle at FCF Manufacturing Corporation, a company that exclusively makes products for global brands Coach and Kate Spade.

They voted to go on strike after the company said it would only grant a wage increase of ₱2 this year. This comes on top of management's threats to transfer them from their jobs, or fire them outright. More than 1,000 voted in favor of the strike, while 100 voted against it, in the factory of 3,000 workers (regular and contractual).

FCF workers receive only ₱500, which is only 44% of the ₱1,142 living wage in Central Luzon. In addition, there are rampant violations of workers' rights such as forced leave, illegal dismissal, and inhumane working conditions.

The strike vote is victory over the company's brazen intimidation and repression. Before the vote, the management of FCF and its sister company FPF secretly gathered workers

on February 26 to intimidate them and campaign against supporting the strike vote. They threatened to transfer workers with reduced benefits or fire them without pay.

FCF is owned by Fashion Focus Ltd, a China-based company. It sells Philippine-made manufactured products for ₱2,000 to ₱20,000 each. In 2022, the company earned ₱2.8 billion, contradicting claims it is unable to grant a wage increase, the workers said.

"Dirty" clothes

The garments industry in the Philippines, FCF among them, is part of a multi-billion dollar global industry employing 60 to 75 million workers worldwide. Up to 3/4 of them are women. Much of its production are in underdeveloped Asian countries. In

2023, its estimated revenue was at \$1.74 trillion.

In a survey by the Clean Clothes Campaign, 93% of global brands pay less than living wages to workers in the industry. According to an Oxfam International research, less than 1% of the profits of global brands would be cut if workers were paid living wages.

In addition to underpaying and forcing workers to work overtime (up to 16 hours per day, seven days a week); unsafe working conditions (crowded, unventilated, and in the case of Bangladesh, dilapidated buildings); violence and abuse; widespread violations of the right to organize and bargain; forced labor; child labor and discrimination against women.

According to the International Labor Organization, garment factories are notorious for gender-based violence and harassment or GBVH. In Asia, 22.8% of women working in the industry reported experiencing at least one form of GBVH in 2021. **AB**

Perseverance amid suppression of the right to unionize in Cebu

Big and foreign capitalists deliberately attack workers' rights to unionize and bargain in order to keep Filipino labor cheap and docile. This goes against what reactionary state officials keep parroting, what their own law say, and the international agreements which they have hypocritically signed. Forming a union and demanding that it be recognized as exclusive bargaining representative of workers is already very difficult.

This is the experience of Bokya and Bayong, both 39 year-old workers in a factory in Cebu, who are still contractual workers even after 13-14 years.

Urgent reasons convinced them to join the union. "I was told a union was being formed for job security, to protect us from arbitrary layoffs," said Bokya. "During that time, there was a lot of talk until that year, when our (labor) agency was the only one left. This is the issue that united us," said Bayong.

They started building the factory union back in 2018, but until now the capitalist refuses to recognize it as a Sole and Exclusive Bargaining Agent (SEBA). To prevent the union's formation, management sanctioned members by placing them on "floating status" or removing them from regular job rotation. The capitalist fired workers four times to kick the ones already organized.

Workers fought back. They launched collective actions and demanded the factory be inspected by the Department of Labor and Employ-

ment to expose how workers are subjected to labor-only contracting (LOC) scheme. They also demanded that workers placed on floating status be returned to regular rotation.

"We conducted an armband protest, sent a letter asking for a dialogue but there was no response," Bokya said.

Instead, the capitalist, with the complicity of the state, increased pressure on workers. It invited the NTF-Elcac to the factory to hold a forum in which the union was brazenly Red-tagged. Union leaders and their families were subjected to threats. Fascist agents even attended management meetings.

The presence of the NTF-Elcac in the factory caused unrest among workers. "To overcome this challenge, we who were active in the union visited workers' homes, gathered them and worked to restore the vitality of our (meetings) and study."

They continued the fight for the union's SEBA status and raised urgent workers' demands such as higher wages. They filed petitions with the la-

bor agency to regularize contractual workers. Outside the factory, they supported other workers who lost their jobs amid times of emergency.

"We helped each other when the practice of putting workers in "floating status" became rampant and during typhoon Odette's devastation," Bokya said.

"During the pandemic, we helped one another in demanding aid from government agencies," said Bayong.

The experience of building the union raised Bokya and Bayong's awareness of broader social issues, particularly the state's widespread human rights abuses. "We joined protests against government killings and harassment, and rallies against violations of our rights," said Bokya. They also participated in relief drives for victims of disasters or fires in workers' communities.

In their personal lives, they learned discipline, courage and militance. "My life changed because I learned a lot about what a genuine union really is, how to really fight and not be subservient to the capitalist," said Bokya. "I learned more about principles, and I am no longer in fear of management," said Bayong.

"I moderated my drinking," Bokya added. "We are no longer afraid of speaking our minds and explaining our rights to others." AB

"Conwep..." from page 7

workers on "floating status" while firing others outright. The worst layoffs were at factories under Taiwanese company Sports City International, the largest employer in the Mactan Export Processing Zone. Between 2020 and 2023, at least 12,000 workers lost their jobs as the company shifted operations to its factories in Vietnam. Conwep claimed that the layoffs were to "save jobs." In reality, the retrenchments were done to maintain the company's

profit level at the expense of Filipino workers.

Like other companies in the enclaves, Conwep's foreign capitalists enjoy unprecedented privileges and incentives. These include tax exemptions, duty-free entry of raw materials, access to modern infrastructure built with public funds, "flexible" labor, and subsidies for utilities (water and electricity) and rent. They also enjoy additional tax deductions under the CREATE law. The "no union, no strike" is observed within the en-

claves, even if undeclared.

These foreigners are allowed to take all their profits out of the country without accountability in the Philippines. As they have done before, they arbitrarily closed down their Philippine factories, completely abandoning workers.

In 2023, Conwep recorded over \$1 billion worth of exports. For 2024, the Foreign Buyers Association of the Philippines estimates that this will grow slightly by 2% or to \$1.33 billion due to the entry of new orders. AB

Cagayanons suffer costs of offshore and black sand mining

From the outset, foreign offshore mining operations along the coasts of Cagayan in 2021 have caused tremendous damage to the livelihood of farmers and fishermen in the Cagayan Valley region.

Considered as the first and largest in the country, offshore mining in Cagayan cover 56,013 hectares of coastline and ocean in 10 towns in the region (Sanchez Mira, Claveria, Pamplona, Abulug, Ballesteros, Aparri, Buguey, Sta. Teresita, Gonzaga and Sta. Ana). The mined sand is source of magnetite, 100% of which is exported to China, serving as a key component in steel production.

Apollo Global Capital Inc, a Chinese company, controls the operation. It was granted a 25-year mining license by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau under the Duterte regime. The permit was granted to AGCI despite widespread and strong opposition to the project by local officials, environmental groups and residents. It disregarded the extensive and irreparable damage caused by offshore mining to the ecosystem not only in the proximity of its operation, but in the wider ocean as well.

It will destroy 50 hectares of reefs and seagrass forests of pro-

TECTED islands and oceans, such as the Palau Island Protected Landscape and Seascape and the Babuyan Marine Corridor. These areas are home to dugongs, whales and many other endangered animals.

The company said their operations will not harm the environment, a claim debunked by researches and studies. Just drilling holes in the seabed to syphon the magnetite sand from the bottom already disrupts the ocean and all marine life. Dumping rocks and sand back into the sea after separating the mineral is also a major disturbance. Their ships also pose a danger to the communities along the coast of Gonzaga. In 2023, the dredger's anchor chains broke due to the strong winds during Typhoon Egay. One of its supports fell and swept ashore.

Since the operations began, Gonzaga fishermen have been prohibited from fishing in the mine area. Due to the lingering effects of previous black sand mining operations along the town's coast, they have

been forced to fish elsewhere as there was nothing more to catch near the coast.

This affects the entire food security of the region. The mining operations covered the municipal waters (15 kilometers of ocean from the coast) which once produced 60.2% of Cagayan Valley's fish supply.

Mining disguised as dredging

Cagayanons continue to suffer from the effects of black sand mining by the Riverfront Construction Inc in the Cagayan River under the guise of "dredging" of the Cagayan River Restoration Program.

In Aparri, the livelihood of 11,000 fisherfolk was affected by the relentless operation of dredgers and large vessels carrying stone and sand to China. They say the activities of these ships create noise and excessive light, and dump chemicals that disrupt the ecosystem causing the decline in the number of fish and aramang (small shrimp) that are the main source of their livelihood. The company digs in areas where they fish, far from the area designated for dredging.

Fisherfolk income dropped drastically since the "dredging" project began. Previously, five days of fishing could yield 200 containers of aramang, but now they are lucky to fill 50 containers. Similarly, a small boat could catch 200 kilos in one night's fishing, but now it can only bring home three kilos. By 2022, their income dropped to ₱300 to ₱1,000 for a three-day fishing, a far cry from their previous income of ₱3,000 to ₱7,000.

Even the livelihood of vendors is affected. Before the project, the income of those who sun-dry and sell aramang and other fish reaches ₱8,000. Since 2021, their income from 5-day sales no longer reaches ₱700.

