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BATINGAW; BELL; HERALD; The New Voice of Filipino Migrants in Australia

Workers build nations, capitalist bring workers down

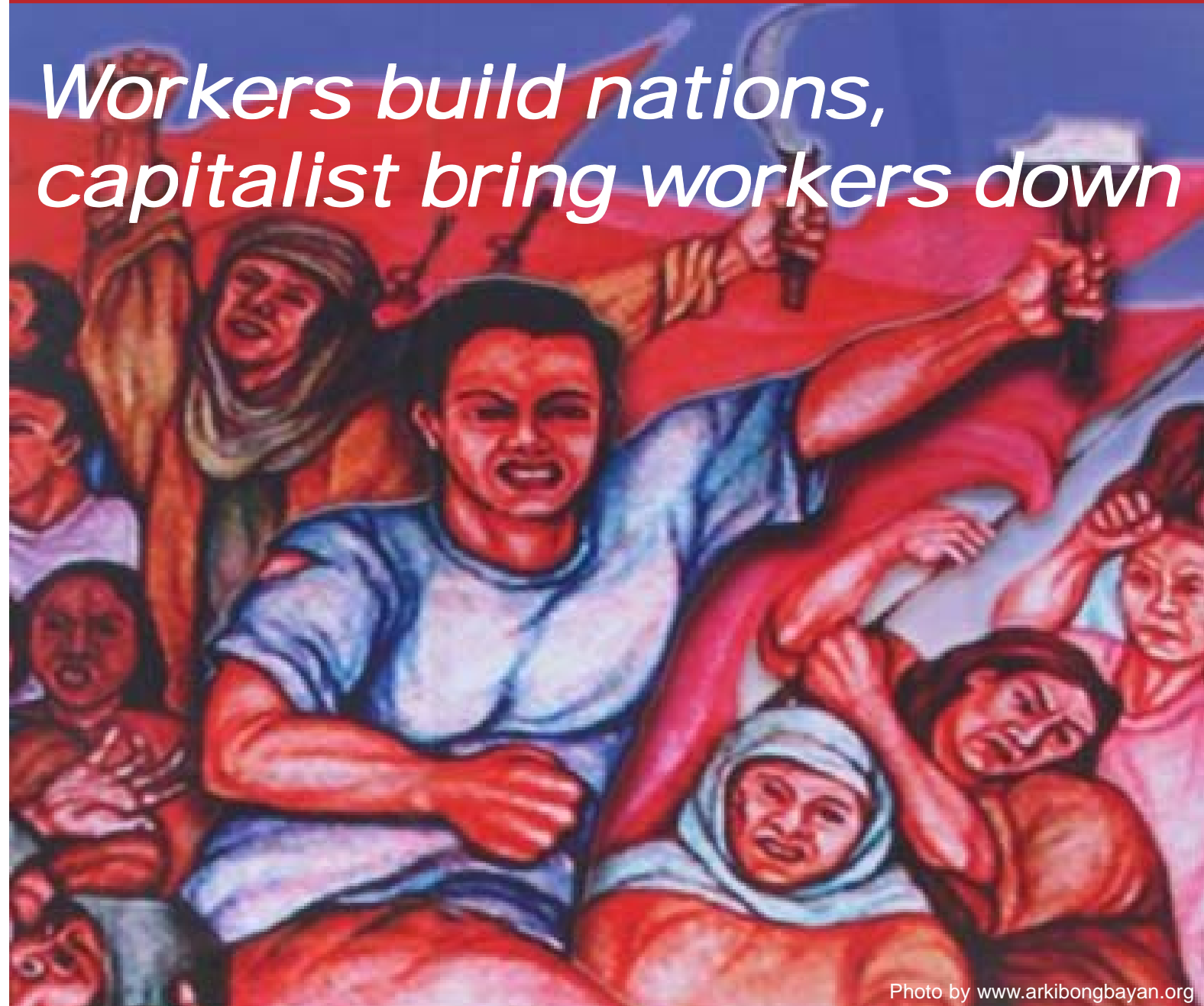


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Workers build nations, capitalist bring workers down

Workers build Australia. This is one of the themes at the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. The sight of workers from different industries showcased in a very important global event - the Olympics, touched the hearts of many working Australians and people around the world who were glued to their television screens night and day eight years ago.

It is 2008, another Olympic year. Workers once again proved that no Olympics can ever happen without their contribution as thousands of blue collar workers toil day and night to finish the Olympic site in Beijing in time.

In eight years, how were the workers treated? Are they given fair wages and other benefits for their contribution to Australia, to the Philippines and to the world?

In Australia, workers' strikes were banned in many work sites, the ABCC (Australian Building and Construction Commission) was formed as an instrument to harass and control construction workers. The Howard government's introduced and discredited work choices - a new labor law which drastically reduced if not removed unions' ability to help and represent the workers and which gave the employer more choices in dealing with the workers - was implemented. This is just to name a few.

In the Philippines workers confront daily many difficulties and issues that drag them further to poverty. Until now bureaucrat capitalist controlling government regularly blocked the demand for a P125.00 (just over A\$3) per day wage increase. Unemployment is an all time high while gross corruption in the highest echelon of government goes unabated.

Worldwide, more than sixty percent of the employed workers earn a measly one to three dollars per day. The International Labor Organisation (ILO) called them as the increasing "working Poor" who are mostly concentrated in the third world countries like the Philippines.

Karl Marx described wage as the amount needed by a worker to support himself and his family decently. This would include eating at least three times a day, a house to live, education for children, health, a needed rest and recreation and other basic necessities. No person then would suffer or have difficulty in supporting his or her family if he or she has a job, considering that every worker should receive a wage. Why then that there are workers who could hardly send their children to school, or who cannot afford to feed their family three times a day or who cannot afford to buy or rent a house? Why are there many workers who cannot afford doctors and medical cost for their family?

Even on the simple equation of wage equal decent living, we can deduce that in the present day and age many workers are not receiving fair wages. This is because in many countries and areas, the wage is determined by the capitalist employers without the participation of the

workers or the workers' able representatives, the union and workers' organisations.

This abnormal phenomenon only confirms one other Marxist analysis - that wage as determined by capitalist is calculated such that there is only enough for the worker to go back to the same backbreaking job the next day.

When capitalist experts determine the minimum wage, they do not consider the amount that the workers require to live decently. Their utmost consideration is that they squeeze the biggest profit from their business.

The workers' harsh situation especially in the Philippines is worsened by the rice crises, oil price hikes and soaring prices of basic commodities. Rice, the staple food of Filipinos has not only more than doubled its price but is also in short supply. Filipinos have to wait in kilometers queues to buy a kilogram or two of rice.

Another group of workers, the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are hit hard by the current economic crisis. The continuous devaluation of U S dollars against other denominations in the world including the Philippine peso virtually reduces the buying capacity of the OFW dollar earnings. In addition to this, the Philippine government will be charging .15% tax to OFW remittances. This is another heavy burden added to the already excessive fees and exactions by the Philippine government and the employment agencies. The Philippine economy which has always been pegged to the US dollar would have long suffered more than a meltdown if not for the billions of money regularly pumped in by the OFWs.

So, where do the workers lie in the ladder of significance and importance to the world's monopoly capitalists? The answer is both at the top and at the bottom depending on who is watching. Commodities do not earn extra added value from which the capitalists derive their mega profit without the application of labor. Workers are still the main factor that gives massive wealth to the capitalist. On the other hand, the capitalist would not give the workers their due share. They would continuously exploit them, treat them with contempt and try to reduce their value by reducing the wages and benefits that they have to pay.

In whichever side or whatever way we look at the issue, workers are the most powerful force in the world's capitalist system. They have the capability to paralyze the whole productive system. They have the capability to enrich their employers and give the capitalist the chance to amass massive wealth.

Mayday is the international day of workers. Let the workers claim their rightful place in this world. On this special day, all workers should come and join the Mayday rally and other activities in their respective places. Show the world that you are a force to reckon with. ###

Migrante slams documentary stamp tax on OFW remittances

An alliance of organizations composed of OFWs and their families today slammed the planned collection of a documentary stamp tax on remittances through remittance companies as yet another Arroyo scheme to bleed OFWs dry.

According to a Western Union source in Dubai, cited by Migrante Middle East, the Arroyo government will soon collect a .15% documentary stamp tax (DST) on OFW remittances sent through remittance companies.

Already, the Arroyo government collects a .15% DST from OFW families on remittances sent through local banks.

"It's as if the knife the Arroyo government stabbed into our back just got deeper. Given that OFW families already reel from the lower dollar exchange rate as they try to grapple with rising food prices - it's utterly unjust and immoral for them to add this new 'state exaction'. In fact, the intensifying economic crisis gripping the Filipino people merits the immediate scrapping of all service charges and fees against OFW remittances. And the first to go should be this documentary stamp tax," says Connie Bragas-Regalado, Migrante International Chairperson.

For every US\$200 (or P8,320 at a P41.60 exchange) remittance, the OFW family will be charged P12.48 in DST. Considering OFW remittances average US\$1 billion

monthly, that means US\$1.5 million (or P62 million) monthly in DST revenue.

"That means P62 million goes to the corrupt Arroyo government instead of to OFW families. Every peso an OFW family saves is another peso they can spend for food. Besides, given the Arroyo administration's reprehensible track record for high-level corruption, we oppose all schemes designed to pour more funds into her coffers. For all we know, this collection is geared towards fattening the administration's campaign kitty for 2010," she added.

The OFW leader noted that the DST is in addition to the other service charges deducted by the remittance company. For example an IMF study states average remittance charges for the Philippines range from US\$15 to US\$26 for a US\$200 remittance.

"The expansion and collection of these burdensome 'state exactions' or government fees is all the more offensive because of this administration's track record of exporting, exploiting and criminally neglecting countless OFWs and their families. We demand the immediate scrapping of the DST on all OFW remittance transactions, through bank and non-bank channels, as a form of immediate economic relief," concluded Bragas-Regalado. #

For reference:
Connie Bragas-Regalado, Chairperson

Get Involved!

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I would like to:

- become a member of Migrante Melbourne
- be updated with information from Migrante Melbourne
- donate to Migrante Melbourne



Migrante Melbourne is a voluntary community organisation of Filipino and Filipino-Australian migrants and workers promoting and upholding their welfare, human rights and workers' rights. It also deepens members' awareness of the root reasons of the Filipino hegira to over 180 countries and settlement issues in their adopted homelands.

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Migrante's protest rally highlights 7 major sins of GMA

Members of Migrante Melbourne and supporters from trade unions and other organizations gathered together for the peaceful protest rally in front of State Library in Melbourne on March 17 calling for the ousting of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The protest rally was supported and attended by Gabriela Australia, Philippine Australia Solidarity Association (PASA), Australia Asia Worker Links (AAWL), several unions including the Communications Plumbing and Electrical Unions (CEPU) and other supporters.

Highlighted on the rally was the so called 'seven major ghastly sins of the Arroyo government'. These seven major

sins are the massive corruption, rampant political killings, gross human rights violations, criminal neglect of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW's), puppetry to the US government, election fraud and cheating, and compulsive lying to the Filipino people.

One of the speakers at the rally, May Kotsakis, Co-Chairperson of PASA expounded the seven major sins of the Arroyo government.

They also recalled the 13th anniversary of the execution of Flor Contemplacion, an OFW in Singapore. Her execution is one example of the hapless flight of the OFW's towards finding a better future in a foreign land.

An open letter to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo by PASA calling for Arroyo to step down and give way to another leader who can ensure that human rights in the Philippines is respected, rid of the corruption entrenched in her government, accept the responsibility of caring for the Filipino people, ensure free and honest elections and maintain good governance for the improvement of the lives of Filipinos was also distributed at the rally.



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About Batingaw

Batingaw is a bi-monthly newsletter expressing views, news and analysis from Migrante Melbourne. An important aspect of developing this newsletter is an intimate knowledge of and close involvement in all aspects of the Philippine and Australian struggles for justice, democracy and fair-go.

Contributing to Batingaw:

Articles, photographs, cartoons, clippings, comments or a few lines are all very welcome. All material should be sent electronically to: melbourne@migrante.org.au. Readers are encouraged to contribute whatever they can by sending donations to the above address.

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Local

Migrante and Gabriela partakes in Bayside Festival

Migrante Melbourne and Gabriela Australia participated for the first time in the 31st year of Bayside Festival organized by Hobsons Bay City Council held in Altona on March 8 - 9.

Apart from Filipino ethnic group, there were also Arabic, Greek, Jamaican, African, Ethiopian, Sudanese, Malay, Macedonian, Karen and others.

Migrante and Gabriela took part through selling Filipino food, and other Filipino products. Other ethnic groups also prepared their own delicacies.

The two days festival was apt for the whole families and friends to enjoy and spend time together. There were carnival alley rides and amusements such as Jumping Castle, Giant Slide, Cup N Saucer, Hurricane, Bungee Jumping, Laughin' Clowns, Cha Cha, etc.

Highlighted on the first day were Altona Lions Craft Market held in Logan Reserve and Arts and Home Crafts show in Finnish Hall, Pier Street.

An open concert on Saturday night was held in Cherry Lake Reserve and fireworks followed then.

On the second day of the festival, members of Migrante and Gabriela joined the parade by wearing regional Filipino costumes. Members were proud as their organization was called and introduced to the community.

The parade started from Queen Street and ended up in Cherry Lake Reserve.



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GABRIELA AUSTRALIA'S
DANCE FOR THE CHILDREN



By Stephanie Rabusa

The Capitalist World System and Global Warming

There have been many reasons for global warming. However, over the last 150 years, the main reasons scientists have identified for the rise in the earth's temperature is the continuous burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and the use of particular farming methods (People's Health Movement, 2005).

Many of the identified sources of global warming are by-products of capitalism and the current world system. Some of them are: growing global population clamoring for both basic and prestigious resources, increase in demand for motor vehicles, increase in number of airplane flights, overheating and overcooling of larger dwellings (eg. McMansions), deforestation, animal production and production of endless selection of consumer products in the modern or post-modern world.

Changes in ecosystems affect the future of humanity whether through disease, pollution, accident, war or natural disaster. In the past, environmental problems were mostly caused by risks that are only seen within the local context. However, in today's world, there is a much wider problem that encompasses our people's livelihood, health and survival. As globalization and the proliferation of the current capitalist system continues, so will the threat to humans across the globe.

According to the report by the People's Health Movement (2005) the effects of climate change include: (i) food security threats brought about by droughts and damaged agricultural systems, (ii) destruction of freshwater supplies caused by higher sea levels (iii) poverty and mass migration caused by climate change might cause human rights abuses (iv) humanitarian emergencies due to extreme weather (v) deaths caused by temperature extremes, (vi) increase in infectious diseases. These are only some of the possible effects of higher global temperatures caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

Many have criticized the capitalist corporate-led globalization that is threatening the long-term sustainability of the planet. And many others have argued that the current capitalist system of production and consumption has led to the increase of the earth's temperature since the start of the industrial revolution.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global average surface temperatures rose .6-.7 °C during the 20th century and is projected to rise 3°C at present rate of greenhouse emissions by 2100. According to this study, the contributing countries that produce the largest amount of carbon emissions are those that are industrialized and are industrializing. The U.S. emits 27%, Europe (as a whole) emits 24%, Japan emits 5%, East Asia (China and India) emit 11%, Australia emits 1%. Regions

such as South East Asia (emit 2%), South Asia (2%) and Africa (2.5%), where the poorest countries in the world are located do not emit as much.

The figures above show that the richer industrialized countries contribute more to carbon emissions producing greenhouse gases but these figures have been steadily going down since 1975. However, due to the relocation of manufacturing plants and factories from industrialized capitalist/semi-industrialized countries to developing countries, emissions in developing countries have been steadily increasing. Environmental problems (and global warming) in developing countries are overlooked, and most cases ignored, in favour of 'economic gains'.

The aim of the capitalists is to make money and to stick to the principles of profit-making. Everything else that is linked, like environmental degradation, is oftentimes disregarded. Based on the assumption that the world has finite resources, capitalists around the globe, mainly in the forms of multinational and transnational corporations, exploit resources of mainly third world resource-rich countries. Third world countries that have very lax environmental laws (and low carbon emissions) can be manipulated by these MNCs and TNCs with the help of international institutions like the World Bank and IMF.

Due to the promise of economic prosperity, third world countries open their doors to neoliberal policies implemented by the IMF and the World Bank without proper consideration of the future of the environment. These neoliberal policies have led to 'free use' of the countries' resources. Without proper monitoring, MNCs and TNCs are only able to do what they like without having to answer to environmental degradation and their contribution to global warming because addressing global warming issues will incur more costs and reduce their profits.

Failure to address the issue of global warming and the earth depleting resources remain the characteristic of the institutions that govern global politics. Scientific advances cannot are not sufficient to address the inequalities and the problems encountered by the developing world's population, who are most likely the ones who will feel the effects of global warming firstly if not the most. With increasing globalization that further undermines the environmental and social wellbeing of societies, especially developing nations, we can envisage further threats to our safety.

According to John Bellamy Foster "The ecological crisis engendered by the capitalist economy threatens the collapse of world civilization, and irreparable damage to entire biosphere from which human society and the planet as we know it may never recover - if current trends are not

The movement represented by the Dalai Lama is utterly reactionary. It is for the restoration of a despotic and extremely exploitative theocracy in Tibet. Worse, it is an instrument of US imperialism in its dual policy of containment and engagement against China and the Chinese people. It is condemnable.

The repressive and bloodsucking theocracy represented by the Dalai Lama has long been overthrown by the Tibetan people themselves, causing his flight from Tibet together with his ultra-reactionary retinue. Since then, these relics of the past have been used as anti-China lackeys of US imperialism in the Cold War and thereafter. They have been financed by the Central Intelligence Agency and other insidious state agencies of the US as well as by certain nongovernmental organizations and funding agencies of monopoly capitalist groups.

Some progressives have argued that the level of oppression, exploitation and discrimination against the Tibetan people has risen because of the growth of capitalism in China and that therefore the Tibetan people are justified to assert and exercise the right to national self-determination up to the right to secede. But the main contradiction to deal with first of all on the issue of Tibet is between the Chinese people of various nationalities, including the Tibetans, who uphold China's national sovereignty and the Dalai Lama's pro-imperialist reactionary movement which demands the restoration of a backward social system far more reactionary and brutal than capitalism.

That the Tibet Autonomous Region belongs to China is a longstanding fact in previous centuries and in the recent decades of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese people of various nationalities, including the Tibetans, concur on this fact. Even the Dalai Lama makes public protestations that he is not demanding the separation of Tibet from China.

But he and his ultra-reactionary kind and their imperialist handlers raise claims about "ethnic genocide" and "human rights violations" against China precisely to support the maximum objective of seeking the separation of Tibet from China and the intervention of imperialist powers and

REACTIONARY MOVEMENT REPRESENTED BY DALAI LAMA IS FINANCED BY US IMPERIALISM AND IS CONDEMNABLE

By Prof. Jose Maria Sison
Chairperson, International Coordinating Committee
International League of Peoples' Struggle
20 April 2008

the minimum objective of discrediting and cutting down China to serve the purposes of the imperialist powers on time for the Olympic Games.

The multi-media owned and controlled by the imperialist powers play up and drum up the smallest protest pickets of the followers of the Dalai Lama in various capitals of the world and the hypocritical statements of Bush, Brown and other imperialist leaders about human rights. They do so to an extent far beyond the media coverage given to the continuing mass actions of the people against the war of aggression in Iraq and to the massive violation of international law and human rights by the imperialist powers and their puppets in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Turkey, India, Tamil Eelam, the Philippines, and elsewhere in the world.

The most interesting development in the Himalayas today is not the protest actions in support of the reactionary movement represented and headed by the Dalai Lama. It is the unprecedented resounding victory of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in the elections for Constituent Assembly. This spells the abolition of the monarchy and establishment of the democratic federal republic and opens further the way to basic democratic reforms towards the completion of the new democratic revolution. But the multi-media of the imperialist powers play up the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan reactionaries and play down the progressive political victory of CPN (Maoist) and the Nepali people. ###

The Capitalist World System and Global Warming... (continued...)

reversed. The latest scientific reports indicate that global warming is, if anything, increasing faster than we previously thought, leading to fears of unpredictable and cumulative effects and of abrupt climate change. The removal of environmental regulations as part of the neo-liberal economics has only served to heighten this ecological crisis".

Globalization and the current capitalist world system per se is not the only cause of global climate change, but the

values and processes of economic and technological globalization as currently practiced have amplified the climate change process and other global environmental changes. As long as we have processes driven primarily by markets, the profit motive and capitalist self-interest, we will continue to degrade our natural base.

Sources:

www.ipcc.ch

John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review*, volume 57, number 3.

Neo-liberal policies aggravate world hunger and food insecurity

Reyvi Mariñas

Television images haunt us every time we watch the evening news: stunted, bony bodies; malnourished, sick children; long queues waiting in a food ration. These are the images of the continuing problem of world hunger and food insecurity.

Millions of people, especially children, around the world go hungry. But the world has ample food production to provide every people on the planet enough food to eat.

Yet hunger in the face of sufficient food supply still persists, particularly in the third world, despite the apparent global economic growth rates and sustained distribution of food supply through global agricultural trade.

The recent world food crisis has sparked tremendous panic and instability around the globe, particularly in developing countries like the Philippines.

Why is this? Do neo-liberal policies, through privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation, have something to do with world hunger, poverty and food insecurity? Are there any factors that affect both the surge of food prices and the unavailability of food supply, especially rice production? What can we do about these?

Patterns of growth in world food production

It seems that the overall trend of food availability in developing countries has dramatically increased for the past 30 years. Rapid productivity in the agricultural sector in many developing countries has led to gains in per capita production and reduced unit costs and prices.

According to the recent data from Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), world agricultural output (crop and livestock) at the start of the new millennium is estimated to have increased by 2.3 percent.

Both the developed and developing countries' current agricultural output has expanded at a reasonable pace since the early 1990s, with an estimated growth of 2.8 percent for the developing countries and 1.8 percent for the developed countries.

The level of growth in grain (cereal, wheat, rice, and coarse grains) trade and production is also at an all-time high. One study shows that both per capita production and consumption of grains have increased in most developing countries during the period 1960 to 1995.

In fact, world trade in coarse grains in 2000/2001 (July/June) expanded to a record level of about 105 million tonnes, 2 percent higher than in 1999/2000. World rice trade in 2001 was also expected to increase by more than 3 percent to 23 million tonnes.

World poverty and hunger

However, the world has made gradual but significant progress in improving food security and human welfare over the last three to four decades. And the progress has not all been promising.

World hunger persists despite the apparent global economic growth rates and sustained increase in world output of agricultural products. They are rooted in persistent poverty and worsening inequality in the world.

Of the world's 6 billion people, 20 per cent (1.2 billion) of the world's population lives on less than \$1 a day and fully half of the human race (2.8 billion) earn less than \$2 a day. The average income in the richest 20 countries is 37 times the average of the poorest countries, a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years.

Global poverty and inequality are even greater in relation to property and wealth. Again, it has been revealed that "the world's 200 richest people more than doubled their net worth in the four year to 1998, to more than \$1 trillion. The assets of the top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and their 600 million people".

Another distressing phenomenon is the escalating food insecurity in poor and developing countries. Hunger and food insecurity are two sides of the same coin.

Again a recent FAO Report indicates that up to 815 million people in the world go hungry and suffer from under nourishment. About 174 million children, over a third of world's under-fives, suffer from malnutrition, despite the number has dropped by 18 percent during the last 30 years.

These statistics are depressing enough to reveal the extent of global poverty and our moral responsibility to tackle this global problem.

Food monopoly as a result of neo-liberal policies

There is a broad understanding amongst mainstream economists and commentators that the recent world food crisis is the result of increasing use of biofuels and diversion of farmlands from food production (*The Guardian Weekly*, April 11-17, 2008, pp. 8-9).

Whilst partly true, this view misses the main point that the current crisis is attributable to the continuing implementation of neo-liberal policies (i.e. trade liberalisation) and the monopoly control of food supply by big multinational companies (MNCs).

Let us take trade liberalisation as an example. For developing countries, open market means the surge of cheap imports (agricultural and food products) into the country.

It is important to understand that the majority of poor people in developing countries belong to small farming families who live in rural areas. Most farmers are small-scale, living in poorly-resource remote areas with low potential and access to land and agriculture.

Some experts claimed that the introduction of cheap imports, as a result of open market, is actually good for a country because it gives consumers more choice, and broader qualities of goods to choose from. However, competition from cheap imports has placed poor farmers in developing countries out of business.

The reason is that cheap imported foods coming into developing countries are sold below the normal domestic productions, which are usually cheaper, but more devastating to local producers.

Monopoly control of food supply by big MNCs is also widespread. Monopoly of food production has concentrated farms in a wide cross section of the country. This has resulted in the marginalisation of small producers, adding to unemployment and poverty.

The liberalisation boom that MNCs and private industries boast and are enjoying seem to be at the expense of poor farmers, small producers and ordinary consumers.

Impact of food crisis in the Philippines

Many developing countries including the Philippines had been hardly hit by the recent increase of world food price and the decrease of domestic food supply.

Particularly devastating is the chronic crisis of rice production in the country. From being self-sufficient and rice exporting country in the 1980s, the country has become a net importer of rice since the 1990s.

Up until now, rice production in the Philippines remains small scale and low in productivity. Equally worse is the conversion of rice farms into commercial uses (e.g. golf course) and conversion from rice to export winners (e.g. flower farm).

Since its privatisation in the 1980s, the National Food Authority's (NFA) role in ensuring food security of the country has been reduced into a mere 'facilitator' of big rice cartels. As a result, NFA has heavily relied on rice imports for local distribution.

It is vital to understand that rice importation is not a solution to the current rice crisis in the Philippines. It is, in fact, part of the problem. The reason is: with greater access to rice imports, private traders stand to benefit from the removal of rice import quota and give them more control over price speculations.

"Why make the culprit the solution?" asked IBON (an independent think-tank) Executive Director Rosario Bella Guzman. "Importation has worsened the country's rice crisis, and by importing more to address the current rice insecurity is an illogical solution", she added.

"Focusing on measures that will seriously improve local rice production and self-sufficiency remains the most sensible step in addressing the rice crisis. Recognizing that that sector's backward state and trade liberalization are the reasons behind the crisis will result in more substantial solutions other than importation", said Guzman.

Poverty and low income are also contributing factors why many Filipinos go hungry. This is because their daily minimum wage has not kept-up with the rising cost of living.

According to IBON, "From 2001 to 2007, the real value of the daily minimum wage in Metro Manila has grown by less than one percent or from P246 in 2001 to P249 in 2006, even as food prices have increased by 21.5% over the same period".

It is clear that while poverty is the main cause of hunger and food insecurity, food insecurity can in turn exacerbate or worsen poverty. To address the problem of poverty and food insecurity, the control of food production and movement of food across the world should be addressed.

In the midst of looming world food crisis, it is imperative that we must place 'the people' at the centre stage of the ends and means of human development, and not the market forces that hinder human potentials.

Sources:

The Guardian Weekly, April 11-17 2008 (special section on 'World Food Crisis', pp. 8-9)., Food and Agricultural Organisation website: <http://www.fao.org>, IBON Info website: <http://info.ibon.org>.



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Macapagal-Arroyo regime wholly liable on the death of OFW inside the deportation center

An alliance of overseas Filipino workers based in the Middle East today said through its regional coordinator that the negligent Arroyo administration along with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Philippine officials in Saudi Arabia are wholly liable on the death of an OFW inside the deportation center in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

"The Arroyo administration which has been negligent on its responsibility providing protection to OFWs in distress and runaways in the Middle East has once again proved its own incapability by not saving the life of distress OFW Ryan Castillo, 30 years old from Batangas, who died inside the deportation center in Jeddah last April 6 reported by our Migrante Chapter in Jeddah and was later confirmed by Consul general Ezzadin Tago," said John Leonard Monterona, Migrante Middle East regional coordinator.

"Migrante in behalf of the bereaved family of deceased OFW Ryan Castillo is contemplating and studying on filling an appropriate case, both criminal and administrative, against all the negligent Philippine Consular officials including the Macapagal-Arroyo administration," Monterona added.

The OFW leader is also urging the members of the Congress especially the Committee on Labor and Employment, Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs as well as the Foreign Relations committee and any other concerned committees both in the Senate and the House of Representatives to conduct an inquiry into this matter in aid of legislation so as to prevent a repeat of this incident.

Monterona said that despite intensive campaigns and numerous activities spearheaded by Migrante International and its chapters in the Middle East urging the Arroyo administration, without delay and further a do, to immediately arrange the repatriation of stranded OFWs in Jeddah, inside the deportation centers and those outside who are seeking refuge at Khandera Bridge in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia as their lives have been so miserable; no food to eat, some of them sick and ill, and some is already suffering trauma due to the abuses and physical harm inflicted to them by their employers.

Monterona further said that the Macapagal-Arroyo regime and Philippine officials abroad cannot and could not keep only to themselves and away from the knowledge of the public the worsening situations of fellow OFWs in the Middle

East as the victims themselves or their families are directly seeking assistance from caused-oriented migrant organizations like Migrante, among others.

"Distress and runaway OFWs often shared their problems to us elaborating how Philippine Embassy and Consulate officials have badly treated their cases; and could even "threaten" them to be returned to their employer or to be sent to jail if they will not accept the so called "amicable settlement" with their abusive employers," Monterona added.

Monterona said that with this arrogant support system, values and culture prevailing in Philippine Embassies and Consulates should be changed. "This could only be done if all the inept post officials abroad along with Mrs. Arroyo and political appointees in Malacanang will be fired and be replaced by capable officials who have a compassion and willingness to promote and protect OFWs' rights and welfare," he continued.

The migrant leader has also expressed alarm on the continued increase of runaway and distress OFWs in the entire Middle East.

Migrante Middle East has listed an estimated 1,300 distress and runaway OFWs collated from the following: more than 500 in Jeddah, more than 200 in Riyadh, more than 200 in Lebanon, less than 150 in Jordan, less than 100 in Kuwait and UAE respectively, and less than 50 in Qatar.

"The Arroyo administration and Philippine posts abroad could expect more complaints and cases from OFWs in the coming months as this increasing numbers of distress and runways is relative to the increase of Filipino workers deployed in the Middle East and so long as many foreign employers remain indifferent on the rights and welfare of its employed migrant workers," Monterona explained.

Monterona noted that there will be increasing numbers of aspiring overseas Filipino workers in the coming months because of the worsening economic situations in the Philippines with the soaring prices of basic commodities including rice, bread, gas and oil while the minimum wage of an ordinary worker remains the same. "This ever worsening economic situation has left no other option to many disgruntled workers and farmers, and newly graduates looking for work abroad who will end up as construction workers, domestic helpers, and in the service sector, respectively" he added.

"But because of the shrinking and competitive labor market, these huge numbers of prospective Filipino migrant workers

would be facing a hard time to get a job abroad and to include the burden of numerous government fees imposed to an aspiring OFW before finally leaving the country for work," Monterona averred.

The OFW leader further said that once these hired workers are already abroad, they will also suffer like the many others who have gone through: contract substitutions and violations, non-payment of overtime work, numerous salary deductions by their employer such as medical health, working permits, no day offs, sexual abuses and harassment, which are enough reasons an OFW will be forced to runaway and seek refuge to Philippine Embassies and Consulates.

"This would be a never-ending vicious cycle consequential to the intensification of exporting labor by the Macapagal-Arroyo regime that failed to develop a strong local economy that would absorb the growing labor force with sufficient income enough to survive a family," Monterona added.

Monterona said that the Macapagal-Arroyo regime is only after and interested in the billions of remittances from OFWs that is keeping the economy long in crisis afloat.

"We are observing now much dependency of the government on the billions of remittances coming from

OFWs, thus for the Macapagal-Arroyo regime intensification of exporting labor is necessary to survive the economy and it is likewise be made a guarantee for potential foreign loans from foreign financial institutions such as the International Monetary Funds and World Bank (IMF-WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) among others," Monterona added.

"It is even clearer now that the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, by not seriously doing its state-mandated responsibility providing assistance, protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of the almost 10-M OFWs and families, is deliberately utilizing and maximizing the sell out of its people's labor in blind adherence to the World Trade Organizations (WTO) imposition on General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS) that ensure shortening of employment contracts, lowering of wages, continuing attacks on workers' unions rights, prevention of immigration, and ensuring the flow of cheap temporary migrant workers for the benefit of multinational corporations," Monterona ended. # # #

For reference:

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STOP THE KILLINGS IN THE PHILIPPINES

From 2001 when Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo assumed the Philippine presidency, Karapatan (Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights) has documented more than 900 political killings and 200 disappeared.

Join Us in Demanding

Justice for the victims and the end of killings, abduction and harassment of human rights and community activists in the Philippines

Events Calendar - Mark your Diary

01 May 2008, Thursday - Multicultural Celebration

7pm, Trades Hall, New Ballroom Corner Lygon and Victoria Streets, Carlton Organised by various groups as part of the MayDay activities

04 May 2008, Sunday - MayDay March & Festival

12 noon, corner Lygon and Victoria Streets, Carlton Annual Worker's Day event organised by the MayDay committee and the Victorian TradesHall Council. Family activities, a march and rally, afternoon tea and community singing and concert

17 May 2008, Saturday - Gabriela Australia's Dance for the Children

6 pm till midnight, St. Bernadette Hall, Cooke Avenue, Sunshine Disco, ballroom dancing and fun night to support the Children's Rehabilitation Centre In the Philippines

9 June 2008, Monday - International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS) - Australia

Founding anniversary

30 August 2008, Saturday - Migrante Melbourne's Tipanan

6 pm till midnight, Laverton Civic Hall, corner Railway Avenue and Crown Street, Laverton A family fun night to help maintain the Migrante Shelter, a shelter and service center for Overseas Filipino Workers



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Migrante Melbourne : : PO Box 606, Laverton, VIC 3028