

Philippines Australia Solidarity Group

NEWSLETTER

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ARMED VIGILANTES AND THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES


Participants in the Philippines Australia Solidarity Group (PASG) study tour of the Philippines in January 1988 visited the island of Cebu and spoke with KMU (May First Movement) organisers. At that time Australian Alan Bond was negotiating to invest in Atlas Mines located in Toledo City, Cebu. The planned visit to this largest mine in Asia to observe workers conditions was abandoned due to the unrestrained activities of armed "anti-communist" vigilantes. In January 1989 four Australian unionists were threatened by two armed vigilantes as they attempted to tour the mine.

During 1988, nine KMU officials and members were murdered at the Atlas Mine and 80 other KMU officials in Cebu were forced to resign due to death threats. A Fact-Finding Mission investigating vigilante abuses reported by the Atlas KMU organisation noted in October 1988 that the presence and activities of armed vigilantes was common knowledge among residents of Toledo City and they documented incidences of death threats, harrasmant, robbery, illegal arrest, murders, strafing and attempted killing.

The KMU won union certification at the Atlas Mines in 1985 and through collective bargaining they improved worker's wages from \$2 to \$4-5 per day, won shorter hours and had 4500 casuuls made permanent employees. These gains have been paid for by the cost of many lives. The Atlas KMU workers, like other workers throughout the Philippines, justifiably believe that they are suffering worse oppression, repression and exploitation under the Aquino regime than they did under the previous Marcos dictatorship.

The KMU are opposed by the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) which is closely linked to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the CIA. The commanding general of the 347th PC Company has admitted that some military commanders have issued mission orders to vigilantes operating at the Atlas Mines despite the unlawfulness of the practice and their activities. While the Atlas Mines management denies detailed knowledge and support of the vigilantes, in October 1987 the personal manager granted 10 workers leave with pay to undergo paramilitary training at the 347th PC. As well, vigilantes have been reloading used bullets at the Atlas Mines workshop and leaflets labelling KMU members as "communists" have been printed using Atlas mines equipment. Moreover, the four Australian unionists visiting in January 1989 were named on a "shit list" which falsely named them as all members of Australia-Asia Workers Links which was then falsely linked to the New People's Army. The vigilantes prepared this bogus material from information supplied by Atlas Mines.

Trade unionists in the Philippines are seeking Australian support whether financially, through letters of support or by communicating the reality of their suffering. Meanwhile, Australia annually provides over \$1.5 million in military aid to the AFP which supports the vigilante squads murdering and terrorising workers struggling for justice. Through PASG you can lend your support to Filipino workers, especially at Atlas Mines, and campaign to end Australian military aid to the Philippines.



MANILA DECLARATION AND REGIONAL MONITORING NETWORK INITIATED AT THE ASIA PACIFIC PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE ON PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Asia Pacific People's Conference on Peace and Development (APPCPD) was held in the Philippines over December 1988 through January 1989. The APPCPD is covered in depth in the Jan-Feb 1989 Philippine Issues, so this article focusses on the two important strategies for regional cooperation to emerge from the Peace Brigade; the Manila Declaration and the the Regional Monitoring Network. The principles of the Manila Declaration include:

- * the total dismantling of all nuclear arms and foreign military and intelligence bases in our region;
- * an end to foreign military assistance to repressive regimes;
- * the total removal of all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle from the region;
- * full support for the rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and to their self-determination and preservation of their cultural identity;
- * united opposition to all forms of foreign and local exploitation of all oppressed sectors, classes and peoples;
- * full control over development aid by the community receiving the aid;
- * an end to foreign military exercises in the region;
- * opposition to production of and trade in armaments within the region;

* united action for genuine democracy, social progress and ecologically-balanced economic development;

* elimination of all discrimination based on race, gender and religion;

* the full implementation throughout the region of all international conventions on human rights, disarmament, peace and development;

The forum plans to hold the conference every two years, rotating the host country, which will next be Kanaky.

The Regional Monitoring Network functions to circulate and act against any incidents of harassment and human rights abuses against any of the Filipino hosts involved in the APPCPD and implementation of the Manila Declaration. PASG is contacted directly by the Ecumenical Partnership for International Concerns (EPIC), which is responsible for alerting Asia/Pacific contacts with details of the case. PASG then activates a local, national and international campaign of protest with delegations to respective national authorities and letters directly to Philippine authorities and international human rights advocates.

The Regional Monitoring Network has already documented the arrest of 18 from the Central Luzon Peasants Cooperative who actively participated in the Peace Brigade. Contact PASG Queensland if you wish to participate in the letter campaign to secure their release and be in solidarity with those who risked their lives to host Australians at the Peace Brigade.

STATEMENT OF THE CORDILLERA DELEGATION AT SESSION 6 OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, GENEVA, 1-5 AUGUST, 1988.

We, from the Cordillera People's Alliance are honored to be present once again in this prestigious assembly. We come here to speak before you on two important matters: first, the efforts we have done to advance the aspirations of the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera for self-determination, and, second, to impart to you what has recently been disturbing us in these efforts.

We speak for the Cordillera People's Alliance which is a broad federation of 124 organizations of the Igorot peoples. The CPA's member organizations include indigenous socio-political organizations and structures such as the clan, tribe, ato, dap-ay, bodong organizations, ili and barrio. The CPA also has sectoral organizations of farmers, workers, small-scale miners, youth and students, women, poor and professionals.

The CPA started with only 27 organizations when it was organized in June 1984 with the main purpose of uniting the Igorot people for the defense of the Cordillera ancestral domain and for self-determination.

Our organization since then has been working for the political and economic empowerment of the people of the Cordillera at the grass-roots level. This is done by community and sectoral organizing to strengthen organized people's power. CPA educational activities, training seminars and cultural activities are conducted to provide the people's organizations with the skill necessary for them to become organizationally self-reliant.

The CPA has been at the forefront of the mass movement for indigenous people's rights in the Cordillera during the darkest years of Martial Law under the Marcos dictatorship. In spite of the many hardships and repressions its members and leaders suffered under the military regime, it consistently and militantly defended the Cordillera people's rights.

Four years after being established, the CPA has been able to set up chapters in all five provinces of the Cordillera region. Our 124 organizations with a total membership of about 25,000 cover almost all of the 70 municipalities in the region.

Painstakingly, our member organizations have set up various socio-economic projects. In the village level where most of our members are, cooperatives for consumer's products, medical assistance and credit are common. These socio-economic structures are humbly small but nevertheless have been very useful in easing the poverty of the people resulting from neglect of government. Such have been our gains in what we see as a preparation for future autonomy.

The past year however, has particularly been very difficult for us. Policies, which-for-us-Igorots, run contrary to our ideals and concepts of self-determination and autonomy have been imposed upon us.

In February of 1987, our President announced a policy of total war against so-called insurgents. Alongside with the regular armed forces of the country, paramilitary units and vigilante groups were formed to beef up the counter-insurgency program of the state. In the Cordillera as in other parts of the country, we have experienced the rampant violation of human rights, especially in the countryside. The Cordillera People's Liberation Army or the CPLA is the more prominent of such groups in our area. Daniel Ngaya-an, a tribal leader and a CPA spokesman was killed by men of the CPLA led by Fr. Conrado Balweg in October of last year. Two months later, the CPLA abducted and killed Romeo Gardo, a youthful leader and organizer of the CPA. In March of this year, more than 50 families from two villages in Kalinga fled and evacuated because of death threats from the CPLA. These villagers were accused to be supporters of the insurgents. The list of abuses done by the CPLA vigilante group goes on and we have documented these.

In response to these, the Cordillera People's Alliance sponsored a People's Tribunal last April 24, 1988. In this Tribunal, tribal leaders from all over the Cordillera came together to listen to witnesses who narrated the crimes of the CPLA. The tribal leaders held a caucus after listening to all the witnesses and in a resolution they all signed, Conrado Balweg and the CPLA were guilty under the law of the bodong. The Supreme Court of the Philippine Government has also summoned Balweg to explain his side on the charges regarding Daniel Ngaya-an's death and other charges. In a statement which came out in the papers, Balweg declared that he is not bound by government laws thus, he did not appear in the court. In effect, Balweg has defied both indigenous and government laws.

Cordillera statement continued in next issue of the PASG Newsletter.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE ALWAYS WELCOMED

The Philippines Australia Solidarity Group (PASG) Queensland is part of a national organisation which has offices in all state capitals and in Canberra. It brings together people of diverse backgrounds and includes both Australians and Filipinos living in Australia. As well, it has close links with Filipino Community Organisations in Australia and the Philippines. Among its members there are people with extensive Philippine experience with information on trade unions, the role of the church (Christian and Non-Christian), women's organisations, industrial working conditions, peasant organisations, rural working conditions, teachers working conditions and the conditions of indigenous peoples in the Philippines. PASG in Queensland provides resource material such as slides and videos as well as speakers.

The objectives of PASG are to generate support in Australia for all Filipino organisations working for genuine democracy, freedom and sovereignty; to end Australian military aid to the Philippines and to oppose all forms of foreign intervention in the affairs of the Filipino people.

PASG holds regular meetings the second Tuesday of each month in the Albion Peace Centre, 102 Macdonald Road, Windsor. For further information contact David Hyndman, Ph.377 4029 or Terry Fisher, Ph.844 9641.

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I would like to:

- join PASG and receive a one year subscription to the PASG NEWSLETTER and Philippines Issues.
- receive other Philippine information materials.
- make a donation of \$----- for solidarity work.

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