



FILIPINO CHILDREN IN CRISIS

According to a report from the Salinlahi Foundation Inc. families in the Philippines are in crisis, a crisis so deep and pervasive as to threaten the nation's future. Philippine society, whether viewed in comparison to other nations or to itself over time, is according progressively less attention to children and families. The present economic and political situation has created a crisis for the most basic social unit, the family. And the greatest victims of this crisis are the children.

The majority of people in the Philippines are peasants and workers. Poverty is widespread in both urban and rural areas. Estimates of households living below the poverty threshold vary from about 50-70% of the population. This poverty is the product of gross inequality in the distribution of land and wealth. Some 5% of the population controls nearly 30% of total income while the poorest 70% live on just over 3% of the country's income. Over the decades the few rich have become fewer, but richer, while the ranks of the many poor have swelled, and the extent of their poverty has grown alarmingly.

The inability to solve socio-economic problems is in itself contributing to the much-publicized 'population explosion'. For the poor, children are valuable assets, in fact they are their only wealth. While each child may be seen by others as an extra mouth to feed, from another perspective, a child represents potential: two extra hands and a mind that will contribute to the family and society.

The official infant mortality rate (i.e. the number who die before the age of one year) as of 1985 is 58 per 1,000 live births. But many experts believe this to be an underestimate and put the figure in a range from 65 to 72 per 1,000. Nutritional deficiency is one of the leading causes of death not only among infants but for all age groups. Malnutrition is an urgent problem because the undernourished child is

more prone to disease and more susceptible to dying from diseases which should not be fatal (measles, for example). Under-nutrition also takes its toll among the survivors; moderate and severe under-nutrition stunts a child physically and mentally.

The Philippines ranks seventy-sixth in a list of 137 countries classified as having a high Under-Five Mortality Rate and third in the world for the number of blind people. It has the highest rate in the world for whooping cough, diphtheria and rabies, and has one of the highest rates of leprosy cases. In the western Pacific region, it has the highest number of cases of TB and polio.

The problem lies in an inadequate health care delivery system. Health personnel and hospitals are badly distributed. Even though the majority of people live in the rural areas, health resources are concentrated in hospitals and clinics in provincial town centres which are usually doctor-oriented, curative and expensive. A more holistic approach is missing in many government and non-governmental health programmes.



(Contd on page 7 >)

"I SEE U.S. INTERVENTION AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF THE COUNTRY'S ILLS"

Bishop Antonio Nepomuceno, OMI and Sister Carmela, OSB were in Brisbane from 1-7th November for the Queensland segment of the Philippines-Australia Ecumenical Church Conferences.

The main thrust of their visit was to acquaint church people in Queensland with the problems facing church workers in the Philippines, many of whom have been murdered and tortured under the Aquino administration.

The visitors addressed a public meeting, conducted a one-day seminar, spoke at a number of secondary schools and gave homilies at Sunday church services. The seminar was beautifully rounded off with a liturgy/celebration of solidarity, dinner and a cultural evening of dance performed by the local Filipino community.

At the seminar, Bishop Antonio spoke of the history of the churches from their colonial beginnings to current times with emphasis on the Marcos and Aquino periods. He said, "The reawakening of the Philippine Church started in the sixties after the second Vatican Council".

After Vatican II to the height of the Marcos regime "the Church's social justice programmes developed from charitable and 'dole-out' agencies to Total Human Development: co-ops, self help projects, prayers, etc. and then to Total Human Liberation: from injustice, alienation, manipulation, exploitation and oppression. All forms of non-violent creative protest actions were utilized like electoral boycotts, fastings, prayer rallies, creative drama, and civil disobedience".

There was great joy at the time of the EDSA recreation. It was hoped that "it would no longer be anathema to work and fight for justice and human rights ... with the overthrow of the dictator, it was expected that those working for justice and peace would no longer be branded as subversives or communists ... sadly, it was no so".

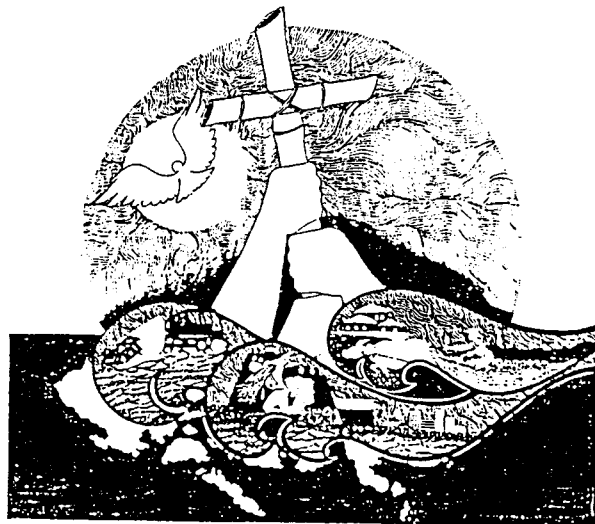
Bishop Antonio highlighted the Aquino administration's choice of a military solution to the country's deep

seated socio-economic problems. This approach has led to the formation of right wing death squads backed by the military. "I see US intervention as the main cause of the country's ills". The intervention, militarily, takes the form of the US bases, supply of military aid and financial support of the death squads.

Sr Carmela spoke of the situation in Negros Island where she works for the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines. She gave particular emphasis to the internal refugee problem on the island.

The Philippines military is currently engaged in Operation 'Thunderbolt' which is using a scorched earth tactic to sever alleged links between peasant communities and the New Peoples Army. The military drive peasant farmers and their families from their land and force them to relocate in towns. Communities refusing to leave are bombarded by artillery from the Army and harassed by vigilantes. Farmers returning to their land are shot by the military. The forced hamletting has resulted in severe starvation and malnutrition and the deaths of hundreds of children.

Both speakers said that church workers involved in peace and justice programmes were being murdered and tortured after being branded as communists and people in Australia falsely labeling church workers as communists are directly contributing to such torturing and murder.



ANTI-NUCLEAR PROTESTERS DEMAND "CLOSE NURRUNGAR IN 1990"



Five hundred anti-nuclear protesters gathered at Nurrungar during 25-30th September to protest the presence of the Nurrungar US Spy Base. The base is on the land of the Kokatha Aboriginal people.

In addition to Nurrungar, the Kokatha people have been forced to host the Woomera rocket testing range, the Roxby Downs uranium mine and the British nuclear testing programme in the 1950's.

Many of the protesters at Nurrungar had been to the Philippines as part of the 1989 Peace Brigade. Two visitors from the Philippines, Peylot an Aeta-Negrigo from Central Luzon and Sr. Carmen, his interpreter, spoke to the rally about Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base.

Clark Air Base occupies 121,030 acres of Negrigo land enclosed in a 22 mile perimeter and Subic Naval Base occupies Subic Bay and the 70,000 adjoining acres of Negrigo land. Subic Naval Base is the most important US naval base outside the US. It provides the upkeep and maintenance of ships supplying the US 7th Fleet with food, fuel and ammunition and has created what is now Olongapo City an infamous haven of 'rest and recreation' for its troops. The prime function of Clark Air Base is to provide a US air logistic hub for the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean up to the Middle East. As such, its mission is complementary to that of Subic.

The Nurrungar protest hit national and international headlines when Defense Minister Beasley sent in a plane load of troops and a number of demonstrators, mainly from Brisbane, climbed two high security barbed wire

fences, painted a peace sign on one radome and damaged the covering of another.

All protest action at Nurrungar was of a non-violent nature with mass actions on each day and various affinity groups arranging their own actions at other times. The first major action was a blockade of the bus transporting the base workers. The next day one of the perimeter fences to the outer part of the base was cut down. The significance of this symbolic action was that non-Aboriginal people removed a structure imposed on Aboriginal land. Two mass actions involved walking the 7km from the outer perimeter fence to the base.

On the last day the police squad known as 'Starforce' sprayed mace directly into the faces of five people although they were in no way resisting arrest. No medical attention was provided nor water to wash the chemical off the faces of those assaulted.

Protesters were generally arrested for 'breach of the peace' and then released a couple of hours later without being charged; a tactic designed to disallow people voicing their objections in Court to the activities of the Base.

Overall the protest was successful in that the demonstrators conducted themselves in a non-violent manner and the little known Nurrungar Base became highlighted through the media.



KMU REPRESENTATIVE VISITS BRISBANE

In October the National Treasurer of the Drug, Food and Allied Industries Workers Federation visited Queensland as part of a national speaking tour. His union is affiliated to Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU - May First Movement Labor Centre of the Philippines). He gave the following interview with P.A.S.G. Qld.

PASG: Every year KMU organizes the International Solidarity Affair (ISA) during the May Day celebrations. Australian trade unions send a large number of delegates to the ISA. Does the KMU feel that the cost, in terms of risk to itself and its members, of this annual event is worthwhile when it evaluates the response it gets back afterwards from Australia?

KMU: I am not aware of any evaluation on this matter by the KMU International Department. But I think KMU finds it worthwhile, we are still doing it and still encouraging foreign workers and trade unionists to come on study tour programs to observe the actual conditions of workers in the Philippines. Every year more and more Australians come for this exposure. Maybe there are some problems; like some might think it is a holiday and when they are put through the structured routines it could be a little bit hard on them. But it is just a matter of proper orientation and selection of those who we think are really interested in acting in solidarity with the workers they meet. It's also a matter of more preparation and better handling by the International Department of the KMU of this study/exposure. Another area where we can look for improvements is the evaluation, feed-back, reporting and follow-up of exposurists.

PASG: Have your union's leaders experienced any harassment?

KMU: It's a common occurrence in the Philippines that when we organize, management usually harasses our workers, they threaten or bribe them. Many of our workers are sacked for their union activities, like in the case of Nestlé. When the workers of Nestlé went on strike management immediately, without filing a case, sacked 72, practically all the officials of the Nestlé union, and refused to accept them back when they wanted to return to work. In other cases of harassment they have put surveillance on

our leaders, put trumped-up charges against our organizers so that they will be preoccupied with legal cases and have to spend money for bailing themselves out, and two of our leaders have been shot, sprayed with bullets at the picket lines and of course many were hurt in these incidents, two were killed.

PASG: When did this happen?

KMU: The Nestlé workers came out on strike in September 1987. They were asking for 120 pesos rise, to be paid in 3 phases; 40 pesos per day increase each year for 3 years. But until now it's not resolved and the 72 officers of the Nestlé union and another 30 workers are still out of job. The present Secretary of Labor, Franklyn Drilon, who was the immediate past vice-president of the Employers Confederation of the Philippines and was formerly retained as a lawyer of the Nestlé Company - he is the one presiding on the case.

PASG: Has the boycott of Nestlé goods been effective?

KMU: Like all boycotts in the Philippines, it's really hard to succeed. In order to launch a boycott against big multi-nationals you must have a strong media projection. Nestlé Philippines is owned partly by a Filipino, Cojuangco, a multi-



millionaire, maybe billionaire, who is the cousin of the President. Nestlé has very strong connections with the mass media and spends more than 200 million pesos every year just for advertisements of their products. With the limited resources of the Nestlé union and even the KMU, we really cannot hope to fight the media projection of a company which spends hundreds of millions in advertising.

PASG: What can 40 pesos buy in the Philippines?

KMU: 40 pesos (about AS2.70) would buy a little bit less than one kilo of chicken. And this 40 pesos increase which the workers in Nestlé are asking for would not even be enough to meet their daily requirements. In order to have some kind of decent living you must have at least 180 to 200 pesos (AS12 to AS13.50) per day. The workers in Nestlé receive around 130/140 pesos a day - and relatively they are better off than most workers in the Philippines!

PASG: What part of the Philippine labor force is employed in industrialized companies like Nestlé?

KMU: According to statistics a little more than 3 million out of a total labor force of about 28 million workers which includes the peasants and other non-industrial workers - so industrial workers constitute about 10% of the whole labor force.

PASG: What is the present minimum wage?

KMU: The legal minimum wage set by the government, after an increase of 20 pesos in the middle of this year, is 87 pesos per day (roughly AS6). But of course this is more honored in the breach than the

law. Most companies do not give even the minimum wage to their workers, they simply break the law because of the low rate of unionization. Only 10% of industrial workers are unionized. Not even half of them have Collective Bargaining Agreements. You can just imagine how weak their bargaining power is by the failure to implement this simple minimum wage law. Management just threatens to sack those who complain of non-implementation of the law. Because of the high rate of unemployment running at about 20% according to independent researchers plus another rate of 15% to 20% underemployment, workers are simply afraid of being sacked because if they are sacked there are so many other people waiting to fill up their vacant positions.

PASG: What is the "Lay Down or Lay Off" policy?

KMU: There are more women unemployed than men. For them jobs are scarcer and often-times you land a job not so much because you are competent but because you have strong connections, what we call "padrinos". Someone sponsors or recommends you, and the managers, and even sometimes the workers themselves, regard the job as something which was given to them, not something which they deserve. The bosses take advantage of this and ask for things in return like sexual favors. Sometimes they regard it as a right and if, for example, a secretary has been out of work for several years and she really needs the money, we cannot blame her for giving in to these advances of male managers. They are threatened, "Lay down or be laid off". I know of several instances.

PASG: Does the government give any benefits when you are unemployed or sick?

KMU: When you're out of job you're simply out of job. There's no social welfare benefits, no unemployment benefits. But those who are working get sick leave of 2 weeks with pay every year and when they are hospitalized, we have Medicare. The Medicare Program of the government pays around 15% of the whole charge of the hospital, including medicines and the room. The remaining 85% you have to shoulder yourself.

In some unions they have in their Collective Bargaining Agreement a certain percentage that will be paid by management

(Cont'd on page 6 ▶)



(• Cont'd from page 5)

- say 60% or 50%, including the Medicare 15%. But in most unions they don't have this provision. So when an ordinary worker is sick or anyone in his family gets sick and they don't have the money to pay for medicines or hospitalization, they borrow from their relatives and friends.

PASG: What is the average rent in Manila?

KMU: A two bedroom house or apartment could cost around 2,500 or 3,500 pesos per month (about AS200) and considering that the average monthly wage is 1200 - 1500 pesos (about AS90), an ordinary worker cannot afford this. So he has to rent a room or share an apartment with one, two or three other families. Many of our workers live in squatter areas or slum areas and Manila is known for its many slums. And they say that as much as 30% in the city of Manila, the 7.5 million population of Manila, live in slums - they are squatters in their own country.

PASG: How much does a kilo of rice cost?

KMU: A kilo of rice costs around 9 to 10 pesos, about 70 Australian cents and one person needs something like 50 Australian cents worth of rice a day.

PASG: Is education for children free or is there a cost?

KMU: For elementary education, the government has a public education program. The payment is minimal for this, you pay only for the books and maybe about 50 pesos (AS3.30) a month. In high school we are supposed to have partially free education but because public high schools in the Philippines are very rare, practically only 2%-5% of high school students profit from this partially free high school education program of the government. And again, in elementary education, which is supposed to be almost free, the government cannot cope with the number of students so that about 30% of the population has to go to private schools.

PASG: What about the people who come from the rural areas into the cities seeking work or housing?

KMU: According to the studies, every year the movement of people from rural areas to cities, especially Manila, is growing. Maybe this is a reflection of the scarcity of land and a lack of job opportunities in the provinces. There is a study by a professor of the University of the Philippines regarding this and the conclusion was something to this effect: slum dwellers in Manila prefer to be squatters of slum dwellings than to be in the rural areas.

PASG: What about militarization in the rural areas?

KMU: Because of the hardships that are being brought about by what we call militarization or forced evacuations, many people are uprooted from their place and from their means of livelihood, their land. They've lost their animals, their farm implements, and the supplies that the government gives them is insufficient so many of them starve. They are afraid to go back because they might be harassed or killed by the military, so some of them go to relatives in Manila and this contributes to the migration of people from the rural areas to the cities.

PASG: How efficient are government processes?

KMU: Many services in the Philippines are very bureaucratic especially when it comes to returning money to the citizens. You have to go through so many red tapes and it's often delayed. Maybe one of the reasons for delay is the rampant graft and corruption in our country where they deliberately slow down the processes hoping to get something from the person who is interested in having services delivered fast.

Graft and corruption have seeped down to a wider level of the bureaucracy and the situation is getting worse in the sense that more and more bureaucrats are now engaged in this. Also, the cronies of Marcos who profited from this graft and corruption are being replaced by the cronies of the present administration. Marcos borrowed money from the IMF/World Bank for the government and his cronies. I think he borrowed something like 55 billion pesos for his cronies and his cronies

(Cont'd page 7 ▶)

(← Cont'd from page 6)

gave him 10%. That's the figure usually talked about in the Philippines. It's common to ask for "grease money" or give a kickback of 10% in order to get a loan. This is standard. I know for a fact that in my province certain politicians are asking for 10% from materials for political campaign funds wherever there is a government project in the locality. And you often hear of "ghost" projects, "ghost" deliveries - a project is proposed, it is funded but it's not made, it's just reported completed. Or maybe it has been partially finished or inferior or lesser materials have been used so that there can be savings and the savings go into the pockets of these politicians and their partners in these projects. That's why you can see so many luxury cars in the Philippines and if you are in the villages, you can see more Mercedes Benz in one day than you can see in one month in Australia.

.....To be continued

PART TWO OF THIS INTERVIEW WILL
BE PRINTED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

KMU REQUESTS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The KMU have asked that friends and trade unions in Queensland give consideration to a project proposal to raise funds for the purchase of a computer for its International Department. The total cost is about \$3600. PASG Qld fully supports this project but cannot raise this amount on its own. We would appreciate any assistance you can offer in raising funds and/or introducing us to your trade union contacts. Please write to: PASG Qld, P.O. Box 174, St Lucia Qld. 4067 if you would like a copy of the KMU proposal.

(← Cont'd from page 1)

The deterioration of Philippine education is of much concern. Out of 100 children entering Grade One, only 60 will reach Grade Six, 14 will finish high school and only five can finish college or technical school.

There are an estimated 5.5 million child workers in the Philippines today. Despite their utterly miserable wages, child labour continues because widespread poverty requires it. Whatever a child brings home to the meagre family income helps to meet some basic needs. Children and youth are forced into petty thievery, drug pushing and prostitution. Some 30,000 boys and girls are involved in the flesh trade.

Peace is another luxury for millions of children. They are the victims and witnesses of massacres, salvagings, disappearances, rape, illegal arrest and detention, strafings, torture, and forced evacuations and hamletting. From 1972 to 1988 five million children have been victims of the civil war. The change in government has not resulted in improvements. From January 1987 to May 1988, some 170,184 children have been war victims. These are the documented cases. And growing up amidst the violence has resulted in the emergence of a war-culture. Paramilitary forces are arming and recruiting children as young as 11 years.

The Bayanihan ng mga Pilipino sa NSW have reprinted the Salinlahi Foundation report, "LET'S GIVE OUR CHILDREN A BREAK!" and badges are for sale to raise funds for the children of Samar and Negros via the Catholic Disaster Relief Centre. Copies of the report (\$1) and badges (\$1.50) available from: PASG, P.O. Box 174, St Lucia Qld 4067. Please add at least 50¢ for postage & packing. We would very much like to hear from anyone interested in working specifically on this issue.



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 on 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.

ATTENTION: PASG Co-ordinator
P.O. Box 174
St. Lucia 4067
Queensland

I would like to:

- join PASG and receive a one year subscription to the PASG Newsletter and Philippines Issues. I enclose payment of \$15 or \$12 (concession).
- receive other Philippine information materials.
- make a donation of S..... for solidarity work.

NAME

ADDRESS

TEL. NO.(H)(W)

PASG Q'ld.
P.O. Box 174
St. Lucia 4067
Queensland

