



Philippines Australia Solidarity Group

NEWSLETTER

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ORGANIC ACT REJECTED IN THE CORDILLERA:

THE POPULAR MASS MOVEMENT FOR AUTONOMY CONTINUES

Over 70% of the Cordillerans voted "no" in the plebiscite on the Organic Act in the Cordillera held on 30 January, 1990. Since the yes vote only won in Ifugao province, it will become the entire Autonomous Region of the Cordillera. Last minute vote tampering was attempted in Mountain Province in a desperate attempt to concoct another yes majority, but eventually the Organic Act was officially rejected there by a margin of over 1000 votes.

Although the campaign against the Organic Act juxtaposed 'strange political bedfellows', the Philippine government's vision for regional autonomy in the Cordillera was resoundingly defeated. Part one of this report examines how the principle political forces campaigned in the lead up to the plebiscite. Part two will appear in the May-June issue appraising post-plebiscite forces in terms of the continuing popular mass movement for regional autonomy in the Cordillera.

CAMPAIGN POSITIONS OF POLITICAL FORCES IN THE ORGANIC ACT PLEBISCITE

The campaign for a yes vote primarily came from organizations established by the Philippine government. They were opposed by transnationals as well as various political factions from the popular mass movement for regional autonomy, which is drawn from indigenous peoples and the lower and middle classes of the Cordillera (Table 1).

Table 1. Campaign positions of political forces in the Organic Act plebiscite.

YES	NO
CAR	CPDF
CRCC	CPA
CEB	CBA
COMELEC	CPLA/CBAD
Politicians (various)	Benquet Mines

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), established in 1987 by the Aquino government with EO220, reconstituted the Cordillera as the 14th region in the Philippines. The Cordillera Regional Consultative Commission (CRCC) followed in 1988 under Aydinan as Chair. The Cordillera Executive Board (CEB) was also created in 1988. As initially established under the executive directorship of Marcelino Delson, there were not even any indigenous Cordillerans on the CEB. The CRCC Organic Act campaign was for autonomy under federalism and a parliamentary form of government. On the continuum from decentralisation to separatism, the state rejected the CRCC position for federalism as too radical and was only willing to devolve limited powers to local governments. Delson proclaimed in August 1988 that, in the event the plebiscite failed to establish an autonomous region, CAR would be transformed into an ordinary administrative region. Alagar, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) director, actually campaigned for a yes vote, even though the organization is officially not to take sides.

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Two important congressmen, Claver and Lumauig, campaigned for accepting the Organic Act because they intended to run for governor over the created autonomous region that would strategically include five provinces (Benguet, Abra, Kalinga-Apayao, Mountain Province and Ifugao) and one chartered city (Baguio). Claver, a former human rights lawyer and Chair of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), stated that "any reasonable person will accept that autonomy is the greatest blessing that could have come to the Cordillera". Only days before the plebiscite William Claver's son, Ayangwa, was tragically murdered by either vigilantes or political rivals.

Leading the opposition to the Organic Act was the Cordillera Peoples Democratic Front (CPDF). The CPDF advocates armed revolution to achieve genuine autonomy in the Cordillera and is an underground broad coalition of democratic forces, including the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New Peoples Army (CPP/NPA). Over 5000 attended the first CPDF political conference held between 16-17 January, 1987 in Sagada. They opposed autonomy as provided in the Organic Act and countered with their elected local peoples councils established in 1989. They have already established genuine autonomy closer to the separatism end of the continuum without advocating complete independence from the Philippines.

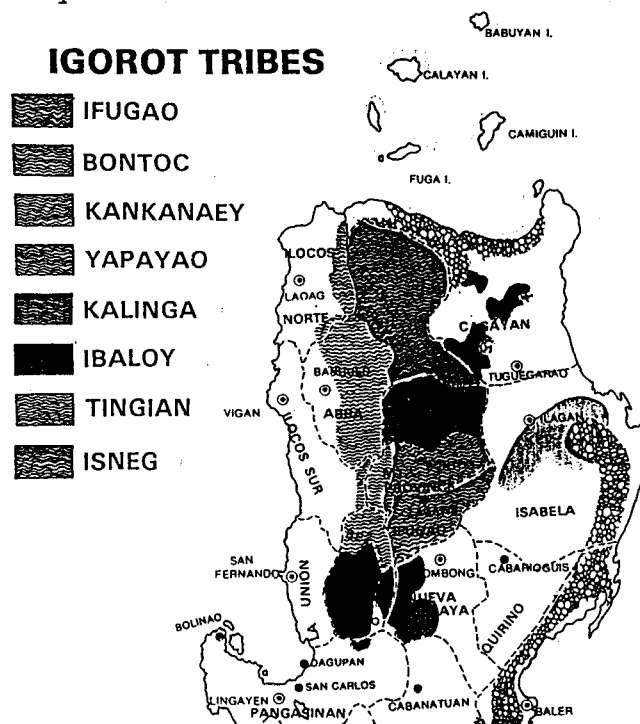
The CPA, started in 1984, is the largest legal coalition of over 125 cause-oriented non-government organisations (NGOs). The CPA advocates essentially the same position as the CPDF, but without armed revolution. Francisca Macli-ing, the secretary general, criticized that offering "autonomy while bombing", was little more than an expression of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) in Aquino's current Total War policy being waged across the Cordillera. The Cordillera Bodong Association (CBA) predates the CPA from 1983. Marcelo Fakilang, the Chair of CBA, found that campaigning against the Organic Act strengthened their commitment to indigenous rights, fiscal autonomy and ancestral domain. The Cordillera Coalition for Genuine

Regional Autonomy (CCGRA) was created in 1988 to reject CAR and offer critical participation with the CRCC through the Cordillera Coordinating Council (CCC) starting in February 1989 under Manny Lotse (CCGRA) as Chair and Angelito Castillo (CRCC) as secretary.

Also in opposition to the Organic Act, but in profound political contrast to the previous peoples organizations, stands the Cordillera Peoples Liberation Army (CPLA) under Balweg and his Cordillera Bodong Administration (CBAd). Balweg broke from the NPA in 1986 and his army has been placed in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for counter-insurgency purposes in the ongoing LIC in the Cordillera. The CPLA/CBAd opposed the Organic Act, proposing instead autonomy under which the bodong peace-pact system would be the Cordillera-wide indigenous form of government. Benguet Mines is understood to have campaigned against the Organic Act, presumably because under an Autonomous Region they would have had to pay higher taxes and face ancestral land right claims from Kankana-ey and Ibaloi 'pocket' miners.

.....To be continued

Table 2. Igorot Tribes across the five provinces of the Cordillera and Baguio City.



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

MEETING WITH REY NATIVIDAD

- NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES PHILIPPINES -

On February 28th, Reynaldo Natividad, the Coordinator of the Committee on Development Projects for the National Council of Churches - Philippines (NCCP), spoke to a Brisbane gathering concerned with human rights in the Philippines. The following report touches on some of the issues brought out at that meeting.

When asked about the current economic situation in the Philippines, Rey said that although there has been a slight rise in GNP, economic recovery has not been realised. Cory's campaign promises of genuine land reform have not materialised and the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Law Reform is totally rejected by national peasant organisations. The government has made no repudiation of the foreign debt as expected and has even given its word to honour all debts; 48% of the national budget pays only the interest. Congress and democratic process has been 'reactivated' but the same old politics of patronage and personalities prevail. Aquino has inherited the same military establishment that was in place under Marcos - one of power and privilege. Many people say it's the military that calls the shots, not the government.

During the attempted coup, Marcos loyalists joined hands with RAM/SFP. The RAM/SFP, now calling themselves Revolutionary Alliance for the Masses/Soldiers of the Filipino People, is using the words of the Left in talking about socialist policies, land reform, and nationalist policies.

On the morning of December 1, Cardinal Sin came on the air to mobilise people power in support of the government. Later the Catholic Bishops Conference denounced the coup. NCCP issued a statement also denouncing the coup and putting forward the issues of the peoples movement.

On the issue of US bases, Rey said that in January there were unexpected US State Department visitors. Afterwards Aquino said there may be a need for snap elections. It is necessary for both Houses of Congress to ratify the US Bases Agreement and two-thirds of the Senators will definitely veto it, so a snap election may be used as a

tactic to get this approval by way of a change of Senators.

Now that goods are to be purchased from the US to supply the bases some sectors are not feeling so favourable toward their retention. The bases presently occupy 55,000 hectares of prime land. Economists are now predicting that earnings could be up to 300% more than we get from the US if the bases are dismantled. There are approximately 26,000 Filipinos employed at the bases who are all paid less than the Americans working there. The NCCP has campaigned for the dismantling of US bases since 1983.

"My visit can help build bridges. Christians in the Philippines are facing a very difficult situation. But we are committed and we are calling on our brothers and sisters throughout the world to overcome these forces of evil in the Philippines today. Groups in Australia can give information. They can strengthen their support to the Australian Council of Churches when it takes a good stand on the Philippines. And pray - prayer is still powerful."



In the Filipino version of the creation, the first man and woman sprang full-blown from the same cylinder of bamboo at the same time. Man was called "Malakas" or strong, woman was called "Maganda" or beautiful.

however, representative of the entire population of unpoliticised, unaware, unmobilised women. Moreover, membership at first was restricted to wives, daughters and sisters of Katipunan members and participation was limited to activities like setting up protective fronts for the meetings of male members. But circumstances forced the men to hand over more responsibility to women and some led the freedom fighters in battle.

The substitution of American imperialism for Spanish colonialism marked a new stage in the situation of Filipinas. Some discriminatory laws were repealed and women of the exploiting landed classes were encouraged to participate actively in public life and to enter higher education. But it was still only after these women fought and campaigned that they began to attain some equal rights. Women's suffrage was achieved in 1937.

Continuing this tradition of resistance against oppression, Filipinas were active against the Japanese occupation in World War II. Some joined guerrilla armies like the Hukbalahap, one of whose units was led by a woman named DAYANG-DAYANG.

One of the largest organizations established in the early '70s was MAKIBAKA, the Liberation Movement of New Women. As part of the national democratic movement MAKIBAKA sought, not only to mobilise Filipinas for a national democratic struggle, but also to develop a women's consciousness - a distinct women's movement integral to the national liberation struggle. It held that the authorities from which women suffer are expressions of a feudal-patriarchal ideology and system. After two years the group was declared illegal and forced underground when Marcos instituted martial law. The women of MAKIBAKA answered the call for revolutionary underground work, urban and rural basic masses organising, and armed struggle. Under the pressures of martial law on the national democratic movement, MAKIBAKA disbanded.

GABRIELA



**BABAENG LUMALABAN
PARA SA KALAYAAN**

Women's organisations which began to proliferate in the late '70s and early '80s, particularly after the assassination of Benigno Aquino, are continuing to grow mainly because their increasing political awareness is no longer restricted to women of the middle and upper classes. Some of these groups are concerned with prostitution and tourism, but this increased politicisation is not expressed exclusively in terms of "women's issues".

The Filipina's analysis of her own situation is not simply that she is oppressed as a women by virtue of her sex. She also sees herself as oppressed as a citizen and as a member of a social class. The MAKIBAKA tradition of addressing nationalist issues from the particular point of view of women and, conversely, addressing a woman's exploitation and oppression in its entirety, remains strong to this day.

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GABRIELA, founded in March 1984, is today a national women's coalition of organisations with a combined membership of over 40,000. It promotes the development of a strong and dynamic movement which includes women from all sectors, especially the toiling masses of women, who are for women's liberation and meaningful social reforms. GABRIELA annually hosts the Women's International Solidarity Affair in the Philippines (WISAP), an exposure and conference of women from all over the world with Filipina activists.

Nevertheless, women's participation in the revolutionary movement is neither unproblematic nor free from chauvinist attitudes. Some men regard campaigning on women's issues as unnecessary because women's liberation will come with the liberty of the nation. Others, although recognising it as an issue, do not regard it as urgent, subordinating it to the issue of class contradictions. Such attitudes are important in so far as the leadership is male dominated.

However, both women and men have been influenced by the media portrayal of Western feminists as a bunch of bra burning viragos. So much so that some women in the women's movement in the Philippines feel under pressure to avoid the word, "feminist". But the women's movement worldwide is aware now, in a way in which it was not aware in the early '70s, of the essential need for third world women to build their movement in their own reality, rather than import a Western version of feminism. Men's attitudes are also changing.

Despite their alleged "passivity", Filipinas are active participants in the liberation struggle. On the factory floor, the picket lines, the streets of Manila, among the urban poor, in the countryside, in all sectors of Philippine society; women are bonding together as women. The overwhelming numbers of women mass activists in the legal organisations, the increasing number in the NPA and, indeed, as political prisoners and martyrs sacrificing their lives for the liberation of all women and the liberation of their nation, Filipinas show how women prove themselves in struggle.

FILM REVIEW

VALENCIA DIARY

RICE, RELIGION, POLITICS AND
A RURAL FILIPINO FAMILY

VALENCIA DIARY, partly financed under the ABC/AFC Documentary Fellowship Scheme, explores daily life in a peasant farming community near the town of Valencia in central Mindanao. This new film approaches its subject through the lives and personalities of a handful of ordinary people in a journal of local and national issues. The nine months' filming straddled the drama of Philippine politics in February 1986.

Rogel and Aida Gonzales are the central characters. Fleeing militarisation some years ago, they had settled with family in the barrio of Sinayawan. They have access to a marginal half-hectare plot of land that does not provide enough rice even for their own consumption. Like the other landless of the village they rely for subsistence on occasional labouring jobs. The young priest, Father Rino, a persistent human rights campaigner is in constant trouble with the local soldiery.

The film begins when Rogel and Aida swap their plough for a sack of rice to tide them over till harvest; it ends with the gathering-in of crop. In the meantime the village is gripped by election fever, Father Rino threatened with assassination, Cory visits Valencia, and so does Imelda Marcos. For a week the film goes to Manila where taxi drivers explain what's been going on and opposing camps rally outside the Batasan Pambansa (National Assembly).

Along the way we are exposed to rural issues: the Green Revolution, land reform, rebellion, militarisation, mechanisation, health care, and the paradox of widespread hunger in one of the rice bowls of the nation. But more than a catalogue of woes, this diary records people constructing their lives with courage, imagination and humour.

As part of its 1990 fundraising effort, PASG Qld. hopes to screen VALENCIA DIARY at a Brisbane cinema. So watch this Newsletter for further details.

NEWS FROM NORTHERN DISPATCH

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Northern Information Network

Sept. 22, 1989 -- ITOGON, BENGUET --
**WOMEN POWER AT PICKET LINES OF BENGUET
MINERS' STRIKE** --The picket lines of
striking miners here became lively
Thursday when some 210 women joined
their husbands as an expression of
their support of the union's demands
for better terms from Benguet
Corporation (BC).

The miners' wives belonging to the
Antamok and Baco-Kelly Women's Organi-
zations, including some from Balatoc
and Acupan, held a march from the
Balatoc site's main office up to Camp I
of Acupan under the noontime heat of
the sun.

Some carrying their children, they
chanted and called on the other women
folk in the mines to join the cause of
their husbands and relatives who had
been on strike for almost two weeks
now. Spokespersons of the women's
organizations involved said the action
was taken to dispel reports that the
women in the mines were not supportive
of the strike.

The women said that while the
strike may have "disrupted" their
normal lives, they are "ready to fight
and face hunger together with our loved
ones," because of the long-term gains
expected from the current action. "We
handle the incomes of our husbands, and
we know there is not much to budget,"
one Antamok woman stated. She believes
the company's move threatens the future
of their families.

The mineworkers are seeking the
inclusion of the company's Grand
Antamok Project (GAP) in their Collec-
tive Bargaining Agreement (CBA). They
have also asked for transportation
allowance for those workers transferred
from the Acupan to Baco-Kelly; and for
the correction of alleged unfair labor
practices, like illegal retrenchments
and unjust job classifications, etc.
The management of the BC has considered
the strike "illegal" since BC spokes-
persons maintained that the issues
brought out by the union could not
justify a strike.

"The issues are fair and reasona-
ble and are worth fighting for," one
from the Baco-Kelly Women's Organi-
zation said. She expressed hopes that the
BC will give in to the miners' demands
soon so that the plight of their
families will be alleviated.

Some participants admitted that
the issues, at first, were not very
clear, but when the adverse conse-
quences of the BC's move was explained,
they understood and decided to actively
campaign for support, not only among
the womenfolk, but also from the
community.

They believe that the inclusion of
the GAP in the CBA will benefit the
workers in the site, and will insure
security of tenure. The BC management
told the union that it cannot include
the GAP under the CBA since the project
is still in its development phase and
not yet in commercial production. The
issue, its spokespersons claimed is
still the subject of grievance and
voluntary arbitration.

At presstime, some of the women
remained in the picket lines here
singing songs of hope with the workers
whose current strike duration is con-
sidered the longest in the gold mining
firm's history.

P. Sarmiento/Northern Dispatch

EVENTS

MAY 6 to 12 - Visiting speaker from
the Philippines - ZENAIDA DELICA -
Executive Director of CITIZENS
DIASTER REHABILITATION CENTER -
various speaking venues in and
around Brisbane - phone Chris Bush
on (07) 377 4029 or (07) 846 1607
for details.

MAY 7 - LABOR DAY - Join us on
the march and help out on our
information stall.

JUNE 12 - PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE
DAY COMMUNITY CELEBRATION -
details to be announced.

DATE TO BE CONFIRMED - RALLY FOR
ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

MEMBERS & SUBSCRIBERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOMED

The Philippines Australia Solidarity Group (PASG) Queensland is part of a national organisation with offices in all state capitals and in Canberra. PASG is a broadly-based solidarity group welcoming membership of individuals who support the struggle of the Filipino people for independence, freedom and democracy. It brings together people of diverse backgrounds and includes both Australians and Filipinos living in Australia. It has close links with Filipino Community Organisations in both countries. Its members include people with extensive Philippine experience and information on trade unions, the role of the church (Christian and Non-Christian), women's organisations, industrial working conditions, peasant organisations, rural conditions, teachers, and the indigenous peoples in the Philippines. PASG in Queensland can provide resource material, slides and videos as well as speakers.

PASG Qld. aims 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 peoples.

PASG Qld. holds regular monthly meetings. For further information contact Chris Bush on (07) 377 4029 or (07) 846 1607 or write to the address below.

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

I would like to:

- join PASG (membership includes a one year subscription to the PASG Newsletter and Philippines Issues). I enclose payment of \$20.
- receive a one year subscription to the PASG Newsletter and Philippines Issues. I enclose payment of \$15.
- have more information about PASG.
- make a donation of \$..... for solidarity work.

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