



Philippines Australia Solidarity Group NEWSLETTER

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HUMAN RIGHTS & POLITICAL PRISONERS

Reports received by the TFDP (Task Force Detainees Philippines) National Center as of November 15, 1990 show there were 602 political prisoners held in some 137 detention centres and jails throughout the Philippines. The 602 include both sentenced prisoners and those not yet convicted.

The nature of their cases distinguishes these 602 as political prisoners. Generally, they are individuals who had asserted their rights in political exercises like protest actions (i.e. rallyists or striking workers). Some were sympathizers or members of groups in armed opposition to the government such as the New People's Army or the Moro National Liberation Front. A third category are those wrongly accused by their captors as having been engaged in protests or involved in rebel organizations.

Undoubtedly, there are a lot more political prisoners than the 602 cases documented by TFDP. For instance, due to practical constraints, TFDP could not document rebel soldiers imprisoned because of their suspected involvement in coup d'etat attempts. They are certainly political prisoners too and, as of October 31, 1990, there were hundreds of them still behind bars.

Of the 137 detention facilities being used to hold political prisoners, 33 are military camps, while 97 are regular detention centers administrated by AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) officers. Five other jails are administered by the police but are located within military camps, such as the PC-INP Jail at Camp Crame. There are also 11 penal institutions where convicted prisoners serve their sentences. Among the penal institutions are the various jails of the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa, the Women's Correctional, a prison for convicted females in Mandaluyong, and the Sablayan Penal Colony in Occidental Mindoro. One other place, not really a jail but which is used to confine one political prisoner, is the National Center for Mental Health in Metro Manila, where a prisoner has been held since experiencing mental disorder after his arrest.

(Contd on page 2 ►)



SEND CARDS TO PRISONERS.

Receiving greetings and communications from outside really boosts morale to keep on surviving if only just for another day.

Produced by PASGNSW, PACF and Bayanihan, this postcard has printed on the reverse "YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE" and the TFDP address to which you mail it. (The Australia Post Economy Air charge to the Philippines is 70c). There is space for a personal message and your name & address.

PASGQLD can supply you with the cards and prisoners' names. By post, single cards cost 60c plus 15c for each additional card.

POLITICAL PRISONERS (← Contd from page 1)

DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS:

Luzon	247	number tortured	103
Visayas	257	number tortured	71
Mindanao	98	number tortured	24

Cebu and Negros Occidental in Central and Western Visayas, two provincial hotbeds of insurgency, have the highest density of political prisoners. The numbers held in the National Capital Region is also high because convicted prisoners are often transferred from the provinces.

A large majority of the political prisoners (about 92%) are males. Most are in their youth. Data on the ages of 445 of them (74%) is available and shows that among them, 278 (about 62%) are aged from 16 to 30.

There are four political prisoners who were 15 years old or below at the time of their arrest, and two elderly prisoners; one 76 and the other 68 years of age.

Among 447 political prisoners with available data on their civil status, 235 are married (including 3 who are widowed). This figure indicates that most of them are the major, if not sole, breadwinners in their respective families.

DISTRIBUTION BY OCCUPATION:

219	Farmers
47	Service Workers
30	Farm Workers
30	Industrial Workers
14	Self-employed/small businessmen
11	Unemployed
10	Out-of-school youth
8	Small Fishermen/fisheries workers
7	Students
3	Housewives
2	Teachers/professors
2	NGO staff
1	Big fisherman
1	White collar worker
217	Data not available

125 of the 602 political prisoners said they are members of organizations. Of these, 56 were affiliated with peasants' groups, while 23 belonged to trade unions. The youth sector also had its share of victimization, 15 said they were in youth and students' groups at the time of their arrest.



The longest-held prisoner, Alvin Nueva, was arrested on July 14, 1972. Of the 22 arrested in 1986, none were arrested before February 22, which means that at least 581 of the 602 political prisoners were arrested under the Aquino administration.

DISTRIBUTION BY DATE OF ARREST:

5	arrested 1980 and earlier
12	arrested 1981-1985
22	arrested 1986
84	arrested 1987
110	arrested 1988
141	arrested 1989
224	arrested 1990
4	data not available

In 1989, 116 were arrested before November, which means that 349 (about 58%) of political prisoners have been in jail for a year or more. The legal status of 482 political prisoners (those with available data) shows that 375 (78%) are still undergoing trial. And yet almost two-thirds of all the prisoners have been in jail for a year or more. The right of detained persons to a fair and speedy trial has been denied in the case of most prisoners.

Notwithstanding the circumstances which give the cases political complexion, it is common criminal charges that are most often filed in court against political prisoners. The usual charges are possession of firearms, murder, theft, kidnaping, arson or robbery. ►



PROFILE: TASK FORCE DETAINEES OF THE PHILIPPINES

Information for this issue's front page article is taken from Oct 15 - Nov 14, 1990 issue of "Philippine Human Rights UPDATE" published by Task Force Detainees Philippines (TFDP), SFI Bldg., 214 N. Domingo St., Cubao 1111, Quezon City, Philippines

TFDP is a human rights institution. It analyses and discerns with the Filipino people their problems and aspirations and seeks to give a meaningful response to their condition by helping political prisoners and other victims of human rights violations caused by militarization and political repression, regardless of creed, ideology or race.

Throughout the years, TFDP has helped in the release of thousands of political prisoners and in locating disappeared persons. TFDP has also provided moral and material assistance to the victims. Through linkages with lawyers, doctors and other professional groups and individuals, TFDP has facilitated other support services to victims of human rights violations and their families. TFDP has taken the lead in human rights education and has developed the most extensive documentation network all over the Philippines. TFDP works today under a new government, a new order and a new challenge. As the people's liberties continue to be transgressed and their demands denied, TFDP will exist. Through its programs, it shall pursue its unfinished mission of seeing to it that the human dignity of the Filipino people would not be trampled upon.

(← Contd from page 2)

Of the 602 political prisoners, only 18 said they were arrested with valid warrants. It can be concluded that most were arrested arbitrarily. A study of the circumstances in which they were arrested shows that, except for a few cases, they were not caught in "flagrante delicto" (in the act of actually committing, about to commit, or have just committed a crime).

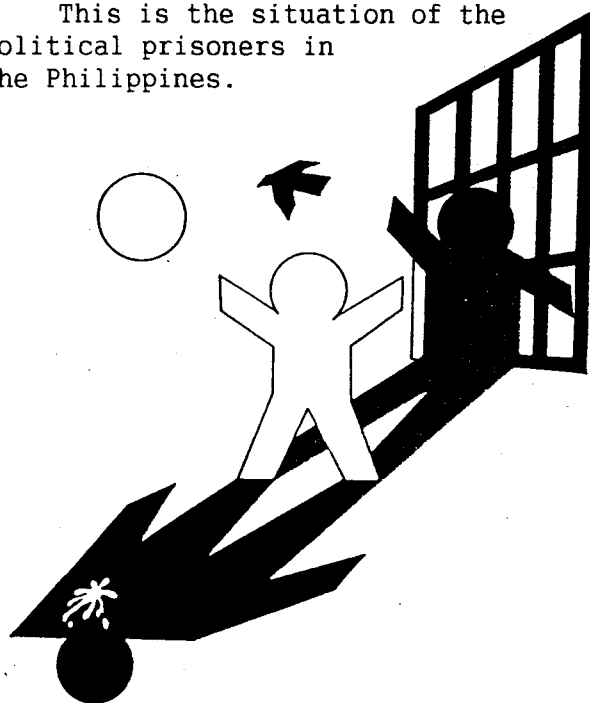
Still another oft-repeated violation committed against political prisoners is torture. (See Table at top of page 2.) A common violation too was the denial of counsel during the first few hours, or even days, of their detention.

Once inside prison, the arrested persons' woes are compounded. Most jails are crowded, sometimes occupied by three times more than their actual capacity. Most of the jails were built decades ago and prove inadequate to hold today's prisoners. Food is generally insufficient. The average food budget remains at P8.00 a day.

Those held in the 96 or so regular jails, as well as those in penal institutions, are mixed with common

criminals, thereby exposing them to potential danger such as during gang wars or jail riots. In military camps they are often separated from common criminals, but visitation rights are usually limited. This is especially so during military red alert conditions when all visits are suspended; a common thing now since coup threats have become more frequent.

This is the situation of the political prisoners in the Philippines.



PHILIPPINE DEBT CRISIS - PART II

CONTINUED FROM THE QLD. NEWSLETTER
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1990 ISSUE

"Debt servicing cannot be met at the price of the asphyxiation of a country's economy and no government can morally demand of its people privation incompatible with human dignity."

Pope John Paul II, Pontifical Commission "Justicia et Pax"

The IMF-WB are the 'police' of the world economic system. Both institutions answer to the governments and banks of the US and other wealthy nations. In exchange for lending money and giving the signal for private banks to lend to the Philippines, the IMF imposes restrictive and onerous economic policies which favor foreign creditors and foreign business but do not benefit the country. These include:

Wage restraints & labor repression - In order to attract foreign investors, the government has adopted a policy of repressing labor and busting unions to keep wages low and the workforce tame. This is in line with the multinationals' need for cheap, easily controlled labor.

Lifting of electricity and water subsidies - Heavily indebted utilities like the National Power Corporation are forced to charge higher rates in order to support the huge amount they pay for debt service. At the same time, the government is unable to subsidize electricity and water rates because so much of its budget goes to debt service.

Import liberalization - The IMF also pushes the Philippines to remove restrictions on imports and allow 'free trade' favoring the US. At the same time it forces restrictions on exports. As a result of this policy the Philippine trade deficit increased five times from US\$202 million in 1986 to over US\$1 billion in 1987. Import liberalization allows cheap apples and oranges to undercut local fruits. Consequently, the Philippines is beginning to lose self-sufficiency in food production. It has even begun to import rice - its main staple food!

Value Added Tax - The IMF has often called for the imposition of new taxes in order to finance the huge budget deficit resulting from debt payments.

More foreign investments - As well as leading to more misery for the workforce, foreign investment contributes to the eventual net outflow of funds from the Philippines and drains its natural resources. What's more, foreign investment is given unfair advantage over local industry such as tax holidays and easy access to credit.

More exports - The Philippines is being forced to continue to export cheap agricultural products including sugar, pineapples and even prawns, and cheap manufactured goods like garments, shoes and semiconductors. Many of the components of these goods are themselves imported. So the only value the Philippines supplies is labor to assemble these products. Although prawns are cheap in relation to industrial products like computers, they have become too expensive for most Filipinos to afford. What's more, the people themselves have been turned into a major export item.

The Philippines is now in a situation where it is paying foreign creditors more than it receives in return. From the EDSA revolution to July 1988, US\$7 billion has been paid for loan overflows of over US\$1 billion, resulting in a net outflow of more than US\$5 billion to rich creditors. The debt strategy adopted by the government is the orthodox approach. Unfortunately Aquino not only follows but even 'improves' upon Marcos' debt and foreign investment-driven strategy.

During 1980-1985, Marcos liberalized only 991 imports. In her first two years, Cory liberalized 1,232 items. Value Added Tax, which Marcos' own tax collection chief refused to implement, was implemented by Cory as an executive order with no reference to Congress. Incentives to foreign investors are increased under the Omnibus Investments Code and PD1177 continues to be used to automatically appropriate ever larger amounts of debt service each year.

Creditors must be paid on time while teachers have to go on strike just to get the salaries due to them. And IMF-WB policies are immediately implemented while people's demands, like agrarian reform, are subjected to interminable consultations with landlords, multinationals and other vested interests.

To pay off part of its debt, the government is selling off Filipino assets and corporations to its creditors. "Debt-to-equity swap" is becoming the favorite debt payment strategy of some legislators in the Philippine government. They are promoting the conversion of US\$5 billion of debt to equity. Ordinarily, a foreign investor who wants to invest P21 million in a Filipino corporation, must first exchange US\$1 million with the Central Bank and then invest the proceeds. Under a debt-to-equity swap, the investor can get as much as 50% discount by buying Philippine debt worth US\$1 million in the international market, pay only US\$500,000 and acquire the Filipino corporation at half price. Then a majority of Filipino industry would fall under foreign control and, worse yet, there would be US\$23 billion of debt still to be paid back.

Another strategy is increased borrowing from official development assistance. But this is often tied to the purchase of commodities from the donor countries.

A nationalist, pro-people debt policy would entail prioritizing growth and development towards a self-reliant, productive and industrialized economy that can meet the demands of the Filipino people. This means ending the heavy dependence on imports, foreign investments and foreign debt while promoting Filipino industry as the engine of growth. The huge net outflow of funds must be stopped so that the country is not deprived of capital needed for schools, jobs, roads, medical care, etc.

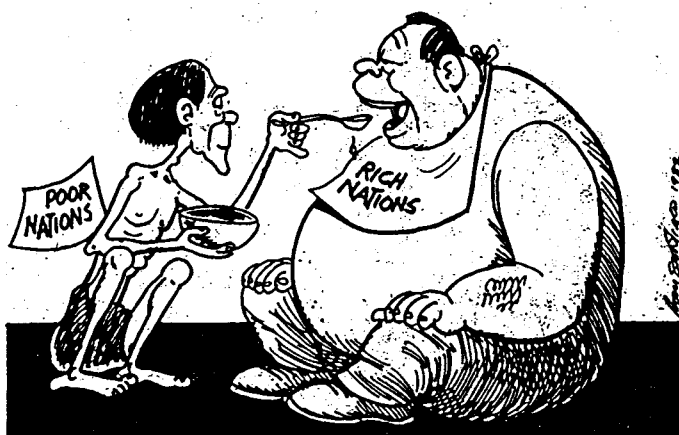
"We are not defaulting on our interest payments or on the principal, but we are defaulting on our responsibilities to the people." (Congressman Edcel Lagman, Freedom from Debt Coalition Press Conference, Sept 30, 1988)

The Aquino government should limit the amount it pays for debt service to maybe 10% of its merchandise export earnings. Currently, over half is used for debt service. The Philippines should not pay all its debts. It should investigate and disengage from fraudulent loans and loans that did not benefit the people. High on this list is the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant and all the private crony loans. The government should take a tough negotiating stance and put pressure on the creditors through a moratorium.

"Palabra de honor" (word of honor) means that one should only pay debts of honor, not debts of dishonor fraudulently imposed. Because of a 1984 IMF agreement, the Philippines government was forced to assume private loans, many of which belong to private crony corporations. Some of those assumed debts are:

Rodolfo Cuenca, CDCP, \$323 million;
Alfredo Montelibano, Planters Products, \$159 million;
Roberto Benedicto, NASUTRA/PHILSUCOM, \$265 million;
Ben Romualdez, MERALCO/First Holdings, \$370 million;
Marcos/Jose de Venecia, LANDOIL, \$165 million;
Geronimo Velasco, Nobel Philippines, \$14 million and
Republic Glass \$2 million;
Herminio Disini, NPC, \$795 million;
Roberto Ongpin, NIDC, \$157 million;
Roman Cruz, PAL, \$321 million;
Cojuangcos, PLDT, \$654 million.

Furthermore, estimates show that the Philippines will be paying out US\$21.4 billion in debt payments in exchange for US\$4.2 billion in new loans in the years 1987 to 1992.



THE RICH GET RICHER BECAUSE THE THIRD WORLD GETS LESS AND LESS

In the past even the USA repudiated some of its debts - like those incurred through British financiers to build the US railroad network in the 1800s. The US will not subordinate national interest to debt payment. Several European allies also never paid back debts to the US incurred during World War I.

As of 1987, twelve debtor nations unilaterally suspended part or all of their debt servicing. Countries that have called moratoria or taken a hard line with their creditors, have often received better deals in the end than the Philippines whose negotiators accept most of the arguments of the IMF-WB.

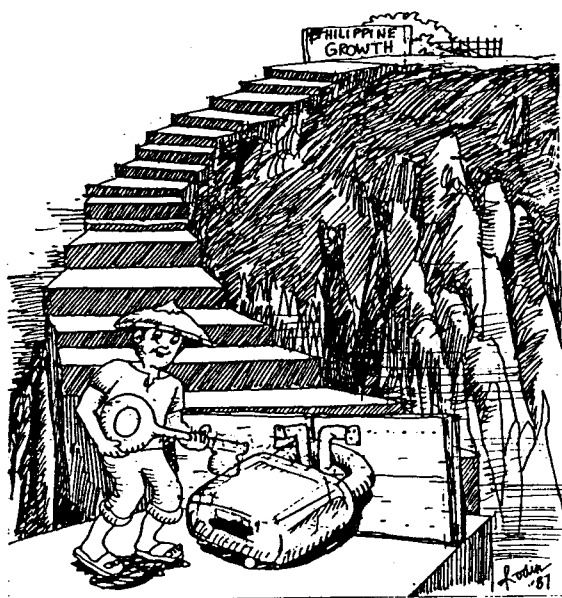
(Contd on page 6 ►)

(← Contd from page 5)

It is not in the interest of bankers to foreclose upon borrowers. In fact, the threat to cut off loan inflows becomes meaningless when outgoings of loan repayments are already larger than income through new loans. The banks cannot afford to let this 'house of cards' totally collapse. With trillions of dollars of Third World debt in their portfolios, the banks will go bankrupt if the Third World suddenly defaults on its debts.

To build an industrialized economy free from excessive debt dependence, the Philippines must first achieve a comprehensively genuine agrarian reform program leading to increased rural productivity and incomes, thereby creating a consumer base to buy the products it produces. The Philippines failed in its industrialization efforts in the 1950s. Few people could afford manufactured goods because a succession of landlord-dominated Congresses prevented any meaningful land reform.

A national industrialization program with target industries protected from outside competition and supported by the government is necessary. By protecting and developing local industries, the vicious cycle of import dependence, trade deficits, balance of payments problems and increased debt, can be broken. This would be a giant step toward economic restructuring that fully serves the needs of the people.



FREEDOM FROM DEBT:
KEY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

US BASES IN PHILIPPINES USED IN GULF WAR

Philippine News and Features
January 13, 1991

The Aquino government must bear the consequences of allowing the US use of its bases in the Philippines for the Persian Gulf conflict, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDF) said on January 11.

In a press statement from Holland, Louis Jalandoni, NDF vice-chair for international affairs, said the US military bases are being used in "America's interventionist and aggressive designs in the Gulf and in the entire Middle East."

The Aquino government has allowed the bases to be used for the transit of American troops and the refueling of US aircraft carriers on their way to the Middle East.

The NDF had earlier repeatedly warned that its forces would launch "intensive and all-out politico-military offensives" on the US bases if they are used for the Gulf War.

The US military bases make the Philippines vulnerable to armed conflicts, "not of its making but arising out of America's aggression."

Jalandoni also said that while professing "love for peace and solicitude" for the Iraqi and other Arab people, the Aquino government has in effect been "abetting US direct intervention and naked aggression against them by facilitating the deployment of US troops and weapons of mass destruction to the Gulf area" in exchange for US support to remain in power.

The Aquino government has left more than half a million Filipino workers in the Middle East unprotected from an imminent shooting war. The reason, Jalandoni said, is that the government depends in large measure on the billions in foreign exchange that the workers earn and remit home.

PASG 1991 NATIONAL MEETING

The national meeting this year was hosted in Minto, NSW on January 25-27.

Members attended from Victoria, Queensland, A.C.T. and New South Wales. Representatives were also present from the Philippines Resource Centre (PRC), Youth & Students Group (Vic), Australia Asia Workers Links (AAWL), Philippines Australia Christian Forum (PACF), Lingap Pinoy Campaign, Uniting Church of Australia, Bayanihan, Dulaang Bayan Sydney (Filipino Community Theatre-Sydney), and Philippines-Australia Cultural Interaction Network (PACIN).

A guest speaker from Association of Concerned Teachers (ACT) provided an update on the general situation in the Philippines. Two surprise visitors, from Task Force Detainees Philippines and Citizens' Council for Justice and Peace Mindanao, spoke about the current campaign for political prisoners.

The major outcome of the debate on Partnership with the Philippines movement was the passing of a motion reaffirming "the leadership of the Filipino Caucus in the Philippine solidarity movement in Australia to determine its priorities, programs, strategies and tactics."

The 1991 program of work will highlight: Bayan tour, Lingap-Pinoy, Human Rights/Political Prisoners, U.S. Bases, and Filipino Migrant Concerns in Australia. One member agreed to act as a 'returning officer' for all PASGs to elect their PRC representatives nationally. In the interim, two members from PASGNSW and one from PASGQLD will represent PASG on the PRC Board.

PASGNSW will collate the minutes of the meeting and we will send a copy to all PASGQLD members.

THIS IS MY LIFE (I WANT CONTROL)

Words and music by Christian Ramilo

This is my life,
You can't live it for me.
This is my life,
Don't try to run it for me.

You can never be me,
And I can never be you.
There are things about me,
That you will never see.
So stop telling me that you
understand,
That you know how it really feels.
I really don't need your sympathy,
What I do need is respect.

This is my life ...

You can tell me what you think,
You can try to help me if you want.
You can agree or disagree,
But in the end I decide.
So stop telling me that we're really
the same,
That your say is as good as mine.
When it's my own life that's on the
line,
Ultimately, it's all up to me.

This is my life ...

You cannot speak on my behalf,
You cannot act in my stead.
You cannot say or do a thing for
me,
If I want to say or do things for
myself.
So stop telling me that I need you,
That I won't survive without you.
I know what I want,
I know where to go,
If you hold me back ...
then goodbye.

This is my life
(I want control) ...



SITUATIONERS AND BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

Extracts from the "1990 IBON DATABANK Calendar" 4 PAGES

Extracts from "FREEDOM FROM NUCLEAR WEAPONS: A QUEST FOR NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, A PILGRIMAGE FOR WORLD PEACE"

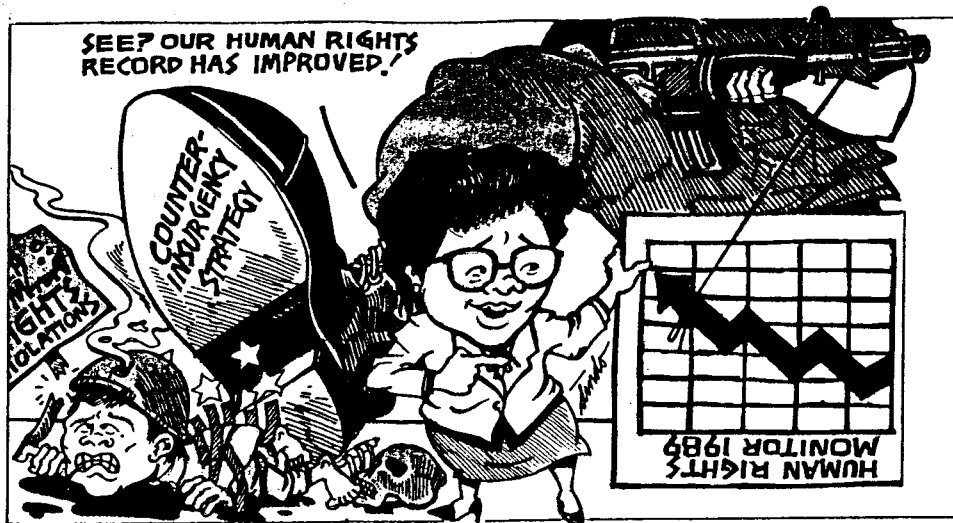
by Wigberto E. Tañada, Senator, Republic of the Philippines 5 pages

Extracts from NORTHERN DISPATCH: "ANCESTRAL LAND CLAIMANTS ASSERT OWNERSHIP OVER PART OF CAMP JOHN HAY" 1 PAGE

Extracts from PHILIPPINE NEWS AND FEATURES: "IN CASE OF U.S. BASES PULL-OUT - Feminists Propose Prostitute Rehab Program" and "NON-TRADITIONAL PLAN - NGOs Push For Base Areas Conversion" 3 PAGES

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