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DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM!

IN THIS ISSUE



"SENATOR COLMENARES"
AT THE ANAKPAWIS
NAT'L CONVENTION
IN QUEZON CITY

8 ANAKPAWIS



REAP MINDANAO NETWORK LAUNCHED TO RESIST EXPANSION OF PLANTATIONS

THE NETWORK RESISTING EXPANSION OF AGRICULTURAL PLANTATIONS IN MINDANAO (REAP-Mindanao Network) was successfully launched in a national conference on Mindanao plantations held at the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Education Auditorium in Diliman, Quezon City last October 28, as part of activities of the 2015 Manilakbayan ng Mindanao protest caravan.

The launch was spearheaded by the REAP secretariat and main conveners led by the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines in the Northern Mindanao Region (RMP-NMR) and

its national office, RMP-National, the Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA), the Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR) and the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), with support from the Hong Kong-based Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC), the All-UP Workers Alliance and the Congress of Teachers and Educators for Nationalism and Democracy (CONTEND) in UP Diliman.

This event was accompanied by a photo exhibit mounted by RMP-NMR and UMA titled "The Other Face of Plunder in Mindanao" which featured the effects of the expansion of corporate agricultural plantations in Mindanao. Infographics were also displayed in the conference venue, while a briefer on Mindanao plantations prepared by the CTUHR was included in the conference kit provided to the participants. More than 300 people attended the event.

Speakers and resource persons for the conference include Pesticide Ac-

tion Network (PAN)-Philippines President Dr. Romeo Quijano, a renowned toxicologist and environmental activist, Bayan Muna Rep. Neri Colmenares, Former Anakpawis Rep. and KMP Chairperson Rafael Mariano, RMP National Coordinator Sister Francis Anover, and Mindanao labor leader Ariel Casilao also of Anakpawis and the Kilusang Mayo Uno in the Southern Mindanao Region (KMU-SMR). Reactors include Datu Jomorito Goaynon of Katribu, Sister Mary Jane Caspillo of RMP-NMR and representatives of lumad and workers from various agricultural plantations in Mindanao.

Dr. Quijano comprehensively talked about the ill effects of pesticides on people and the environment especially in banana plantations. Dr. Quijano is currently facing resurrected harassment suits filed by the Lapanday Agricultural Company (LADECO) because of his research and exposes.

Mariano described the govern-

ment's role in exempting agricultural plantations from land reform and its threat on the food security of the Filipino people. Casilao, on the other hand, described not only the situation of affected farmers and lumad (indigenous peoples), but also the predicament of agricultural workers toiling under harsh labor conditions in these plantations. He ended his presentation with a call to resist oppression, plunder and exploitation.

Prominent guests include Prof. Felipe de Leon Jr. of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA); Rep. Fernando Hicap of Anakpawis Partylist; Former Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo, UP Manila Prof. Roland Simbulan, Dr. Carol Araullo of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN); Elmer Labog, KMU National Chairperson, among others.

Cultural performances were presented by the Tindoga lumad organization of Bukidnon, KONTRA-GAPI and songwriter Danny Fabella.

Solidarity messages from international and local formations were sent by the PAN-Asia Pacific, AMRC, the World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (WCC-EAA) and the Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples' Rights (TFIP).

UMA and RMP-National also organized and participated in several forum-discussions to promote the REAP Mindanao Network at the Bulacan State University, Dela Salle College of St. Benilde, Ateneo de Manila University, Miriam College, UP Manila, University of Sto. Tomas, San Isidro Labrador Church, and the Claret Seminary, where a total of over a thousand participants composed of church people, community leaders, students and teachers interacted with lumad leaders Aisa Seisa, Dulping Ogan, Kerlan Fanagel and other resource persons like Dr. Gene Nisperos of the Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD).



Photo by REAP 2015

Lumad, peasants, church people, the academe and advocates of agrarian reform, human rights and the environment come together at the REAP Mindanao Network launch at the UP College of Education

PANAP HR workshop in Penang

THE PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK- ASIA PACIFIC (PANAP) held a Human Rights (HR) Training Workshop from 17 – 20 August 2015 in Penang, Malaysia attended by various international organizations including militant peasant groups from the Philippines, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA); and human rights group Karapatan.

PAN-AP leads the "No Land, No Life: March for Life! Fight for Land, Rights and Resources" campaign which highlights land and resource grabbing as a human rights issue in the region.

Go Organic!

UMA ATTENDED THE NOV. 5 LAUNCH OF GREEN ACTION PH, and other events recently held to promote organic and sustainable agriculture.

Within the framework of the struggle for genuine land reform, UMA heeds the challenge to exercise cooperation and develop production work particularly in its efforts to introduce organic farming practices in Hacienda Luisita, where its local affiliate AMBALA has embarked on a groundbreaking land cultivation initiative or **bungkalan** since 2005.

Aside from the Green Action PH launch, UMA also participated in the Organic Food Fiesta held July 12; the Philippine Network of Food Security Programmes' (PNFSP) Organic Fair, August 29; and the Organic Farming for Healthy Filipinos and Healthy Environment fair, held last Oct.22. UMA also gave inputs on organic agriculture at a forum held at the UST Thomas Aquinas Research Complex in November.

Green Action PH is a broad national alliance of organizations, institutions, producers and consumers with common advocacies towards sustainable production and sustainable consumption.



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Planting Hunger



AN ERRANT SIGNPOST interrupts the stretch of sugarcane fields in Butong, Quezon, Bukidnon in Mindanao, which is only a few kilometers away from the imposing facade of the Bukidnon Sugar Co., Inc. or Busco, one of the biggest sugar mills in the country.

In other such haciendas, sugar workers call this interlude the *tiempo muerto*. It is dead season, and the bare quiet along the endless dirtroad seems to be the nagging hunger of farmworkers as they wait for the cane to grow. This painful lull of idleness will be broken by their hard toil when harvest time finally comes along.

Fifteen years after a collective land reform certificate was awarded to sugarcane farmworkers in Hacienda Carmen through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), the so-called beneficiaries are still slaving away as *tapaseros* or cane cutters. They are barred from cultivating their own land and growing their own food.

The area marked with a “NO TRESPASSING” signpost is now a barren field stretching a few hundred hectares towards the massive mountain ranges of Bukidnon. The former sugarcane hacienda is now claimed by a corporate agricultural plantation.

The land is reserved for pineapples.

In an interview with UMA, Mang Arnel, one of the original Hacienda Carmen agrarian reform beneficiaries, says theirs is a long and painful story. But for the thousands of farmworkers toiling in sugarcane estates such as Hacienda Luisita, Hacienda Roxas or in the sugarland Negros, this anguished narrative is all too familiar.

Bogus Land Reform

In February 2000, 52 out of the total 130 farmworkers in Hacienda Carmen were initially awarded a 288-hectare

parcel through a collective Certificate of Land Ownership Award or mother CLOA.

The beneficiaries were eventually organized by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) as the South East Sugar Workers Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SESWMPC) where non-government organizations and so-called development groups closely linked with government agencies have brokered agricultural projects using land reform funds. The SESWMPC held the collective certificate for 319.47 hectares. If distributed, each beneficiary would hold 2.19 hectares of land.

The Hacienda Carmen sugarcane estate was assessed by the DAR and the Land Bank to have a market value so high each beneficiary would be obliged to pay the government almost a million pesos for their individual parcel. Under the CARP, the government must pay “just compensation” to the landlords which will eventually be sourced from amortization payments of beneficiaries. Amortization must be completed for a period of 30 years before beneficiaries could finally own the parcels of land awarded through land reform.

Farmers lament that these obliga-

tions are utterly inappropriate without adequate government support for their agricultural production. Each beneficiary was compelled to pay the Land Bank a yearly amortization of Php 27,813. After only three years of bad harvests and debt traps, it was estimated that 99% of the beneficiaries in Hacienda Carmen cannot fulfill these heavy payments.

Without any assistance from the government or its patently bogus land reform program, some of the beneficiaries were compelled to pawn their lands. Wealthy landlords and sugar planters saw the hapless and impoverished beneficiaries as easy prey. By 2003, beneficiaries were coerced to enter into lease agreements where they were paid Php 5,000 per hectare per year – an amount that Mang Arnel claims is not even enough to cover their yearly amortization obligations.

By 2008, the annual rent went as high as Php 15,000 per hectare. But as the sugar planters dictated the terms of these lease agreements, the supposed land reform beneficiaries have totally lost effective control over their awarded parcels.

At first, the beneficiaries were hired as farmhands in their own land until

eventually, the sugar planters hauled in their own people to do work for cheaper wages. Before long, some of the beneficiaries were duped to sell their lands to unscrupulous buyers evading CARP restrictions through dubious waivers.

By 2012, the Land Bank and the DAR warned beneficiaries that the awarded land reform certificate will soon be cancelled because of their failure to pay amortization. By this time, the empty threat mouthed by these insincere and irresponsible government institutions was just like rubbing salt on their open wounds.

Bitter Pineapple

The shady deals forged by sugar planters with individual beneficiaries have now allowed the entry of giant agribusiness firms. According to Mang Arnel, wealthy sugar planters with the collusion of local government officials have entered Hacienda Carmen through a 15-year contract with DAVCO, without the knowledge of residents and land reform beneficiaries in the area.

The Davao Agri-Ventures Corporation, Inc. or DAVCO, a firm established by the late agribusiness mogul Antonio Floirendo Sr. and now headed by his

son, Antonio Floirendo Jr., is notorious for encroaching into peasant and lumad or indigenous peoples’ communities in Bukidnon as part of its aggressive and seemingly uninterrupted expansion thrust.

Originally engaged in fresh banana production, the Floriendos own the Tagum Development Corporation or TADECO which controls vast banana plantations with complete processing facilities in Davao del Norte. Since then, the corporation has ventured into several businesses including pineapple production. With its enterprise with global fruit giant Del Monte, DAVCO exports an average of at least 8.5 million boxes of Del Monte gold pineapples per year, sold to trading partners in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, the Middle East and New Zealand.

Since last year, Hacienda Carmen land reform beneficiaries with support from advocates and peasant groups such as Kahugpungan sa mga Mag-uuma (Farmers Association) or Kasama-Bukidnon, affiliated with the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) and the Organisasyon sa Yanong Obrerong Nagkahiusa (Organization of United Farmworkers) or Ogyon, UMA’s local affiliate in Bukidnon province, barricaded the area from DAVCO and embarked on a land cultivation initiative to produce food for the community such as corn, peanuts, cassava and other root crops.

Farmers set up and manned the barricades unfazed. Even while engaged in production, farmers were constantly threatened and harassed by armed goons employed by DAVCO. Earlier this year, after two successful harvests by the farmers, the company’s bulldozers rolled in into their plots and completely destroyed their precious food crops.

The DAR Adjudication Board has finally intervened – but in favor of the pineapple plantation. Charges were slapped against farmers, barring them from their own land as bitterly prompted by the menacing “NO TRESPASSING” signpost.

This kind of violence – spawned by bogus land reform and impunity – is planting hunger among the country’s food producers.

UMA JOINS ANTI-IMPERIALIST PROTESTS, INT'L GATHERINGS

MILITANT PEASANT ORGANIZATIONS in the Philippines led by the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) launched and joined various anti-imperialist activities, including national protest caravans and international solidarity gatherings from October to November.

Peasant protests from October 15-21 were held in Quezon City and Manila to mark International Rural Women's Day (Oct. 15); World "Hunger" Day (Oct. 16) and the 43rd anniversary of Presidential Decree (PD) 27, the bogus land reform program enacted during the Marcos dictatorship (Oct. 21).

The Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) was among various militant groups that welcomed the Manilakbayan ng Mindanao protest caravan which held camp-outs at the UP

Diliman campus, Liwasang Bonifacio in Manila and the Redemptorist Church in Baclaran, Pasay City from October 26 to November 22. The people of Mindanao composed mainly of peasants, *lumad* or indigenous peoples, Moros, and other sectors affected by state-sponsored attacks on their communities and indigenous schools, called on the public to support their resistance to militarization and plunder. Manilakbayan delegates held several protest actions and cultural activities to highlight the people's struggle against foreign large-scale mining activities and aggressive expansion of corporate agricultural plantations in Mindanao.

During the Manilakbayan, UMA was among groups which led the formation of the REAP Mindanao Network. A street conference against oil palm plantations was also held Nov. 4, spearheaded by KMP. UMA also mounted the REAP photo exhibit at the International Festival of Peoples Resistance and Struggles (IFPRS) held Nov. 17.

END IMPUNITY. Protests on the 11th year of the Hacienda Luisita massacre. (KMP)



#PHFightAPEC



UMA also participated in various international solidarity activities such as the Peasant Anti-Imperialist Solidarity (PAIS) held Nov. 13, sponsored by the KMP and the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC); and the International League of Peoples' Struggle 5th International Assembly (ILPS5thIA) from Nov. 14-16.

During the ILPS Assembly, the Commission 6 for Agrarian Reform Concern called for intensified struggle against foreign plunder of land and state terrorism. The Commission 6 workshop was attended by more than 50 delegates from various farmers and advocate groups in the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Kurdistan, US, France, Australia and Taiwan.

The ILPS Commission 6 also led a picket protest at the Ninoy Aquino Memorial Shrine in Quezon City to condemn the 11th year of injustice and impunity on the Hacienda Luisita massacre. UMA and AMBALA Vice-Chairperson Rudy Corpuz also joined a candle-lighting protest in commemoration of the Hacienda Luisita martyrs at the Tomas Morato rotunda led by militant labor center Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) and also participated in by foreign delegates of ILPS and APWLD. Protests were also held in Hacienda Luisita.

Peasants and agricultural workers joined various sectors at the anti-APEC protests held from Nov. 18-19. Despite tight security, road blocks and dispersals, militant groups led by BAYAN culminated protests in a mammoth rally at Gil Puyat Avenue, near the site of the actual APEC meetings.

"We declare this day as historic, in total contrast to the APEC summit where leaders of developed countries and puppet regimes such as the Aquino administration brainstorm on how to step up wholesale landgrabbing and control over vast agricultural lands. We, the producer-farmers of the world are standing up against this malevolence of monopoly capitalism or imperialism," said APC and KMP Chairperson Rafael "Ka Paeng" Mariano.

THE ESCALANTE MASSACRE: *Three Decades After*



PHOTO FROM REP. KARLOS ZARATE

VARIOUS PEASANT AND HUMAN rights groups, including the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Escalante massacre in Negros Occidental last September.

A torch parade by residents of Escalante City was held a night before the actual anniversary. On September 20, the NFSW held protest marches in Escalante and Bacolod City to honor the fallen martyrs.

The Escalante Massacre was the result of the violent assault against the 5,000-strong rally composed mainly of hacienda or sugar workers and other progressive sectors such as fisherfolk, students, urban poor, professionals and church people who gathered in Escalante to protest the 13th anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law.

The mobilization was also in response to a nationwide call for a "Welgang Bayan" (People's Strike) against the Marcos dictatorship.

At least nineteen people were killed and scores were injured when state

forces led by 50 combat-ready Regional Special Action Forces (RSAF), local policemen, members of the Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF), and unidentified armed men opened fire at the protesters, mid-afternoon of September 20, 1985.

Shooting reportedly occurred after then-Escalante town mayor Braulio Lumayo and Congressman Armando Gustilo left the town hall with their bodyguards.

After the carnage, local warlords Lumayo and Gustilo were never summoned for investigation by the Escalante Massacre Fact-Finding Commission. A ranking police officer in command of RSAF was assigned elsewhere and was even promoted. Only three (3) low-ranking policemen were imprisoned as fall guys for their role in the massacre. They were eventually released in 2003.

On December 3, 2012 the martyrs of Escalante were honored as heroes at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani in Quezon City.

Most of the massacre victims were in their youth with the youngest, Rovena

Luisita under BS Aquino

JULY 27 WAS PRESIDENT BS Aquino's fifth and last State of the Nation Address (SONA). For the farmers in Hacienda Luisita, that day marked more than half a decade of Aquino's lies and bogus land reform.

Such is the sentiment of speakers at State of Luisita, a press conference and solidarity program organized by Luisita Watch held at the UP College of MassComm Diliman, a week before Aquino's last SONA.

AMBALA SecGen Renato Mendoza described the Aquino administration as full of panloloko, pandarahas, at pangangamkam (deception, violence, and landgrabbing).

An anomalous solar power public-private partnership (PPP) project approved by Aquino is now under construction in disputed agricultural areas in Hacienda Luisita.

Before the massacre at the picketlines of Hacienda Luisita's Welgang Bayan in 2004, sugar workers also became the main casualties of the violent dispersal of Escalante's Welgang Bayan two decades earlier.

Franco only 14, and others in their teens and early 20s – Norberto Locanilao and Maria Luz Mondejar, (16); Michael Dayanan, Angelina Lape, and Ronilo Santa Ana, (17); William Alegre, Alex Labatos, Claro Monares, Manuel Tan, and Cesar Tejones, (18); Nenita Orot (20); Juvelyn Jaravello, Rogelio Megallen Jr., and Rodolfo Montealto (21), Rodolfo Mahinay and Edgardo Salili (23).

All victims were hacienda workers except for Juvelyn who was a community organizer.

Mindanao Labor Leader named 1st Nominee of Anakpawis

ANAKPAWIS PARTY-LIST presented its nominees for the 2016 Elections during its national convention last Sept. 26. Ariel "Ayik" Casilao, local leader of militant labor center Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) in the Southern Mindanao Region (KMU-SMR) was named first nominee of Anakpawis.

Casilao is also an organizer of agricultural workers in SMR as leader and spokesperson of the National Federation of Labor Unions or NAFLU. Before this, Casilao was a founding member of militant youth organization Anakbayan in 1998; secretary-general of Karapatan-SMR and leader of BAYAN-SMR.

Casilao was elected National Vice-Chairperson of Anakpawis Party-list during the convention. He also worked as co-convenor of the just concluded Manilakbayan ng Mindanao 2015.

Casilao and the KMU in SMR have led workers in several successful protests and strikes which were due to and have further resulted in the effective expansion of their organizing and political work in the region. Among agricultural workers, Casilao led recent actions against giant banana plantation companies.

Among the new and strengthened unions are the United Pantaron Banana Workers Union (UPBWU-ADLO-KMU) in Davao del Norte and the Nagkahiusang Mamumuo sa Suyapa Farm (NAMASUFA-NAFLU-KMU) in Compostela Valley. The Banana Workers Association (BANWA) chapters in North Cotabato, Davao City, Davao del Norte and Compostela Valley have all expanded accordingly. The new alliance Banana Industry Growers and Workers Against SUMIFRU (BIGWAS) was also instrumental in securing victory for a number of agricultural workers' strikes this year.

Other than Casilao, Former Anakpawis Rep. and KMP Chairperson Rafael Mariano and Anakpawis National Chairman Randall Echanis were named second and third nominees respectively of Anakpawis Party-list.

"SENATOR COLMENARES" AT THE ANAKPAWIS NAT'L CONVENTION



Makabayan Bloc senatorial candidate Atty. Neri Colmenares (center) with staunch supporters, actress Angel Locsin (L) and former Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo (R).

DURING THE ANAKPAWIS PARTY-LIST NATIONAL CONVENTION held last September 26 at the Amoranto Sports Complex in Quezon City, Bayan Muna Representative Neri Colmenares told the hundreds of toiling masses in attendance that he became an activist because he witnessed and became part of the day-to-day struggle of sugar workers in his native Negros Occidental. The militant struggle of peasants and agricultural workers continues to inspire him to this day.

Colmenares knew the viciousness of Martial Law – he was arrested twice as a student activist in Bacolod City and in Cagayan Valley and endured severe torture. Tempered by his experience in detention, he pursued higher studies and eventually became a lawyer. Colmenares is now the President of the National Union of Peoples Lawyers (NUPL) which handles cases pro bono for political prisoners, activists, and for ordinary masses in need.

When he became a Congressman of Bayan Muna (People First) Party-list, he authored and co-authored several bills that uphold the rights and welfare of the ordinary Filipino. This includes among

others House Bill 252, better known as the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill (GARB). He is also known for authoring the bill for the P2,000 increase in the monthly social security (SSS) benefits of senior citizens, a piece of legislation now only waiting for a signature from the President to be finally enacted.

But more than that, Rep. Neri Colmenares is still part of the parliament of the streets where he marches alongside the masses in fighting an oppressive and repressive system to effect change.

UMA is among the toiling masses of peasants and workers who fully support the candidacy of Neri Colmenares for Senator in the 2016 National Elections.

UMA NATIONAL CONGRESS TO BE HELD NEXT YEAR

The Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) will hold its Third National Congress in Mindanao early next year. Member-organizations and other interested parties are enjoined to contact us for inquiries and details. Our email address is uma.pilipinas@gmail.com.