

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

American workers are also facing hard times. The dual evils of inflation and high unemployment touch everyone of us. But although there are now strong attempts to roll back many of the gains made by labor in this country, we are not operating under a regime which outlaws the basic rights of workers.

Support from U.S. trade unions, and from workers around the world, is crucial if Filipino workers are to succeed in their difficult struggle for basic rights.

Several American unions, including the ILWU, the UAW, and the SEIU have already passed and publicized resolutions of support for Filipino workers. Some international labor federations, have also taken up the cause of Filipino workers. The International Transport Federation, for example, has supported Filipino seamen while the International Foodworkers Union is conducting a worldwide boycott on behalf of hotel workers at the Manila Peninsula Hotel.

YOU CAN HELP SUPPORT THIS STRUGGLE

1. Encourage your union to send letters and telegrams of protest over the arrest of labor leaders, stating your support for the just and legitimate demands of Filipino workers including the restoration of the right to strike and the restoration of civil liberties in the Philippines.

2. Send letters of solidarity to the Filipino trade unionists.

3. Invite a speaker/slide presentation to your union to learn more about the current situation in the Philippines.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

"This union supports the efforts of trade unionists in the Philippines to improve their living and working conditions, condemns the arrest of labor leaders and the prohibition of legitimate trade union activities including the right to strike and demands the release of trade union activists and the full restoration of trade union rights."

Send to:

President Ferdinand Marcos
Malacanang Palace
Manila, Philippines

Philippine Solidarity Network (we will forward to Philippine unions)
707 Wisconsin
San Francisco, CA 94107

"Let this be a record for our struggle. Lend your support for our final victory."

Kilusang Mayo Uno Labor Center
Manila, Philippines
December 12, 1980

U.S. INTERESTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Foreign corporations, mostly U.S. account for 67% of total investment in the Philippines. U.S. companies have over \$2.5 billion invested in the Philippines—and extract a profit of \$3.50 on every \$1 invested, \$2 of which is repatriated to the U.S.

FAVORABLE LAWS

When the U.S. "gave" independence to the Philippines in 1945, a special amendment (the Parity Agreement) was added to the Philippine Constitution which allowed U.S. companies and individuals the same rights as Filipinos to own and control Philippine resources.

Even after the expiration of that agreement in 1974, President Marcos insured continued U.S. domination of the economy by instituting government measures which favor U.S. investors. Under the Investment Incentives Act and the Export Incentives Act, U.S. companies are allowed full repatriation of profits, a tax-holiday from five years of start-up date, duty-free import of raw materials and semi-processed goods for re-export and other financial advantages.

Because of these measures, the level of investment has increased markedly since the 1972 declaration of Martial Law: in the two years prior to martial law U.S. firms invested \$16.3 million in the 2 years following martial law, they invested \$362 million in the Philippines.

EXPORT PROCESSING ZONES

To further enhance the growth of export oriented manufacture and processing, the government has set up several Export Processing Zones.

In the most well-established, the Bataan Export Processing Zones (BEPZ), there are 26,000 workers in 58 factories. Around 80% are female workers, ranging from age 15 to 24.

The wages in the BEPZ are extremely low. The average daily wage for regular workers (13 pesos) is equivalent to the price of a kilo of fish or three loaves of bread. Strikes are strictly forbidden.

Workers live in cramped boarding houses, often sleeping in shifts on the same bed. Health and safety conditions are notoriously poor. Common health problems cited by the workers include fainting (from lack of food and oppressive heat), eye strain (especially in the electronics assembly plants) and weak lungs (especially in the textile plants and factories using toxic chemicals). There is no provision for sick leave.

Most workers say they were hired between the ages of 14-16. They claim it is useless to apply if one is over 25 years old because that is already "too old." The majority of workers, being young and female, are subject to severe forms of sex discrimination and sexual harassment at the workplace. Most keep quiet for fear of losing jobs to the many eager applicants.

New export processing zones are now in operation in Cebu, Davao and Baguio and others are planned in Bacolod, Zamboanga, Leyte and Tarlac. The World Bank has provided loans for their construction.

In 1976, there was a well-coordinated strike wave throughout the country. 200 workers at Mead-Johnson went on strike, and were arrested by the military. Two of those detained were pregnant women. Fifteen hundred employees of a Westinghouse assembly plant staged a slow-down to demand better working conditions. At Central Textiles, three thousand went on strike—defying the ban.

More recently, in 1979, some 700 workers at the Ford Stamping Plant in the Bataan Export Processing Zone staged the first strike in the zone's history. Four hundred strikers were promptly arrested and imprisoned.

Ford brought in strikebreakers, while placing many labor activists on preventive suspension. The Minister of Labor pleaded with the suspended workers to give up their fight, pointing out that the Philippine First Lady is a close friend of the Fords and would do all in her power to see the company got its way.

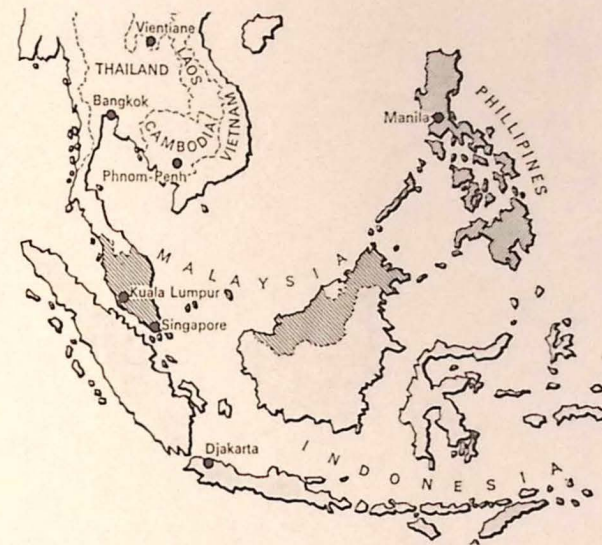
The workers refused to be cowed—they were determined to set an example of militant defiance for other zone workers.

In February of 1981 alone—after the lifting of Martial Law—workers held 23 work stoppages in Metro Manila, equal to an annual rate of 276 strikes. Among those companies struck in the most recent wave was the American owned Franklin Baker, a coconut processing firm.

In 1980, on May 1 the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) defied the strike ban and the ban on demonstrations by organizing a rally of over 30,000 workers in Manila demanding restoration of trade union rights and the lifting of martial law.

The numbers and militancy of the May 1 rally shocked the Marcos regime. Four months later, shortly before a national gathering of labor organizers, the Military Intelligence Service Group raided the offices of major trade unions and arrested 19 labor leaders for "subversive activities."

Among the leading labor activists who were put behind bars and who have still not been released are Ernesto Arellano, General Secretary of the KMU, Leto Villar, General Manager of the Cubao Drivers Cooperative, Alejandro Magtoto, President of the Wyeth Suceo Employees Union, and Rosario Zapanta and Eleurio Tuazon, officers of the Philippine Textile Mills Employees Union.



A Call for Solidarity with the Philippine Labor Movement

The Philippine Solidarity Network is a nationwide organization opposed to U.S. military, economic, and political domination in the Philippines and in support of the Filipino people's struggle for a just and democratic society.

For more information, contact Philippine Solidarity Network, 707 Wisconsin Street, San Francisco, CA 94107 or your local chapter.

"We are over 7 million workers in fetters, your Philippine brethren. Hear the clanging of our chains. From Batanes to Tawi-Tawi they rattle in protest."

In December 1980, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU)—a major Filipino labor federation of 150,000 workers—issued a call for solidarity for their struggle for basic trade union rights to the international labor community. All quotes in this brochure are from the KMU statement.

BACKGROUND

The Philippines is an island country of 50 million people. Although it is across the Pacific from the continental U.S., the connections to the U.S. are very close and date back very far.

After three hundred years of Spanish domination, the Philippines became a U.S. colony as part of the spoils of the Spanish-American War. In 1945, after securing favorable conditions for the expansion of U.S. companies and a foothold for the largest military bases outside of the U.S., the U.S. "granted" independence to the Philippines.

The Philippine economy is still dominated by U.S. businesses and finance. Del Monte, Dole and United Brands control vast tracts of agricultural lands growing pineapple, bananas and other foodstuffs for exports. Lucrative mining and timber enterprises are owned by Atlas Consolidated, Boise Cascade and Georgia Pacific. In the past decade, the growth of export-oriented industrialization in the Philippines, U.S. companies like Ford, Timex, and Texas Instruments have come to dominate the manufacturing sector (see box on U.S. interests).

For over a decade, the Philippines has been under the rule of President Ferdinand Marcos. In 1972, just before the national elections in which his term as President was constitutionally due to expire, Marcos declared Martial Law in order to maintain himself as head of government.

Martial Law meant not only the indefinite extension of Marcos' autocratic rule. Immediately, thousands of workers, peasants and students were imprisoned as political detainees—without charges. With one dictatorial decree after another, Marcos banned strikes, outlawed demonstrations, shut down scores of newspapers and radio and TV stations, and drove thousands of trade union organizers and other political opponents underground through brutal military rule.

Though Marcos lifted Martial Law in January 1981, he continues to rule by decree and most of the repressive measures remain.

MARTIAL LAW AND THE LABOR CODE

"Martial Law has made us all galley slaves shackled to oars for the greater profit of those who would use us. That body of laws known as the New Labor Code has been wielded as a cudgel against the workers themselves."

One of the major reasons for the declaration of Martial Law was growing opposition to the Marcos regime, including widespread unrest among labor to protest low wages and intolerable working conditions. In the period just prior to Martial Law there were 160 strikes per year.

In an effort to quell the growing labor movement, and to convince foreign investors of low wages and a "docile" labor force, Marcos introduced the infamous New Labor Code.



One of the most insidious provisions of the Labor Code is that workers in "vital industries" are forbidden to strike. The broad definition of what is a "vital" industry means that strikes are effectively banned, certainly as far as U.S. and other multinational employers are concerned.

Vital industries include all export manufacturing concerns, as well as public utilities, transport and communication firms, hospitals, schools and colleges, fuel processors and distributors and banks.

For those few industries where strikes are allowed, a union must file notice of intent to strike with the Ministry of Labor 30 days in advance of the planned strike date—and the President then has the authority to prohibit the strike.

The Labor Code also includes other provisions to suppress workers. For example, companies are permitted to put any worker on "preventive suspension" who "poses a serious danger to the life or property of the employer." Employers often use this provision to get rid of union leaders or local organizers who are branded as troublemakers. A suspended worker is effectively blacklisted by other employers.

According to the Labor Code, employers need only pay 75% of the basic minimum wage—and provide no benefits—during a 6-month probation period for new employees.

After this period, workers are supposed to become regular and entitled to full pay and benefits. However, employers often terminate workers just prior to the close of the 6-month period, and rehire them again on a probationary basis to avoid the additional expense of the full wage. Many workers are so used to this practice that they jokingly refer to themselves as "permanent casuals."

Labor organizers are also subject to the more general repressive laws of the regime as well as those specific to the Labor Code.

These government decrees include banning all demonstrations and public meetings, arrest of "subversives" without charges or trial, and the right of the military to stop and search anyone without giving cause.

In addition, because of the close ties of the military to corporate management (e.g., the Commander of the Navy is in charge of a large shipping company, the Minister of Defense is a lawyer for the Dole Corporation, etc.), the military is frequently called in during strikes to arrest strike leaders, break up picket lines and protect strikebreakers.

The military regularly practices "preventive detention" of labor leaders in an attempt to avert mass actions and demonstrations. In September 1981, for example, 17 labor leaders were detained in a military prison shortly before a planned mass rally of the KMU labor federation protesting government non-compliance with their demands for a higher wage and the restoration of the right to strike.

Many of those arrested, including Ernesto Arrellano, General Secretary of the KMU, are still in prison.

While in detention, many labor organizers have been subject to brutal torture. Torture ranges from isolation in solitary confinement with no sunlight or exercise, to physical beatings under interrogation, pistol whippings, and electric shocks applied to the nostrils, genitals and other sensitive parts of the body.

Other workers have been "salvaged." This term refers to persons who have disappeared altogether while in military custody, like Ernesto Nazareno, a construction worker at the Bataan nuclear reactor site who was warning against the dangers of building a nuclear plant on the slope of an active volcano.

According to the Task Force on Detainees of the Philippines, a church-related human rights group, at least 37 labor activists have been "salvaged" since the beginning of Martial Law.

"At every turn we are exploited. Those among us who dare to organize or who stand up and speak out are hauled away to military detention centers as 'subversives.' Some have been murdered while others have disappeared, their fate unknown to this day."

WAGES AND CONDITIONS

"We toil like animals, but it seems that even they are better off than we are. For while carabao and oxen can live on grass, we cannot feed our families enough, no matter how hard we try, on what we earn."

The average wage in the Philippines is a60 cents per hour—one of the lowest wage rates in all of Asia. The daily wage rate of laborers has declined 35% since the imposition of Martial Law in 1972.

At that rate, a single wage earner cannot support an average family of six at even bare subsistence level.

The average compensation—including wages and benefits—for workers in the capital city of Manila is only \$4.20 a day. According to the Philippine government's own Food and Nutrition Research Institute, an average family of six requires at least \$4.20 a day to meet basic nutritional needs—not to mention other basic necessities. Because of this, children must often work to help keep the family alive. According to the Philippine government's wages council, a family requires \$7 per day to keep up with the cost of living.

The basic work week is 6 days or 48 hours. Frequently workers are forced to do overtime, compensated only at time and a quarter.

Especially in the manufacturing industry, workers are required to meet daily output quotas. In many cases these quotas are adjusted upward without corresponding labor saving innovations—in short "speed-up" is a common practice.

The Labor Code stipulates certain mandatory fringe benefits—including vacation leave, emergency living allowance, and social security contributions be made by employers. These benefits amount to 145% of basic pay.

This unusually high percentage can be explained by the fact that when pressured to raise basic pay, the government responds by adding on benefits rather than increasing their base wage. In this way, the higher pay does not affect the calculation of such wage supplements as overtime, maternity leave, contributions of employers to state insurance funds, etc.—all of which are computed from basic pay.

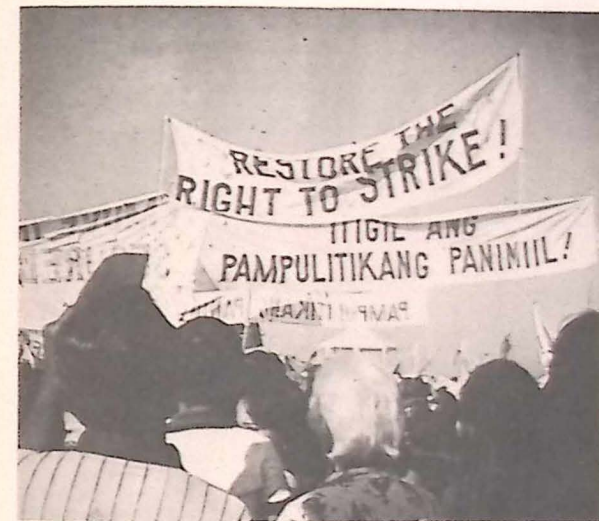
Many benefits are "mandatory" only in a limited sense. For example, firms exempt themselves from paying the fringe benefits pleading financial "distress." Workers observe, however, that by all indications their "distressed" employers appear to be prospering.

A recent study by the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, a labor federation historically close to the government, showed that 65.5% of firms were found to be in violation of labor standards—mostly non-payment of wages or summary dismissal and preventive suspension of employees—and that 36.5% violated the health and safety standards.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT

"Faced with this continuing oppression, there has developed a workers' movement in the Philippines which has demanded restoration of all the basic rights of the Filipino people."

"We have been brought down to our knees, but we are trying to rise again."



The trade union movement in the Philippines has a long and proud tradition. Workers have been organized since the late 1800's. In 1872, dockworkers in Manila went on strike demanding better living and working conditions.

And even no, despite severe repression—wholesale firing of labor activists, arrests, torture and even death—the labor movement continues to fight back, to grow and become strong.

Even though strikes are outlawed under Martial Law, workers strike actions throughout the country demanding the payment of a just wage, the granting of full benefits and the assurance of good working conditions, and the full restoration of trade union rights.

Almost immediately after the declaration of Martial Law, there was a rash of short, sharp industrial actions. The first major strike took place in the La Tondena distillery in 1975 where 500 workers occupied the factory, demanding higher wages.