

Battered Bodies and Crushed Rights: State of Filipino Workers' Trade Union and Human Rights under Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo's five year administration

by: Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR)

Overview:

When Mrs. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo assumed Presidency following People Power II in 2001, she promised that her government will focused on job creations, bringing food for every table and giving education for all children.

Arroyo government's economic and political plan reduced the promise into myths.

Continuing deposed President Estrada's MTPDP, the Arroyo government accelerated the desperate race to integrate the Philippines into the global market, whilst building the mechanisms that later ensured Mrs. Arroyo's presidency in 2004 elections. Handing the employment generation to foreign investments and overseas employment, government's economic programs and policies were directed to attracting more foreign investments through creation of more economic zones, further liberalizing trade thru tariff removal on imports, privatizing government-owned and controlled corporations including basic utilities and services, deregulating and re-structuring even educational system to meet the demands of multinational companies and fill-in the shortage of cheap labour in industrialized countries.

Five years of Arroyo government, 30% Filipinos continue to live below the poverty line (ultra poor) and the poor are left to feed their children, literally with garbage. Thirty two percent (32%) of country's 36.461 million labour force or 3 out of 10 able-bodied workers are jobless and wanting in jobs, the highest unemployment and underemployment rate since the downfall of Marcos dictatorship two decades ago.

On the other hand, a big chunk of the so-called employed remains contractual or flexible workers earning 17-45% lesser than the prescribed minimum wage - i.e less than half of the estimated cost of living-- and with extremely less chance of becoming permanent workers or members of the trade unions.

In short, majority of the Filipinos agree that life is more difficult today than in five years past. This is a condition that births to dissatisfaction and dissent from the already impoverished people particularly the workers, the urban and the rural poor. This deep dissatisfaction exacerbated by scandals involving the First family transformed into organized and unorganized anti-Arroyo movement calling for resignation or ouster of Mrs Arroyo.

Mrs. Arroyo who prepared herself to perpetuate in power treated her critics not as legitimate protesters but government destabilizers, terrorists and communists. So rallies, strikes were broken violently, strikers are dismissed en masse and slapped with charges of common crimes. Leaders, organizers and active members of the trade unions and other labour organizations particularly those that were also holding positions in the progressive partylists were abducted, forcibly disappeared or outrightly killed. Leaders and their respective progressive organizations and institutions, including bishops critical of the administration are

tagged as communists or NPA supporters and their organizations as fronts. A label that in this country is tantamount to serving death warrants.

As a result, in the last five years, trade union and human rights condition of Filipino workers were shaped and defined by Arroyo's government economic and political policies anchored in attracting and serving foreign investments while silencing oppositions through aggressive War on Terror campaign or Oplan Bantay Laya counter insurgency program. The picture this government created in an ugly one.

Trends and Patterns of the Trade Union and Human Rights

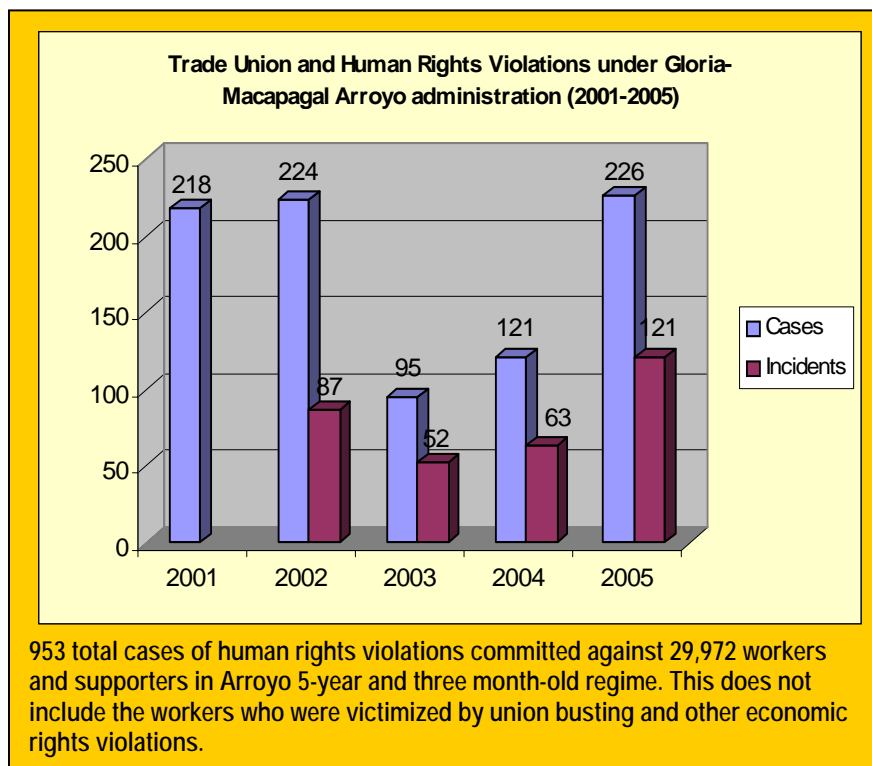
In Arroyo's 5-year and three month-old regime. CTUHR recorded 953 total cases of human rights violations committed against 29,972 workers and supporters. This figure does not include the workers who were victimized by union busting and strings of economic rights violations that continue to push the workers deeper into the pit of poverty and misery.

What the Marcos regime did not accomplish in its 20 years of dictatorship, the Arroyo regime almost perfected the means of decimating unions and temporary paralyzing the workers through

sophisticated, swift and silent attacks on workers rights on one hand and naked militarist style on the other. Specifically, these are characterized by the following trends and patterns:

1. calculated deprivation of workers basic economic rights: freezing wages at barely survival level whilst condoning capitalists who violate basic labour standards and are forcing their workers to work longer beyond their capabilities.

Wage is the workers main if not the only source of livelihood and sustenance. Yet, amidst the skyrocketing prices and inflation rate that hits at 7.7%, the workers wage trailed behind. In NCR for instance, minimum wage is pegged at P275/day - the highest in the country -- as against the government estimated P650.17 daily cost of living for a family of six in NCR or P534.80 at the national level. Workers in other regions receive much lower even if their cost



of living is higher than in the NCR such as in the Autonomous Region of Mindanao. Salaries of contractual or flexible workers are worse, as they often get 17-45% lesser than the minimum wage without benefits as exemplified in CALABARZON. [CTUHR research].

In fact, there has never been an effort by the Arroyo government to minimize the gap between the cost of living and income of wage earners. Except for P25 wage increase granted last year, the Arroyo government incessantly ignores the demand for wage increase. The workers' call for P125 across the board legislated wage increase seemed to fell on deaf ears in spite of the House Committee on Labour and Employment endorsement of HB645 pertaining to that demand. Talking like the heads different chambers of commerce, the government through the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE) cited that wage increase will trigger factory closures and more unemployment and in the end will be anti-workers. An argument that for several times has been debunked or trashed as unemployment continue to bloat and factories close down due to inability to compete, even without wage increase.

Frozen wage is not the only worries of workers particularly in other regions. Reduction of wages alarms them most. In a move to attract more investors outside the existing economic zones where production costs are much higher, the government re-classified regions and provinces into urban areas, growth corridor area, agricultural etc. which by their definition there exist varied cost of living which should be the basis of determining minimum wage. In effect, workers in CALABARZON or Southern Tagalog for instance found themselves divided into nine minimum wage-levels, in a more shocking discoveries found their salaries reduced, instead of increased.

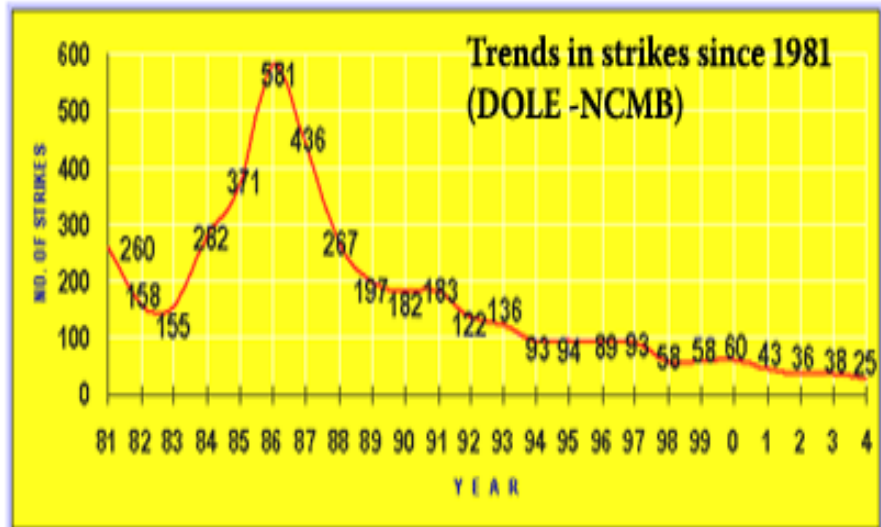
To augment their income and to prevent themselves from being unemployed anytime, the workers are forced to work longer beyond their physical ability. Raymundo Aguba, 29 years old - a contractual worker in Masuda Philippines —died of exhaustion after his supervisor forced him to work continuously for 22 hours on August 3,2004. His fate was followed by Romeo Mapacpac of Asia Brewery and Salvacion Langomez in Compostela Valley who also died due to exhaustion in May and September last year. The three were struggling to meet the production quota imposed on them while hoping that their income would be augmented through overtime work.

Similarly, more or less 1000 permanent contractual women workers of Fashion House Garments in Cavite and Anvil Ensembles in Taytay Rizal were drugged to keep them awake for at least 16 hours or more. In Fashion house workers took Bonamine tablets - an anti-dizziness drug taken before traveling while in Anvil Ensembles workers took Duromine --a regulated drug belonging to the amphetamine and methamphetamine families. Anvil Ensembles is sub-contractor of baby clothes for such First World Companies such as Sears and Roebuck [PDI-july 5/03] Fashion House Garments produces GAP and other branded clothes.

Despite the fear, workers desire to improve their conditions at work push them to organize, or launch concerted protest actions even without unions. Except that they have to face another form of whipping, which often they are not prepared.

2. Intensified systematic union busting measures from dismissal of union officers and active members, shutting down operation where majority of union members are working, closures, so-called change of management, retrenchment to massive contractualization resulting not only in dramatic decrease of union membership and CBAs but also more exploitative and oppressive working conditions.

Since 2001, the Department of Labour and Employment took pride in showcasing the downtrend in strike statistics. DOLE Secretary Patricia Sto Tomas attributes the decline in the 'improving industrial relation in the country and the decreasing workers' interests on strike'. 'Moderate unions call it responsible trade unionism'.



Nothing from these above perceptions is true.

Decline in strike is by no means an indicator of improving working conditions. It is on the contrary. In examining several federations' experiences, CTUHR documentation revealed that in the last five years for instance, majority of the newly organized unions are busted before they are certified. Management employs different ways such as dismissal of union officers and active members, shutdown of operation where majority of union members are working, closures, so-called change of management, retrenchment etc.

To defend itself, then budding unions such as the union of Yokohoma Tires in Clark Economic zone, SunEver lights, Southtec Development Corporation in Laguna and Sackline Industries in Valenzuela city were forced to go on strike to defend itself. Their strikes were violently dispersed and unionists were left to filing their complaints of illegal dismissal at the Department of Labor and up to the Supreme Court. The result is even more frustrating. Sackline workers who were displaced for example has since 2001, been in and out of the National Labour Relations Commission to follow-up their case, and yet no resolution seems forthcoming.

Cutting the lifeline

Nipping the buds through mass dismissal is not the only potent way of busting unions. Capitalists seemed to learn that job dismissal of identified and perceived unionists is not enough to neutralize unionism. In some cases, it (dismissal) compounded by unreasonable company regulations even encouraged persistent curiosity by remaining workers that eventually led to a new wave of attempts to unionize.

Under the guise of economic losses or bankruptcy and government protection to businesses, companies resorted to closure during CBA negotiation, or after union certification election or when unions reached the stage of filing a notice of strike in a more decisive move to eliminate unions.

In Cavite Export Processing Zones (CEPZ) where union organizing is closer to impossible, persistent unions and workers who overcame that impossibility found themselves out of jobs and unions when companies shut down their operation. Fashion House Garments in Cavite declared closure after the 1000 unorganized workers staged a

walk-out in protest against long working hours, drugging them and non-payment of their wages. Charging workers of illegal strike, workers were dismissed without any compensation and a month later, Fashion House re-opened with a new workforce. Some workers who did not join the walkout re-applied and were admitted as a newly hired employee and with wages way below the previous ones.

In CTUHR partial monitoring, trade unions hardest hit by this trend are those affiliated by KMU and those independent but with genuine and militant orientation. In the last four years prior to the festival of killings, KMU and allied unions lost almost 30 unions with an estimated total membership of 20,000 compared with two (2) under BMP and NCL and two (2) for TUCP resulting to lost of 384 jobs.

In more ways than one, the labyrinthine process of certifying trade union as bargaining agent and concluding a CBA, parallel with massive employment of contractual workers while dismissing union members trigger the decline of trade unions. DOLE-BLR's data, for instance, show that as of December 2005 union membership at the enterprise level only accounts to four (4%) percent of the total estimated 31.733 million employed workers in the country. Thus, behind the consistent drop in the strikes is also the drop in union membership. *[see table union & strike)*

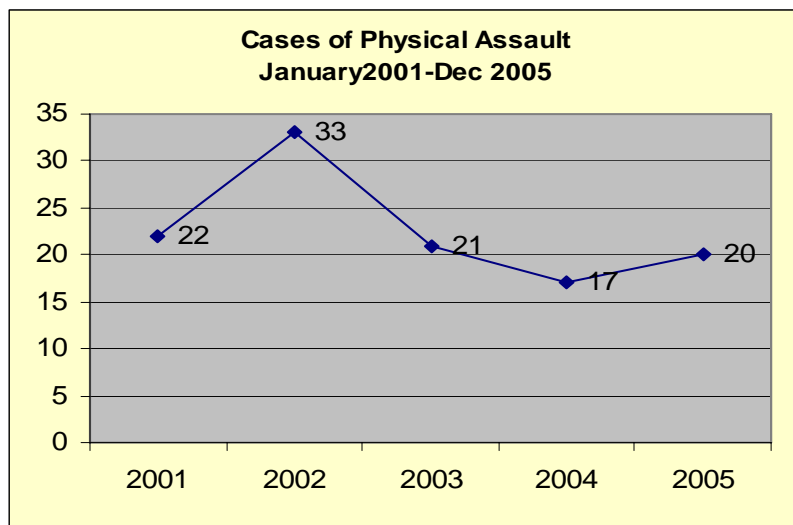
This only proves that if there are new unions who managed to withstand the attacks in its infancy stage, their numbers are not enough to replace or outweigh the rapid loss of membership of existing unions. In addition, the increase means nothing, because it did not result in the increase of membership and the number of workers covered by the CBA. To ink a

Union and Strikes (based on DOLE-NCMB/BLR data)				
	2002 (total)	2003	2004	Dec 2005
Strikes	36	41	27	26
NOS AJ/CCA			556	465 52 or 11%
Enterprise- based Unions/Orgn	11,365	11,472	15,193	22,572
Total Union Members (UM) (000) [private sector]	3,914,000	3,923,000	1,296,373 or 4% of total employed	1,304,865 or 4% of 31.733 total employed
Number of CBAs	2,700	2,757	1,770	1,734
Workers Covered by CBA/ % (UM)	528,000 or 13% of TUM	540,000 or 14% of total UM	308,796 or 24% of union members & 1% of total employed	296,122 or 4% drop from 2004 data

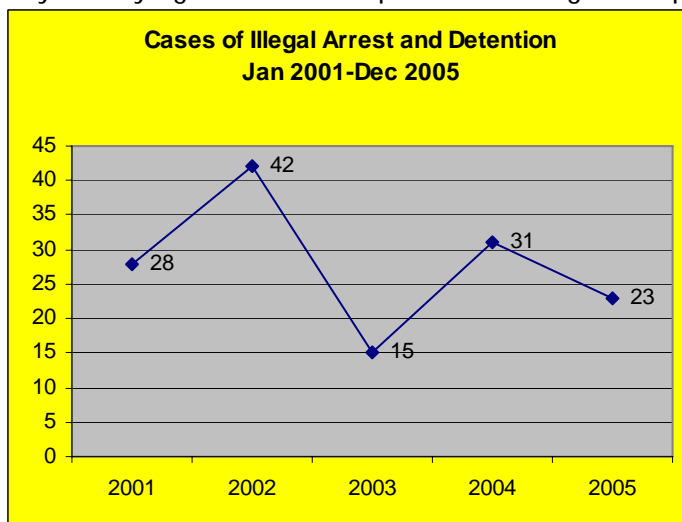
CBA is the main purpose of organizing union as some sort of guarantee for workers' protection and benefits and the company's commitment to adhere thereto.

3. Heightened violent attacks on strikes and protest actions by composite of police, military and company guards as war on terror rage in industrial areas and unionized workplaces resulting not only into decreasing number of unions and strikes but also multiple human rights violations .

At the outset of War on Terror campaign, the current administration treats the strike not as a democratic expression of legitimate grievances but deterrents to foreign investment and terrorism at the factory level. So, it has always been easy and swift for the police and military to attack the workers' picketlines the way they attack wild animals or criminals on the loose.



Notwithstanding the difficulties, organized workers continue to assert their rights and resist attacks. In 2004 and 2005 alone for example, 1,100 unions with 249,464 members or an average of four (4) unions per day filed their Notices of Strikes against mass dismissal, discrimination, union busting, refusal to bargain and CBA deadlock. Obviously, not all notices consummated into strike. The DOLE settled the disputes or legally pre-empt the strike in various ways, often by certifying the labour disputes or issuing Assumption of Jurisdiction orders.



Upon certification, the intended or impending strike or lock-out is automatically prohibited even if there is motion for reconsideration of the certification order in the Office of the Secretary of Labor. (*Sec5, Rule 9, NLRC Rules as Amended*). In effect, it legally bans the strike and any form of concerted actions.

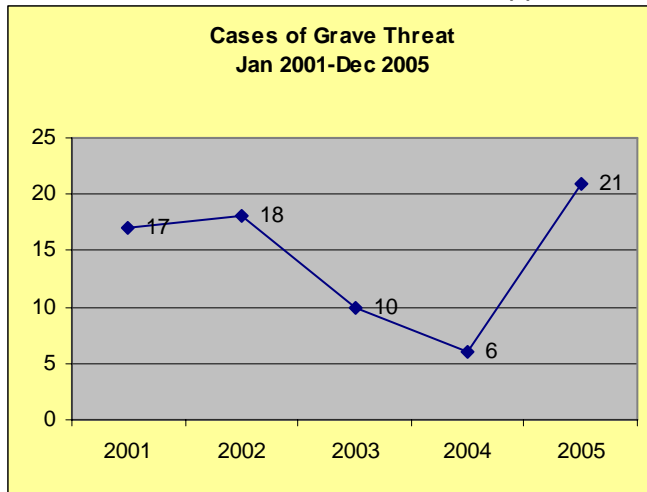
The very threat to jobs and livelihoods not to mention the appalling working conditions are fire that actually emboldens the unions particularly militant unions, to assert and defy the Assumption Orders.

However, the result of such assertion has always been dangerous and in various cases, deadly.

In the last five years for instance, CTUHR has documented 150 violent strike dispersals of which 69% or 103 cases are directly attributed to the enforcement of AJ. PNP (SWAT, SAF etc)

and AFP were responsible for 94% of these assault cases while the 6% were company guards. In its first year in office, these included violent assaults in the strike of Yokohama Tires, Toyota Motors, Nissan Motors, and Nestle Philippines. In 2003, workers had a temporary relief in

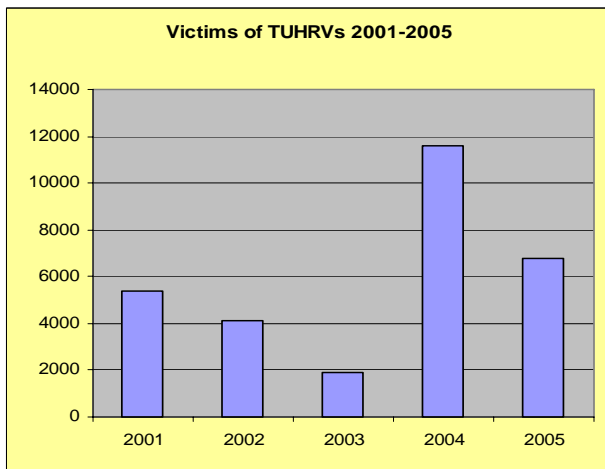
physical assaults as the government prepared for election 2004.



Soon after Mrs. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo declared her victory in May 2004 election amidst allegations of massive fraud, dispersals, arrests, abduction, and state terrorism resumed in unprecedented manner until today. At least six major strikes were violently broken up several times, such as the Oxford International Garments, General Milling Corp, Southtech Development, Sunever lights in the second half of 2004. The police and Army assault on striking farm and sugar mill workers in

Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac that resulted into multiple killings epitomized this intensified terrorism that state forces are capable of doing to quell unrest. The Luisita massacre was the

most bloodied and most brutal strike dispersal in the post Marcos era.



Thus, as Arroyo government enters its sixth year in office, CTUHR partial documentation recorded 953 total cases of human rights violations committed against 29,972 workers and urban poor. Noted cases apart from assault on the picketlines are physical assault, illegal arrests and detention, threats and intimidation, abduction and enforced disappearance, and lately, the killings.

Harassments more vicious in strikes at MNCs and MNC sub-contracted companies

If government quick and war-like deployment of PNP forces including the elite counter-insurgency unit Special Action Forces (SAF) in strikes and protest actions in multinational companies is an indicator, then GMA government would need heaven and hell to hide its rabid anti-worker and pro-MNCs policies and practices. Except that she did not even attempt to hide it, on the contrary, she brazenly flaunted and continuously flaunting it.

Looking at the statistics, GMA openly favored Japanese companies that saw her directly intervening in the `so-called dispute settlement', that is, paralyzing the strike and castration of unions though combined physical assault on workers and mass job dismissal of union members as provided by Assumption of Jurisdiction order. This included her direct interference on her perceived co-ordinated strikes at Yokohama Tires Manufacturing, Toyota Motors Philippines, Nissan Motors and Honda Cars, all Japanese-owned firms.

Another MNC that clearly enjoyed full government protection is the Nestle Philippines. The strike marked its fourth year. There is no doubt that Nestle Philippines is not only liable for the numerous assaults, injuries and intimidation against protesting workers, but also guilty of violating the Supreme Court ruling on inclusion of retirement benefits as matters of Collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Several times, the court upheld its decision and with the same number of times, Nestle Philippines refused to implement.



Nothing has been done to discipline Nestle Philippines, in contrast to the repeated harassments of 800 striking workers who served the company for more than 20 years. Seventy (70) were slapped with fabricated criminal charges and are hounded like criminals.

The most brutal attack was the killing of Diosdado Fortuna, Nestle workers union president - in September 22, last year. In the FFM conducted after the killings, indications that Nestle Philippines was involved, in spite of company's denial, were patent. Fortuna was the second Nestle workers union president who were killed during the strike. The first was his predecessor, -- Meliton Roxas - who was shot dead at the picketline in 1989.

4. intensified legalization of open and naked attacks by state forces, notably PNP (incl. Mobile Groups, RSAF, SWAT, SWAG) and AFP on workers and workers' unions through issuances of Assumption of Jurisdiction on strike and calibrated pre-emptive response

In relation to the abovementioned cases, and examining DOLE data since 2001 for example, it is apparent that all AJ orders issued were to pre-empt strikes or to compel striking workers to return to work within 24 hours. Nothing was issued to pre-empt an impending lock-out even if such move will cause massive workers lay-off and retrenchment. No order ever forced the company to recognize and bargain with legitimate and DOLE certified unions or to compel the company to go back to negotiation. Nothing was issued to deputize the PNP or AFP to force the company's compliance, in rare cases where decision by the Secretary of Labor was favourable to the workers.

Sixty eight percent of the 150 cases of strike assaults documented by CTUHR for instance is attributed to AJ implementation. The massacre at Hacienda Luisita was its most bloodied form.

Apart from Luisita, notable case was the strike in Goodfound Cement in Albay. At the onset of their strike in October 2003, 2 APC (armed personnel carriers) barricaded the gates leading to worksite and two truckloads of Marines and Scout Rangers were deployed. The workers were not allowed to go near the company gates as soldiers drove them and pursued as

far as several kilometers away from the factory site. Fearing for their lives, the workers did not attempt to go back to the site while the union officers were hunted by Scout Rangers even weeks after the strike dispersal. No one from the union member was left, and the union became a thing of the past inside the factory.

Thus in the years past, AJ both provided absolute power to the Secretary of Labor—no one could question what s/he likes to think -- and legal protection for capitalists' abuses that found convenient excuse in the law provision.

Workers struggle for wages, benefits and rights went beyond the destruction of their picketlines. As they understand that these issues are only part of the economic and political policies that the government is pursuing, their protests find another venue in streets. Together with the urban poor, peasants and students, they have re-directed their demand from wages, rights to ousting the immediate cause of their predicament that is, ousting GMA. As protests filled the streets and hogged the headlines, the government handed the calibrated preemptive response (CPR) that virtually bans rallies and demonstrations. Similar to strikes, this saw violent police dispersals of rallies, the last of which was on April 6, this year.

- 5. integration of industrial policies and labour relations in the governments twin campaign: Oplan Bantay Laya (literally means Freedom watch) – a counter insurgency program previously known as Oplan Makabayan – and War on Terror that saw the militarization of industrial areas and workplaces specifically in areas and companies where progressive unions exist.**

Capitalizing on the 9/11 bombings in 2001, Mrs. Arroyo's declared that her government will stamp out terrorism and relentlessly pursue terrorists, destabilizers, criminals and pushers including those strikers that terrorized jobs and livelihood in the factory. Immediately, the presence and direct intervention of military and military-police in labour disputes became common. Elements of Regional Special Action Forces and PNP Mobile group and SWAT in full battle gear started camping out in factories where workers are considered `restless' and where disputes are brewing. This saw the military maintaining operation base in Nestle Philippines from 2001 until at present, for instance.

In Sun Ever Lights, at the time when the union was heading for certification election, elements of Special Weapons Action Group (SWAG) were deployed to man the production line and kept watch on union leaders of then budding unions. In 2003, head of South Luzon Command of Philippine Army, in a forum organized at Camp Vicente Lim admitted that PAMANTIK-KMU and other allied unions together with their leaders are in their surveillance list as these unions are suspected to have links with if not breeding communists.

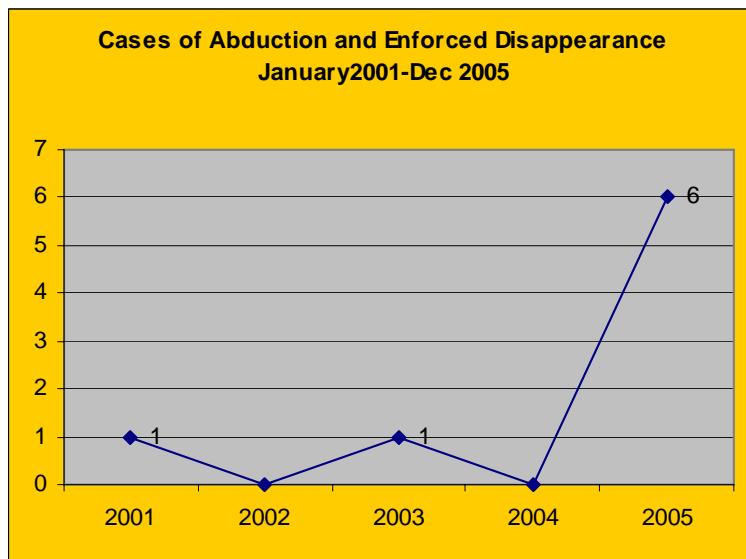
Under Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL), a more sophisticated version of Estrada's Oplan Makabayan counter-insurgency program, military's direct intervention and control of industrial relations, labour- management relations as well as conduct of community organization become more apparent and vicious. In 2004, the AFP for instance justified the combined police and Army's assault on strike of Luisita workers and farmers that led to a massacre to the NPA's maneuver and design. The same line has been drum beaten in the subsequent killings of supporters of Luisita workers.

At the close of 2004, OBL succeeded in sowing terror and havoc in unionized workplaces particularly those affiliated to KMU. In Bulacan, Console Farm, Robina Farm—and Solid Development Corporations, where KMU affiliated local unions exist, members of 24th IB and 56th IB under the command of Gen. Jovito Palparan, camped inside the farm. They hold union meetings, call general assembly and barangay forums and consultation, warning them to dissociate themselves from KMU, Anakpawis and demanding that they report to them any suspected NPAs. Workers and resident who failed to attend the gathering are labeled as rebel supporters or communists. Union officers who were interrogated and tortured were forced to resign from job, or abandon their unionwork due to fear. Rogelio Concepcion, acting union president of Solid development corp who wase abducted last March six remains missing.

Under OBL strategic holistic approach, a combination of military and political approach, the military expects to achieve a win-hold-win situation in suspected rebel infested areas. This means that the first step is clearing the areas of any insurgent or potential insurgents, sympathizers or supporters - which reads where progressive people’s organizations exists or where Oust GMA sentiment is stronger -- by flushing them out through military clearing operations, ranging from regular military census to what Gen Palparan’s term neutralizing them. After clearing the area, they will maintain and consolidate such area by leaving a platoon, or at least a base of operation for political and economic work which includes as earlier said, holding forums, assemblies and periodic medical mission.

In San Ildefonso, this included the Army holding a rally at the wake of a priest previously aligned to Bagong Alyansang Makabayan on April 24 while in Towerville, San Jose del Monte Bulacan, this include cutting electricity connection to force residents who are unable to pay their bills. In short, the military shadow government operates.

OBL however, is not about killing the NPAs, it is about `neutralizing` the leaders, and members, and supporters of legal progressive organizations and partylist. It is about demonizing people’s organizations in desperate attempt to weaken its base.



In this context, it is not surprising though that heavily militarized regions account for most numerous cases of intimidation, surveillances, abductions and killings. Southern Tagalog or CALABARZON provinces for example - host to 39 military battalions and former General Palparan’s base of operation of then Oplan Makabayan until 2003 consistently recorded the highest number of violations. Gen. Palparan - known as the butcher of Mindoro - was promoted and transferred in Eastern Visasyas as head of 8th Infantry Brigade. Last year, he was again transferred to Central Luzon to

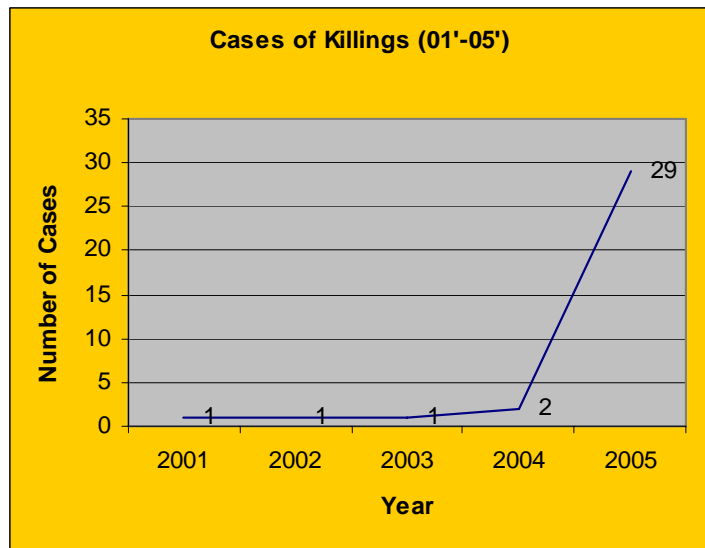
head the 7th ID and the situation in Central Luzon was never been peaceful.

Central Luzon ran second as Palparan's men seem to compete in achieving their boss' target of ending the insurgency in the region within six months. The latest was the harassments, intimidation and abduction of workers and community residents in Metal Ore Mining, in Camaching, Dona Remedios Trinidad, also in Bulacan last April 17.

6. festival of political killings, frustrated killings, abduction, enforced disappearance and other threats to life as the pinnacle of Arroyo government's gross human rights violations

Whilst writing this report, (April 28, 6:00AM) Gerardo Cristobal, former union officer of Yasaki EMI and leader of Solidarity of Cavite Workers was shot by police intelligence operatives. Fortunately, he escaped death. Since last year, he has been receiving death threats.

In the first quarter of this year alone, CTUHR has documented five cases of killings of workers, trade unionists and labor advocates, up from four cases in the same period last year, all of whom came from Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog. Yet, there are



no indications that this festival of killings which started last year will end soon.

In 2005 alone, which the CTUHR called the Year of Living Dangerously, 31 union leaders, union & party list organizers and supporters were killed. Majority of these cases (20 cases) happened in the last four months of 2005. It started with the Luisita massacre in 2004 and subsequent killings of members and supporters of hacienda struggle. It continued with the killing of Diosdado Fortuna, in September 2005. Less than a month later, Ricardo Ramos of CATLU, De Leon of PISTON and six others were killed in less than 48 hours between October 25 & 26. . This figure adds to 17 unionists and supporters killed from 2001-until March 2006 giving Mrs. Arroyo a total of 48 blood debts to the workers and semi workers. This number does not include those workers who were abducted and still missing as of this writing.

Majority of these cases were carried-out by motorcycle riding men in ski masks or helmets - an apparent deliberate move to make them practically difficult to identify. Initial investigations revealed that 16 or half of the cases were premeditated, i.e. victims were under surveillance by suspected AFP or PNP elements before their deaths.

Until now not a single perpetrator was apprehended in spite of strong indications that these killings, abductions and disappearances were handiwork of either police, military or their agents. On the contrary, the perpetrators like Gen. Palparan was been promoted strengthening further the culture of impunity. The Arroyo government kept mum on the killings despite calls from various sections that she looks into these cases.

b. Ordinary workers were not spared

Leaders were not the only target of these killings. Seven ordinary workers were murdered either company guards - acting like mercenaries in what they think as protecting the capitalists' interest -- by military - allegedly because those workers were NPA couriers or gangster.

Dante Teotino, a worker from Schneider/San Lorenzo Packaging, Kaybiga, Calookan city was shot by company guards, on order of the management, at the picketline together with six (6) other workers who sustained serious injuries on September 13, 2005. Ronald Adrada, a vendor was shot by PNCC guard last September 25 at South Luzon Expressway, allegedly simply because he violated the anti-vending policy in highways. Noel Daray, 22 years old, was shot by guard when he filed an illegal dismissal case against W.L. Foods in Valenzuela city on December 25.

Even members of rival group could be as deadly as the AFP elements and company mercenaries. Ramon Namuro, 51 years old and a PISTON member in Monumento, Caloocan city was shot dead on October 15, by Guardian member - a paramilitary group whose members are allegedly involved in gangsterism. The perpetrator is also an ADJUDOM member -- a break-away group of PISTON who want to wrest control of the jeepney terminal in the area.

Prospects & Conclusions

With impending rounds of oil price hikes, the workers will be pressed again to get by with their current low wage. The situation will be more difficult for contractual workers and the unemployed who has nothing to hold onto. In the same manner, indications that the killings and human rights violations will stop soon are absent, as surveillances on leaders and witch-hunting intensified.

Not even a relief from the twin problem of poverty and political repression is forthcoming. On the contrary, this condition will worsen that will make it more imperative for workers, for the trade union movement to gather their strength to bring their demands not only in the factories, but also onto the streets. It will not be easy as terror created in NCR for example by CPR and Proclamation 1017 and Oplan Bantay Laya is deep and far-reaching. However, if the broad Anti-Arroyo movement could muster enough strength to pressure Mrs. Arroyo -- immediate cause of both economic and nagging political crisis -- to resign or get ousted, this appalling situation will significantly change.

But then, it remains an uphill battle. The next few months will be very challenging, not only for the human rights or workers movement, but to the Filipino people in general. If Arroyo government will succeed in the bullet-train like process of her so-called people's initiative by July, then, we will not only see the same President until 2010, but we will experience a president and prime minister in one person. But the worst thing that will happen, is that charter change will pave the way for complete sell-out of Philippine sovereignty and patrimony to MNCs, as 100% ownership of companies and land will be allowed as just one of the provision.

It is therefore imperative that in carrying forward the painstaking struggle for economic and social improvements and campaigns against trade union repression, political killings and human rights violations, the workers consider both the economic and political causes of their predicament.

As said earlier, definitely, it won't be a walk in the park but with international support and solidarity from different sectors, the walk would be a thousand times lighter and bearable.

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28 April 2006