

Public statement

## Philippines: Wage increase now!

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We, members of the Solidarity of Unions and Labor Organizations for New Government (Sulong), urge the Senate to give workers the fair chance to get what is rightfully due to them. We challenge the Senators to rise from the wreck of the Executive's 'social payback rhetoric by enacting without delay the P125 wage increase bill.

On New Year's Eve in Baguio City, President Arroyo proclaimed 2007 the time for 'social payback' — the time ordinary people will begin to enjoy the fruits of her administration's painful economic reforms the past few years.

If indeed the pledge is true then 2007 could be a promising year for the toiling people. We have strong doubts, however, that this 'social payback' sound bite was just another shot at the back of Dr. Jose Rizal, notably when the proclamation was made during the same season and place where the national hero was once betrayed by PGMA in 2004. More likely so when after the proclamation, the President and her lieutenants simply wore back their old hats.

The issue of a legislated wage increase is a vivid example of this. On this raging issue, her labor chief Arturo Brion, merely echoed the line of ECOP and other business groups in opposing the P125 wage increase bill now pending before the Senate. In trying to destroy the arguments and block the passage of the P125 bill, both have raised the specter of "economic disaster" and painted other catastrophic scenario once the measure is enacted into law.

With the position taken by Brion ECOP has effectively won the government into its side, leaving the workers on their own in waging the fight for P125. But we will not cower. We will win the fight.

Hence, if Brion is already sold out to capital does his boss hold a different stand? Unfortunately, it was PGMA who first sold out on this issue. After the passage of the EVAT law last year, she urged Congress to pass the P125 bill only to retract later after business groups have threatened to withdraw their support to charter change - a decision made clearly on the basis of politics and not of economics. That is why, on the record, the measure was passed in the Lower House not out of the goodwill of the majority who were then very much preoccupied with con-ass but by the smartness of the bill's proponents.

It is therefore to our interest that the P125 bill or another legislated wage increase measure be enacted into law on the basis of its merits. In fact, the country's working class majority, as well as policy makers, deserves more than just official public hearings but wider national discussions and public debates on this issue.

Workers have not been asking for more than what is just and fair. We are not asking too much. The staggered P125 bill passed by the Lower House is already a compromise formula. In fact, a living wage is the ultimate demand of every worker in order for his/her family lives a decent life.

At the moment, workers deserve a wage increase to recover lost value of their wages over years. They deserve a wage increase in the face of the rising cost of living which is now at P746 a day. They

deserve a wage increase as fair share from that much daunted economic growth; the big part of it, in fact, indisputably came from their hard labor.

Moreover, workers deserve a wage increase in the form of legislation to put an end to the harm and injustice done to the millions of workers, organized and unorganized, by the inutile regional wage boards the past 17 years!

We understand where the strong opposition to the P125 bill is coming from. It is clearly class instinct coming from the capitalists who always turn doomsayers when faced by clamor for wage increase. They who had always equated that anything that hurts their pockets hurt the economy. They, who regardless of whether or not their apocalyptic economic forecast are supported by empirical data or proven by practical experience, nonetheless use them brazenly mainly to disempower the workers.

To them we say: Enough of your blackmail! Workers deserve a better treatment. We deserve a better deal.

***SULONG - Solidarity of Unions and Labor Organizations for New Government***, AGLO, APL, ASAP, BMP, Fildem, KPMP, Lagman, Liga ng Manggagawa, Makabayan