



# FREE WORKERS



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A publication of the Substantial Democracy Project

Federation of Free Workers

## Wage war on terrorism by fighting its root causes

The Federation of Free Workers (FFW) and fellow labor group Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL) condemn acts of terrorism in all its forms, whether state-sponsored or caused by a non-state entity. But while both believe a war against terrorism should be waged, the biggest battle should be fought against its main roots—poverty and social exclusion.

This view became clear when the Substantial Democracy Project (SDP-FFW) held the second of its Workers Symposium Series on Current Concerns and Challenges for union leaders in Luzon at the Asian Social Institute on October 16.

The theme for the symposium was “The US-Led Anti-Terrorist Campaign: Its Implications to Labor and Employment.”

“As a federation, we should do our part in stubbing out the root causes of terrorism,” declares former FFW Vice President for International Affairs Antonio Asper. The FFW Governing Board adopted a statement condemning the September 11 attacks during its meeting on September 21 and 22 at Quezon City. (See the full text of the statement on page 2)

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### SDP, PSI launch FFW PPOA booklet

Barely five months after the FFW 21<sup>st</sup> National Convention approved its Policy and Program of Action (PPOA) for the next five years, what it set out as its principal concerns and major plans are now in booklet form. Formally launched coinciding with the Local Presidents Consultation at the Asian Social Institute on October 16, 2001, the PPOA shall serve as the guide of the FFW for the next five years.

“The PPOA is a product of the Federation’s hard work not only during the Convention, but even more than a year before it when several conferences, workshops and consultations were held,” explains FFW Governing Board Member Tess Montejo, who served as secretary of the PPOA Committee of the Convention. She explains that the outputs or results of these were cut and paste(d) to the final document.

“Read the PPOA and adhere to it,” National Treasurer Joe Cayobit advises union presidents and other local officers in attendance. “You should act as watchdogs and tell (the leadership) if it is not abiding by the PPOA or deviating from it,” Mr. Cayobit, who

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ARE WE READY FOR WAR? Union leaders from Luzon seem to be asking themselves as they assess the impact of the US-led anti-terrorist campaign on labor and employment.

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*statement*

*on the*

*terrorist*

*attacks*

*in*

*new york*

*and*

*washington*

.....

*Terrorists have attacked the heart of world capitalism, terrifying the American public and gripping the world with anxiety. In reaction, America rallied the support of its allies and has waged a “war without borders”, highlighted by a series of counter-attacks on America’s perceived enemies. The labor sector in the Philippines is not spared by these developments. The FFW is wary of the effects of this US-led anti-terrorism campaign on workers, employment, wages and working conditions. Already, employers’ groups have appealed to the President to set aside any wage increases at this time owing to the terrorist threats. To give you labor’s point of view, we are publishing the Federation of Free Workers (BATU-WCL) statement against terrorism in lieu of an editorial. This was adopted by the FFW Governing Board during its Meeting on 21 to 22 September 2001 at the Imperial Hotel, QC. -Ed.*



FFW condemns the terroristic attacks on New York and Washington and their perpetrators. As the wanton destruction of the World Trade Center and its aftermath show, the attacks have global roots and repercussions. Terrorism is not merely physical destruction and mass murder. On any scale that it is carried out, terrorism debases the human dignity both of the victims and its perpetrators.

The terrorists must be brought to justice and made to answer for their acts. Their coddlers, backers and accomplices must be punished equally. Because of the global character and outreach of present day terrorism, the United Nations has the responsibility to combat and eliminate terrorism in the affairs of nations and governments as well as on the lives of peoples.

FFW agrees that war must be waged against terrorism. But this war is vastly different from conventional. Targeting specific groups of persons, governments or nations is neither enough nor is it productive in the end. Terrorism is rooted more permanently in human values that have been corrupted by poverty and social exclusion. It cannot alone be waged on the military, political or diplomatic fronts. It must involve the economic, social and moral planes as well.

The main roots of terrorism is lodged in poverty and social exclusion, in the dynamics of power and powerlessness. Power tends to corrupt. Powerlessness equally so. In this sense, terrorism is a product of powerlessness, of fear in a changing world that the poor and powerless cannot understand and which marginalized them.

The dynamics of power and powerlessness is like the Dance of the Vampire. It terrorizes people. In the end, both protagonists and antagonists become vampires and suck the bloods of peoples. Uprooting terrorism requires global efforts to move peoples out of

poverty through measures that will mainstream them in social life at levels that befit human dignity and that is better achieved through social dialogue than military warfare.

National interest cannot alone be the defining principle in the war against terrorism. It is too narrow a view about a problem that involves global dimensions and the too human tendency for greed and the lust for power any place on earth. Beyond national interest there are common human values now under attack that must be defended by all nations, races, creeds and political beliefs: freedom, liberty, solidarity, democracy and the right to live with dignity and decency. This is why we must advocate for common and global efforts to eliminate the scourge of terrorism and its causes in human affairs.

FFW urges caution in efforts to wage war on terrorism. Too easily, the implements of military warfare having been emplaced, xenophobia, racism, religious intolerance, greed, mass murder and a host of other human scourge can rear their ugly heads or take over reason, which can deepen and broaden other global problems already at hand.

Our government and people must contribute to a global effort to root out terrorism and its causes. This is our responsibility in the community of nations. What capabilities and capacities we have in the global front, we must lend to the international community.

But our own efforts to keep the world safe from terrorists activities should start and should be continued in our own land. The war against poverty in our country must be escalated and sustained; the efforts to empower the marginalized sectors so that they can effectively participate in social life must be pursued relentlessly. This way, we rid global terrorism of their recruiting and breeding ground. FFW is committed to do its part in these efforts.

Another World War has been officially declared. We can only pray the human race will survive this one.

September 21, 2001.

In behalf of the FFW Governing Board,

Ramon J. Jabar  
National President



on liberalization

PROF. OFRENEO



We're paying a high price for our economic planners' mistakes.

APL Deputy General Secretary Joshua Mata agrees with the FFW assessment. "With widespread poverty, violence becomes inherent because of the disparity of wealth between the few rich and the majority who are poor," he explains. The Philippines, according to Mr. Mata, experienced the same when Edsa 3 broke out leading to the siege of Malacañang on Labor Day.

Social exclusion in the form of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and religious intolerance among others, exacerbates the breeding ground of terrorism as well.

Terrorism to worsen labor's plight

With the attacks on New York and Washington, many experts believe the economy of the United States—one of the Philippines' major trading partners, will go through a recession, prolonging its slowdown since late last year after an unprecedented decade of continuous growth.

Japan, the other chief importer from the country, has been problematic since five years ago.

This has greatly affected the electronics industry, which comprises 75 per cent of Philippine exports, and the garments industry. Already, the former had laid off 40,000 workers.

"Despite People Power 2, there has been no reversal in the country's economic situation," admits Prof. Rene Ofreneo, former Dean of the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations.

He asserts that even before the Sept. 11 attacks the policy of liberalization has caused the downfall of local industries. "We're paying a high price for our economic planners' mistakes." He thinks that government through the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), erred by focusing too much on exports, thereby neglecting the development of local industries. He cited the steel, rubber, tire, shoe, battery and tile industries as among those that folded up with the influx of imported goods.

He also belied reports that developed countries have done away with protectionism. "US and Europe are quick to extend support to the agriculture sector when they

on the impact of terrorism

JOSHUA MATA, APL



It may have turned back the gains of the worldwide anti-globalization campaign.

are under fire," he argues.

Also, contrary to the claim of employers that a wage increase would only be inflationary, Prof. Ofreneo believes that workers' pay must be hiked to increase their

on what we should do

TONY ASPER, FFW



Help create a climate for more social dialogue and cooperation.

purchasing power. "But they must be encouraged to buy local goods so they could save jobs," he points out.

OFWs wary

Mr. Asper also painted a gloomy scenario for overseas Filipino workers. "If the war against terrorism breaks out in Middle Eastern countries, hundreds of thousands of Filipino overseas workers may have to be repatriated or the cadavers of Filipino victims from terrorists' attacks in the western world and the Middle Eastern countries will have to be shipped back," he muses.

Prof. Ofreneo agrees. Not only would the remittances of OFWs be reduced, these workers would go home being added to the unemployment statistics.

Going to war? Wait!

"Any war, anywhere, dislocates a way of life as well as the lives of

peoples and the jobs of workers,” warns Mr. Asper. “And war in these modern days endangers all living beings as much as the human species,” he presumes.

Mr. Mata also cautions against war, particularly the government’s all-out support for US aggression. “It may send the wrong signals to our Moro brothers in the country,” he says. For them, fellow innocent Muslims in Afghanistan are being killed by the air attacks of the US-led Alliance.

If support also meant letting the US and its allies use Clark and Subic Airbases as launching pads, the act may be in violation of the Philippine Constitution which expressly prohibits nuclear weapons in the archipelago believed to be in the US warships’ arsenal.

However, Mr. Asper also thinks that opening up the bases will “generate jobs for workers who will service the planes, ships and their crew.” But this, he says could make the country a target for terrorist attacks.

With their possible re-opening comes the social problems of prostitution and the question of political sovereignty says both Mr. Asper and Mr. Mata. In an historic vote in September 1991, the Philippine Senate voted against the treaty extending the half a century old RP-US Military Bases Agreement.

### Terrorism diminishes labor power

Mr. Mata is worried that terrorism may have turned back the gains of the worldwide anti-globalization campaign. Activists have called off mass actions while they commiserate with the victims of terrorism. Protest rallies against the institutions of globalization may be misconstrued as support for terrorism or the *jihad* Osama Bin Laden has called for.

In the local front, he told workers

to be vigilant against employers who are out to make the situation a convenient excuse to justify earlier plans to retrench or not award wages and benefits due them.

### Paradigm shift

While the future looks gloomy as an aftermath of the Sept. 11 incidents, Prof. Ofreneo deems it as “a golden opportunity for the country, including the FFW, to talk about a new development model.” It is also in this context that he considers the grave need for social dialogue to discuss “preservation of jobs and the preservation of industry.” More than anything else, he wants the aged development plan of NEDA changed.

He calls for unity as a nation, rekindling of nationalism to counteract globalization and

encouraged everyone to help each other in order to survive.

Mr. Mata wants workers to look at the bigger picture. “Unions should not think of their own factories’ or industries’ problems only. Unionists should actively take part in decision-making at the bureaucracy.”

Mr. Asper shares the same view. He urged FFW leaders to help create a climate for more social dialogue and cooperation in the country emphasizing on common interests. At the international level he pressed for global trade union solidarity manifested in globally coordinated trade union action in the International Labor Organization, international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization to mitigate poverty and improve social protection.

### SDP, PSI launch FFW PPOA booklet (cont.)

served as Chairperson of the PPOA Committee, asks of the participants.

Committee Convenor Tony Asper describes the PPOA as the “distillation of FFW’s analysis and programs.” He directs the membership to spread it to the whole world, particularly to legislators and local politicians so they may use it as bases for policies or laws to be formulated.

Mr. Ephraim Guerrero, speaking in behalf of co-sponsor SDP-FFW, regards the publication of the PPOA as “a way of giving back to the membership what they had decided on.” He regards it as the FFW bible in the next five years.

Ms. Raquel Arpoja, officer-in-charge of the Philippine Social Institute-FFW, one of the publishers of the PPOA booklet hopes that it does not remain in the members’ bookshelves. “Let it be known that the FFW is dead serious in promoting decent work in a borderless world,” she declares.



WHAT'S HAPPENING? FFW GB members consult with local union officers in Luzon following the PPOA Booklet launching.

# GMA appoints ffw lawyer to anti-graft body

Add FFW Legal Counsel Atty. Jose Sonny Matula to the growing list of FFW personalities who have joined the bureaucracy. On 28 September, he took his oath as the Executive Director of the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC), a job that gives him first hand at running after government people who steal from the “kaban ng bayan”. He holds a rank of an Assistant Secretary.



**GRAFT BUSTER.** Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) swears in FFW Legal Counsel Atty. Sonny Matula as wife, Bambam (left) and PMS Chief Vikki Garchitorena look on.

The Commission is one of the government agencies tasked to ensure a clean and good government. Specifically, it is concerned with presidential appointees and officers in the executive branch with salary grade 26 and above.

Under Executive Order No. 12, the Executive Director, who is a presidential appointee in charge of the day-to-day activities of the Commission, will head the Secretariat of the Commission.

“I will be supervising all the personnel of said agency in prevention, investigation and other anti-graft activities,” Atty. Matula clarifies. “I will be coordinating with the Department of Justice, Philippine National Police, National Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement agencies in the campaign against graft. Constituency building against graft is also a component of its program,” he bared.

### The monumental task

“I submit the fight against graft and corruption is a heavy job and demands a lot of commitment and courage,” he admits.

The Social Weather Stations in 1998 reported that two thirds of its respondents believe there was corruption in government, 38 percent of whom said “a great deal”; and “34 percent” said “some”. In the same year, deposed President Joseph Estrada acknowledged that most of tax money flows into the pockets of Bureau of Internal Revenue agents or custom examiners instead of the national treasury.

Though reports are said to be imprecise, the prevalence of corruption is an acknowledged national menace. In the 1997 Ombudsman’s annual report, the government estimated a loss of US\$ 48 billion over the span of 20 years from corruption, exceeding the entire country’s foreign debt then of US\$40.6 billion. The Commission on Audit’s 1998 estimate showed that corruption costs the government about P2 billion annually.

Corruption inhibits foreign and domestic investments and erodes our country’s competitive advantage. It also saps resources for basic services for the

poor and the underprivileged. When one vigorously pursues and prosecutes the grafters, he will step on the toes of a number of vested and powerful interest groups. Thus, retaliation is expected at the risk of one’s life.

“*Kaya nga ang supporta ng higit na nakararami ng mamamayan para magtagumpay ang kampanya laban sa graft ay hindi matatawaran,*” he acknowledges.

Atty. Matula deems determination and perseverance indispensable to succeed in eliminating graft and corruption since they are already well-entrenched and considered a part of the daily life of government. “Mind you, not only government, a number of unions and private companies in the country are also saddled with graft,” he laments.

He takes solace from the congratulatory text message of Johnson & Johnson Union President and former Governing Board Member Al Sollegue, “either you will make a difference (in government) or end up a different person.”

### Second stint at the bureaucracy

This is not Atty. Matula’s first government job. He was appointed Executive Assistant V of FFW President Emeritus Juan C. Tan when he was the Chairman of the Social Security Commission. He headed a five-man staff.

Though quite similar, the two jobs differ in the definition of work and the demand and degree of risk involved. The SS Commission is a policy and quasi-

judicial body on social security, concerned with the welfare of workers in the private sector and their beneficiaries. The Anti-Graft Commission, on the other hand, is an executive arm with administrative adjudicating power

### How he got Ate Glo's nod

It is widely believed that Atty. Matula's involvement in People Power 2 was a big factor in President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's decision to appoint him.

"Probably she acknowledged my participation in the activities of the Labor Solidarity Movement, *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PDSP) and *Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino 2* for the oust-Erap movement," he presumes.

A son of Agusan del Sur, Atty. Matula served as head of staff of Ate Glo's Constitutional Transition Committee (CTC) under the supervision of now DBP Chair Lanny Nañagas, from late 2000 to early this year.

The CTC prepared her agenda for the first 100 days and coordinated with trade unions and other sectoral groups to support a peaceful and constitutional transition of power. "I, together with other trade union leaders convened her task force on labor and social safety nets," Atty. Matula recounts.

He regards GMA as a hard working public official. "She oversaw her secretariat's work from morning of one day to dawn of another, for three months at her residence in La Vista at the height of the impeachment trial," he recalls.

Asked by one of Ate Glo's advisers what government position he wanted to have, upon her accession to the Presidency, he replied, "I just wanted to return to FFW." That was then.

This time he could not refuse the offer of President Arroyo. "I believe it is not proper to say no when the president herself invites you to a noble and challenging job, especially so since anti-graft is one of her priority programs," he rationalizes.

### Taking the cudgels

Atty. Matula has not resigned from the Federation. FFW President Ramon Jabar suggested that he go on indefinite leave. He would be leaving behind at least 63 active cases at the labor arbiter level to the Supreme Court. "My cases will be distributed to the remaining staff of the Legal Center in Manila, Atty. Belai Villanueva and Legal Assistant Novy Macahilig," he explains. FFW Vice President Atty. Allan Montano will take some. The rest will be turned over to the hard working Virgilio Nem Singh, who has just accepted the invitation to return to the center.

As he leaves albeit temporarily for government, Atty. Matula's enviable work ethic will sorely be missed. "I give legal advise to FFW local unions and its members, and defend and advocate their rights in all fora. I also appear in the prosecutors' office and in regular courts for our members," he says of his job at the Legal Center.

‘Like the other lawyers and legal assistants in FFW, I also do menial jobs like typing, filing and messengerial work. *Sabi ko nga sa mga FFW members, masyadong mahal ang serbisyo sa FFW, abogado pa ang nag-tatype, nagpa-file and nag-memesenger sa inyo.*’

**Atty. Sonny Matula**

"*Pumupunta rin ako sa mga negosasyon, conciliations and mediations sa National Conciliation and Mediation Board at kung kailangan kasama rin sa grievance conferences,*" he adds.

His total devotion, and commitment to serve the workers is evident in his down-to-earth attitude.

A father of two, Atty. Matula is also a resident lecturer and resource person of the FFW-Philippine Social Institute (FFW-PSI) and other unions on political issues, labor laws, trade union and human rights, among others. He does

not mind extending services to relatives of FFW members who come to the office for legal advise and counseling.

### As a youth activist

Atty. Matula knew of FFW as early as 1985 when his English Professor Romeo Caylo at the Mindanao State University (MSU) in Marawi pointed out that FFW was one of the reliable democratic allies of the social democrats against the Marcos dictatorship.

He came face to face with FFW members as a student leader who used to be a member of the League of Filipino Students during a 46-day strike at the Mindanao State University after the downfall of Marcos. FFW members in Iligan City supported the student-initiated strike led by the Movement for a Better MSU (MFB-MSU) in 1986 that moved for the ouster of Gov. Ali Dimaporo as president of MSU and the dissolution of his armed group called *Barracuda*, among others.

"I remember FFW members donated rice, vegetables, fish and even money to sustain our strike," says the government scholar. Thereafter, he joined *Bansang Nagkaisa sa Diwa't Layunin*, which had a number of activists in FFW and became one of the activists of a social democratic party, the PDSP. Noel Tan, also a student leader, introduced him to local leaders of FFW in Iligan City.

The first FFW officer he met formally was Jun Villarta, former FFW VP for Mindanao and President of National Steel Labor Union (NASLU-FFW), along with Rene Pestolante, PSI-FFW coordinator in Iligan City. From then on, MSU students were invited to participate during labor day and strikes, including the one in Gaisano-Iligan in 1986, which was the first he participated in.

"I got deeper knowledge about the FFW, its ideology, programs and its national leadership when I worked with the La Ignaciana Apostolic Center (Institute of Social Order) in Sta. Ana, Manila, in 1987," he remembers. He learned that FFW, led by Johnny Tan with his mentor Fr. Walter Hogan, S.J.

## Free Workers

made a revolutionary impact in the labor movement and changed the terrain of labor relations for better wage, humane condition of work and others.

### Welcome to the Federation

By 1993, Mr. Roy Oliveros, who headed the PSI, called the then law student for an interview and introduced him to FFW leaders. Then FFW President Mr. Tan told Sonny, as he is popularly called, that he really doesn't know him. But when Mr. Tan was informed that he was working with Fr. Archie Intengan, S.J. before, he remarked, "you must be an excellent assistant."

He was therefore hired and worked as operations staff. "*Sabay kami ni Danny Lim, a former local president of the FFW union in Alhambra Tobacco, pumasok as staff of FFW,*" he reminisces. After a while, he was promoted to technical staff under the office of the FFW President.

Since he was studying law, he helped prepare position papers and pleadings for local unions in Interphil, BPI Family, Globe Telecom, among others, when the Labor Secretary assumed jurisdiction over the labor disputes. Even when he was working at the Social Security System (SSS), he made pleadings, communications, position papers, briefing papers and news releases for FFW on a part-time basis. After taking his oath as a lawyer in 1998, he availed

of the early retirement program of SSS and returned to FFW as legal counsel.

### 'Scholar' as a law student

He said that his salaries from work during daytime at the FFW, SSS, ISO and PDSP contributed for his law studies in the evening at the Manuel Luis Quezon University. "Thus, it can be said that individual FFW members have a contribution to my law education," he asserts.

"The greatest support, however, comes from my wife, Bambam," he conveys. It stems from their *mutual commitment to bring out the best in each other*. "Now that I am a lawyer, it is her turn to resume a master's degree in Business Administration at the De La Salle University," he concludes.

### Greatest influences

Atty. Matula derives inspiration from his late father, Carlos Matula, Mr. Tan, Mr. Jabar, Fr. Intengan and his fellow social democrats. Though his father, farmer and part-time tailor, was only an elementary graduate he guided his eight children. "He always encouraged us to obtain education as key to overcome poverty."

Mr. Tan is an exemplary union leader who is an institution himself. He is not only a recognized national trade union leader but also a leader of the international trade union movement. Even though he is already 79 years old, he reports for work regularly. "*Basta*

*working day, di umaabsent sa BATU,*" he says in admiration.

Atty. Matula is also inspired by Mr. Jabar, who started out as a local union president and rose to the ranks. He was elected FFW National Vice President, became a Congressman in the 90s and is now serving his second term as FFW National President.

Fr. Intengan, to Atty. Matula, always encourages the young to serve the poor and work with workers, peasants and other sectors in the struggle for authentic social change. He is also greatly influenced by his social democrat comrades for the commitment to make a difference.

### Parting Shot

Before assuming his new role in the bureaucracy, Atty. Matula reminded his fellow trade unionists about their responsibilities. "In every workplace or post that we are holding, we are there not only to serve and earn a living but also to make a difference. We must not be afraid of power, we must possess it to empower our people and transform society."

With this power he hopes *elite* unionism in the Philippines will be transformed. "*Ang organisadong lakas-paggawa ay sampung porsyento lamang. Hindi nagpapalawak. Ang organisado ay dapat mag-organisa ng kanilang kapwa manggagawa na walang unyon!*"



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