



# The ICFTU: *'tainted with blood and bribery'* —KMU

The Kilusang Mayo Uno of the Philippines responds to recent *LABOUR BULLETIN* debates on the ICFTU and labour internationalism.

## Dear Comrades in COSATU

We have read the *SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN* interview with top ICFTU officials during their recent visit to South Africa regarding your affiliation to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. Our colleagues from the Indian Ocean Trade Union Conference have sent us their position and solicited our views regarding the discussion\*.

Firstly, we would like to state that the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) recognises the fact that the issue of COSATU's affiliation is solely in the hands of your membership and leadership. Secondly, COSATU has a leading role in the progressive trade union movement in the world, especially those in Third World countries. Your decision on this issue has a significant impact on and implication for the trade union community.

The KMU therefore would like to make its views known to comrades regarding the ICFTU and its role in the Philippines. In particular, we will detail the roles of the local ICFTU affiliate, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations), and the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF).

The TUCP is the local affiliate of the ICFTU. It was established in 1975, at the height of the Martial Law period, to legitimise and consolidate the Marcos dictatorship's hold on labour. The leaders of the TUCP had since then supported the repressive labour, political and economic policies of the dictatorship.

The labour representatives appointed from the TUCP to the defunct Marcos parliament, ably supported the passage of repressive labour laws known as BP 130 and

\* See *LABOUR BULLETIN* Vol 17 No 1 and Vol 17 No 3



BP 227, These laws emasculated the right to strike and legitimised the entry of scabs and police in industrial conflicts. During the labour crackdown in 1981 and 1982, when national leaders of the KMU were hauled to jail, the TUCP enthusiastically egged on the regime. In those days when trade union and political prisoners jam-packed the dictatorship's jails, not a word was heard from the Philippine affiliate of the ICFTU.

### US money and influence

The TUCP has a close relation with the AFL-CIO, its patron in the ICFTU. Through the Asian-American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI), the AFL-CIO channels its technical and financial assistance to the TUCP. And, not surprisingly, the AAFLI has twice been involved in major exposes involving covert funds to influence local politics and national policies favouring American influence in the country.

The first instance occurred during the twilight years of the Marcos dictatorship. In the mid-1980s, the Marcos dictatorship became virtually isolated from the populace and the world community because of its tyrannical rule.

The TUCP kept its close relationship with the dictatorship. However, some of its leaders and affiliated federations started working with the opposition group led by Corazon Aquino. Aquino was then launching her bid to oppose Marcos in a presidential election.

Philippine law expressly prohibits financial contributions from foreign donors to any candidate running for public office, and regards this as undue foreign influence in the internal politics of the country. However, the American government cannot keep its hand out of the cookie jar, and found a way to go around this prohibition.

Two US-based newspapers, *The Nation* and the *San Francisco Examiner*, documented and published articles in 1986 detailing how the funding arm of the AFL-CIO in Asia, the AAFLI, passed a total amount of \$4 million, to the TUCP. The *Nation* article quoted AAFLI's Philippine

director, Bud Philips, as admitting that the funds helped the TUCP unions and at the same time gained political allies for the AAFLI.

The money originated from the US-government's National Endowment for Democracy and was channelled through the AAFLI to the TUCP. It was at this time that TUCP secretary general Ernesto Herrera, now a senator, became active with the National Movement for Free Election, the opposition's electoral watchdog. The AAFLI money was spent, among others, in "voter awareness and civic action campaigns on topical issues". It is also to be noted that groups within the TUCP supported Aquino and Marcos during the election.

The 1986 experience clearly shows the extent to which the TUCP, AFL-CIO and AAFLI let themselves become conscious players in US efforts to manipulate the election. The election was so fraudulent that it became the fuse for the 1986 uprising that brought Corazon Aquino to power.

### Buying TUCP votes

The second instance occurred in 1991 during the heat of the national debate on whether to reject the treaty to be entered into by the Aquino administration and the United States extending the stay of the US bases in the Philippines for another 10 years.

The discussion then was centred in the Philippine Senate, where it was to be ratified. The anti-treaty senators outnumbered the pro-treaty bloc, and a mad scramble went on for lobbyists, primarily the US government, to influence more senators to vote for the base treaty.

TUCP secretary general, Senator Ernesto Herrera, at the start of the debate initially rejected the treaty, saying that it did not benefit the workers nor the Filipinos. However, after some time, he changed his position into supporting the US bases. What convinced Senator Herrera was AAFLI's pledge of some \$3.7 million, and another \$10 million from the US government to the TUCP in exchange for his vote on the US bases. This bribery attempt, brought to the





floor of the Senate, exposed how much the US government, through the TUCP and the AAFLI, would collaborate just to maintain US policies in the Philippines.

Even as the bribe offer was exposed in the Senate, Senator Herrera voted for the bases. The treaty was, however, defeated, paving the way for the dismantling of the US military facilities in the Philippines.

As the KMU exposed these reckless attempts to meddle in Philippine politics, the AFL-CIO hit back. Trade unionists from the United States reported that AFL-CIO bosses had expressly banned any KMU leaders from visiting American unionists, especially during meetings and trade union activities. The AFL-CIO even came out with a guide on how to turn down visiting KMU leaders requesting meetings. The basis for this ban is that "the KMU is a communist front", and as such has no right to speak to American trade unionists.

Despite this policy, US unions from the local to the national levels, trade union groupings and individual members recognised the KMU and became active in mobilising support and solidarity activities.

### **The TUCP and the Aquino government**

As it was in the Marcos years, the TUCP wormed its way into the powers that be during the Aquino administration. It also became an instrument of the Aquino regime's efforts to destroy the militant trade union movement.

During the mid-80s, the TUCP's inability to defend and advance the workers' interests, both on the shopfloor and at industrial and national levels, became obvious to the rank and file workers. Unions and federations broke away from the TUCP and turned towards the militant trade union movement, or became independent. During the rest of the 1980s, TUCP membership declined, becoming a top-heavy organisation of labour aristocrats and company unions.

In exchange for political support and appointment to choice government positions, TUCP leaders cozied themselves with the Aquino regime. Herrera got an endorsement from President Aquino to run and be elected as Senator in the powerful Senate. Appointed congressional representatives were mostly from TUCP, and Aquino chose a TUCP leader, Ruben Torres, as labour secretary in



the late 1980s.

With Herrera's sponsorship, new laws were passed, further diminishing already limited union rights such as the right to strike and to organise. These restrictive amendments were enshrined as the Herrera Law or RA 6715. Public sector unionism became a sham as Aquino took away government employees' right to strike and to bargain collectively.

### **The TUCP and vigilante death squads**

Not content with assaulting trade union rights with legislation, the TUCP boldly participated in the Aquino regime's Total War policy. This policy aimed to destroy, through military and political means, the trade unions and people's organisations which opposed its policies.

The US-Philippine Fact Finding Mission to the Philippines, headed by former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, documented that the first national anti-communist conference sponsored by the extreme-right World Anti-Communist League was held at the TUCP national office in Metro Manila in February 1987. That conference called for the formation of vigilante death squads in the country.

Vigilante groups were organised, armed and trained by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, in communities, plantations, mines and factories. Individuals and organisations which were branded by the government as "communist agitators" or "communist fronts" were targeted for liquidation. The immediate targets were KMU organisations, in particular, leaders and members.

In Negros, the dominant sugar workers' union, the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) was publicly branded as a communist front by both the TUCP, the military and the civilian government.

With this accusation, a virtual state of terror was unleashed. There were full-scale military operations, especially in plantations organised by the NFSW. Union leaders were summarily executed, harassed or threatened

with death. Strategic hamletting, through which sugar workers and peasants were forcibly evacuated from farms and plantations, became widespread. These evacuees were then herded into military camps and were harangued with red-baiting seminars branding the NFSW, the KMU, and even church leaders as communists and communist fronts. The sugar workers were then made to pledge allegiance to the government and were presented to the media as "New People's Army surrenderees".

### **Terror against mineworkers**

Another vicious reign of terror was also underway in 1987 on the nearby island of Cebu, where the giant Atlas copper mine is located. After years of indifference by leaders of a yellow union, in 1985 mineworkers voted out the TUCP union and brought in PAMA-SPFL-KMU. The KMU won unprecedented economic and political gains for the workers, which under TUCP dominance were virtually unknown. In an effort to regain leadership of the 10 000 mineworkers, the TUCP colluded with the management, the military and the government to eliminate the KMU, before the certification election of 1989.

A vigilante group was organised and armed by the military among the core of TUCP supporters in the mine. Daily broadcasts from the TUCP's local radio station, DYLA, by announcers Cerge Remonde, Jun Alamo and Art Tariman branded the PAMA-SPFL-KMU as communist fronts (Remonde later on became the TUCP's director for national and international affairs). Active union members and leaders were hunted down by the vigilantes and, by the time of the certification election, 13 KMU members had been killed and dozens wounded in vigilante attacks. Under this reign of terror, the vigilantes organised another union after it found out that ALU-TUCP would never be supported by mineworkers, because of its corrupt track record.

To help the struggle of the Atlas mineworkers against the vigilante



repression, an international campaign was launched. International organisations, national unions and trade union centres registered their support through letters of protest sent to the government and Atlas management each time vigilantes killed unionists or attacked union meetings. For its firm commitment to the workers, PAMA-SPEL-KMU garnered a landslide vote from the mineworkers for a five-year term.

These incidents were verified in an intensive investigation by the Senate Committee on Human Rights and Justice chaired by Senator Wigberto Tanada in 1990.

Similar experiences such as that in Negro and at the Atlas Mine were repeated all over the country. Vigilante formations did not end with the Aquino regime. They are still continuing, despite the resistance of progressive unions. In fact, Jun Alamo of the Cebu vigilantes, was reported to be organising in northern Metro Manila. Workers are made to attend seminars which include the usual red-baiting. The KMU is depicted as the organisation blocking the way for the country's industrialisation efforts, hence it must be liquidated.

Throughout the period of Total War policy under Aquino, the KMU and different human rights organisations have publicised and campaigned against the ongoing human rights violations in the Philippines. Amnesty International and the International Labour Organisation took notice and condemned these violations. Both bodies called on the government to dismantle its paramilitary and vigilante organisations, which were found to be the most vicious violators of human rights in the Philippines.

However, not a word was heard from the ICFTU, much less to censure its affiliate, the TUCP, for letting its union and its leaders organise vigilante groups.

### **The IUF: dividing workers**

The international trade secretariat of the ICFTU in the food and allied industry, the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF), had five member federations

in the Philippines in the mid 1980s. Four of these five federations – the DFA, IBM, NFL and NFSW – are affiliates of the KMU. The other, NUWHRAIN, is affiliated to the Lakas Manggagawa Labour Centre, a conservative trade union.

However, by December 1988, all the KMU federations, except NFL, decided to bolt out of the IUF because of "political intervention, discriminatory actions, harassments and constant red-baiting". The three federations, comprising the majority of the food and allied workers unions then with the IUF in the Philippines, brought to the fore the extent of how much the international organisation would try to impose its policies on local organisation, irrespective of its autonomy.

The IUF's anti-KMU campaign started in 1984. Instead of trying to mend the rift between the KMU and conservative factions within NUWHRAIN, IUF leader Ma Wei Pin launched an anti-KMU attack at a national and international level. This further widened the division in the federation, instead of mediating the conflict. It led to the split, with the KMU-aligned locals forming the GLOWHRAIN (Genuine Labour Organisation of Workers in Hotel, Restaurant and Allied Industries), and the conservatives staying in NUWHRAIN.

The IUF's anti-KMU attitude did not end with the splitting of NUWHRAIN. During the 1987 strike at Nestle Philippines by the DFA union, the IUF did not support the workers' struggle against the multinational corporation. The strike was launched on the basis of Nestle's unfair labour practices, non-payment of holiday benefits and non-implementation of benefits. The IUF Council of Affiliates in the Philippines repeatedly sent resolutions urging the IUF to support the Nestle strike, but the federation hardly lifted a finger.

Then came the red-baiting campaign of IUF leader Dan Gallin against the KMU and its affiliates. In international forums, Gallin did not spare a word calling the KMU a front of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Gallin made these statements



despite his knowledge that in the Philippines, merely identifying somebody as "communist" makes him/her an open target for paramilitary and military harassment and the death squads.

At the height of the Nestle labour dispute, a local union leader at Nestle's plant in Cabuyao, Laguna, was assassinated by gunmen in front of the factory gate. Human rights groups strongly believe that the assassins were part of vigilante groups in the province.

After the KMU federation's disaffiliation from the IUF, the incensed IUF leader stepped up his attack against the KMU.

The IUF circulated a paper, "Anatomy of a Lie", putting into black and white all of Gallin's baseless and vicious accusations against the KMU. This classic example of black propaganda played well into the hands of the military and the Aquino regime, which filed a case of subversion against KMU Chairperson Crispin B Beltran and leaders of the KMU union at Atlas Mines.

Even if these subversion charges filed against KMU labour leaders have been dropped in the Philippine court for lack of evidence and substance, Gallin's attacks continue.

### Can the ICFTU reform itself?

In the *South Africa Labour Bulletin* article dated January-February 1993, ICFTU leader Enzo Friso said that his organisation supports the "democratisation of developing countries". If we are to apply the ICFTU policy to the Philippines, especially the activities of its affiliates, the TUCP and its AFL-CIO patron, these words come to naught.

It is quite clear from the facts indicated that the ICFTU member-organisation in the Philippines does not intend to pursue the so-called "democratisation" process. For this process means giving back to workers their right to organise, collectively bargain, to strike and to collective actions for redress of grievances, without threat or actual harassment from the government or the ruling class.

In all the documented atrocities committed by the Philippines government through its vigilante organisations and its police and military forces, the ICFTU has remained silent. This is even if its local affiliate, the TUCP, has allowed its organisation and its leaders and members to become active and prime movers of right-wing vigilante terror.

The ICFTU has remained silent, even if its Philippine affiliate continues to batter Filipino workers with restrictive labour laws. It has lost its "democratisation" slogan as the AAFI and the TUCP blatantly trampled on the sanctity of Philippine internal affairs as it bribed leaders and politicians to influence politics and policies to the benefit of the United States.

By keeping silent on the IUF's witch hunt, it has given implicit support to Dan Gallin's MaCarthyist attacks, setting up Filipino trade unionists to become targets of military and vigilante harassment.

These policies of the ICFTU are not limited solely to the Philippines. It has repeatedly supported military-backed unions in Indonesia and South Korea and government-sponsored union centres in Malaysia and Singapore. As in the Philippines, these unions are their government's instrument to stifle grassroots and a truly autonomous trade union movement.

The KMU has difficulty in believing that the ICFTU could reform itself and take a new direction in challenging the issues that trade unionists throughout the world have to face. Judging by its track record in the Philippines, coupled with its continued support for apologists of military and authoritarian governments in Asia, the ICFTU has to do more than change its rhetoric.

It is for these reasons that the KMU has kept away from the ICFTU, and it is also because of this critical position that the KMU earned the ire of the ICFTU. For Filipino trade unionists know that the name of the ICFTU here is tainted with blood and bribe money. ☆