

A Show of Solidarity, A Show of Force

Migrant and Local Workers Join Hands for Equal Rights, Equal Wages

Hong Kong workers and their families joined hands and marched on May 1, 2009 as they commemorated the 127th year of the International Day of Work. By simply witnessing them walk across the long stretch of Hennessy Road, one can see just how varied the trade unions who have joined the demonstration – civil servants, metal benders, workers at the MTR corporation, street sweepers, postal workers, everyone.

Migrant workers, who comprised a sizeable number of the mobilization, marched with their fellow local brothers and sisters. Each section of migrants has its own issues to carry and demand to the Hong Kong government yet everyone was united in one call: their inclusion into the legislated statutory minimum wage.

Carrying billboards in both English and Chinese (stating “Statutory Minimum Wage for All!”), migrant workers braved the first wave of summer heat as they marched for two hours straight from Victoria Park to the Central Government Offices. Their chants, also shouted in both English and Chinese, were tirelessly expressed to all passers-by, commuters and everyone who witnessed the event. Their banners and placards were waved proudly as those holding them encouraged everyone to join in this show of solidarity, this show of force.

A Show of Solidarity

The International Day of Work in Hong Kong is not celebrated by local workers



alone. For many years now, local and migrant workers have come together and marched for a common purpose – the protection of their rights and tenure as workers, the demand for a just and humane wage as well as the maximum number of working hours, government’s provision of services, among many others.

Right now, in the midst of the intensifying global economic recession, migrant workers in Hong Kong have steadfastly urged the HK government to include them, specifically foreign domestic workers, in the statutory minimum wage.

Recently, the Labour Affairs Board, a network of governmental and non-

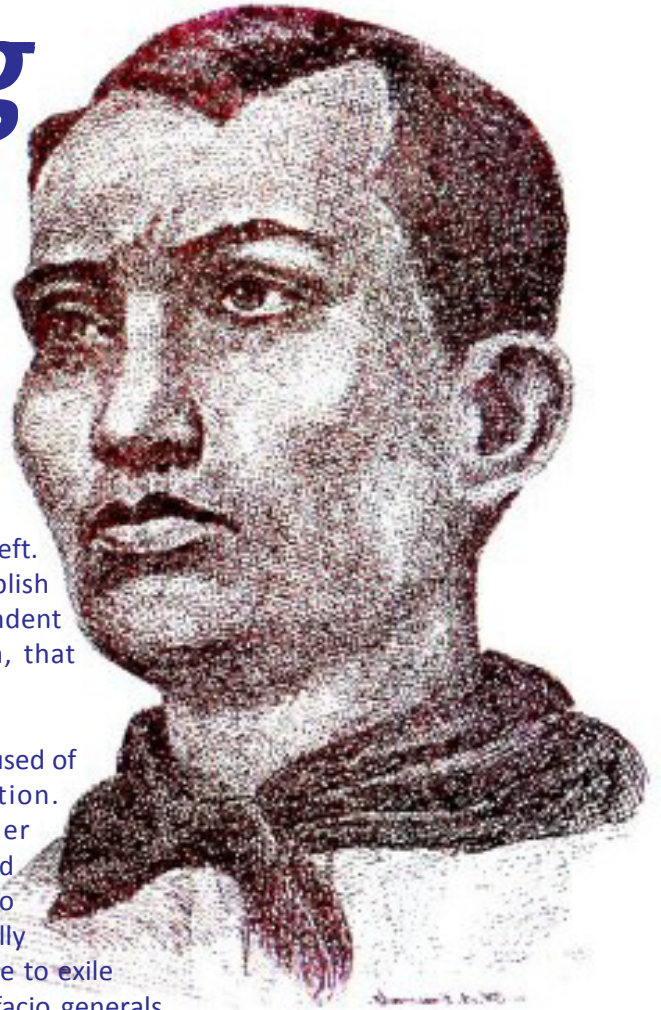
governmental organizations, has proposed to exclude in-house domestic workers from the said legislation reasoning that: a) it is difficult to compute their wages; and b) their inclusion will “put their jobs at risk.”

Clearly, in the Mission’s eyes, this is nothing else but discrimination. Such unfounded fears being propagated by the government create a cloud of doubt on the general public whom they should be providing objective and impartial information to.

Several organizations like the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body have already submitted to the government a

Remembering Andres Bonifacio

November 30, 1863-May 10, 1897



May 10, 2009 is the 112th death anniversary of Andres Bonifacio, co-founder and *Supremo* of the *Kataastaasan at Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng Mga Anak ng Bayan (KKK)*, (The Highest and Noblest Society of the Sons of the Country), hero of the Filipinos.

The revolution was launched on August 23, 1896. By December 1896, the Magdalo faction headed by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, has called for the creation of a revolutionary government, a move opposed by the Magdiwangs (under Bonifacio) as the *KKK* already functioned as a full-fledged state with national, provincial and municipal branches.

On March 22, 1897, the Magdiwang and Magdalo councils met though the meeting's objective was not discussed. Instead, the assembled leaders decided to elect the officers of the revolutionary government.

Aguinaldo was elected president with Bonifacio as Director of the Interior. The election in effect dissolved the Katipunan. However, Bonifacio's election was questioned by Daniel Tirona on the grounds that a person elected to such an office must have a lawyer's degree – an undisguised insult to Bonifacio.

Bonifacio dissolved the assembly and nullified the elections.

Bonifacio and his men left. They resolved to establish a government independent of, and separate from, that established.

For this, they were accused of rebellion and sedition. Andres and his brother Procopio were found guilty and sentenced to death. Aguinaldo initially commuted the sentence to exile but some former Bonifacio generals persuaded Aguinaldo of the dangers posed by Bonifacio if he was allowed to live. On May 10, 1897, the Bonifacio brothers were executed.

Thus died Andres Bonifacio, who believed in the capacity of the Filipinos to liberate themselves from the yoke of the foreign colonizers. And we are the progeny of the people he believed in.

The times may have changed and we may be a number of generations far removed from the 1896 generation. Yet the freedom they desired, the honor and the dignity they sought to maintain, remain the same.


We overseas Filipinos must learn from the sacrifices of our fore-parents: to stand up for our rights, for our honor and dignity wherever we are; and for the rights and honor and dignity of our children and their children's children.

And although we are far from our Inang Bayan (motherland) we must remain vigilant and should always be involved.

Former President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law and went on with his rule until he was ousted in 1986. Mrs. Gloria Arroyo and her ilk are shamelessly pushing charter change to perpetuate themselves in power. Commission on Elections Commissioner Jose Melo warned that there might not even be an election in 2010.

All these negate aspirations of Bonifacio and the Katipunan.

May the spirit of 1896 continue live on in the hearts of the people Bonifacio believed in.

These will be our greatest tributes to Bonifacio and the Katipunan. 



Siti Jamsiyah

SITI JAMSIYAH, was born 21 August 1972, in Kediri, East of Java. She was the eldest of five siblings. She has one sister and three brothers. Her parents are pure Javanese.

Since she was a kid, Siti was taken care of by her grandmother. She finished secondary level 2 after her grandmother passed away. She decided to help her parents by supporting her sister and brothers' education.

Siti worked in Bali for three years as a shop keeper. In 1993, she went to work in Saudi Arabia. Siti worked for two years there.

One day she received a call that her father has suffered stroke. She went back home to see her father. She stayed for three months to watch over her father and realized the difficulties faced by her family. She decided to go back to Saudi Arabia again for two years to help her family.


She then got married and bore a son. Unfortunately, however, they separated and she took care of her son all by herself. In 2001 she applied to Hong Kong as a domestic helper. That time she paid the agency an equal sum of her three-months salary. She was only receiving HK\$200 at that time with the of minimum of HK\$3,670. And for the rest of the contract she was only receiving HK\$1,800 and no rest day at all.

When that contract was finished she found a new employer. Again, she was asked to pay the agency of HK\$4,000. At that time she was given a full salary of HK\$3,670. She worked for this employer for six years.

But on the 4th contract to be, she was taken to the agency by the second daughter of her former employer and at the agency office they told her that she was not entitled for long service payment and that was her employer's decision. She did not agree and decided to file claims against her employer.

With the help of the Mission for Migrants Workers, she did not only claim for long service pay but also claimed for rest days, statutory holidays, annual leave pay that was not given to her during the six years of working for them.

It took four months before she was able to finish the fight with that six years of hard and slave-like working condition.

Siti went back to Indonesia with the desire of going back here in Hong Kong. 

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proposition with a computation in determining the foreign domestics' wages. Various local groups have expressed their support including the HK Confederation of Trade Unions, Justice and Peace Commission and Commission for Labour Affairs (both of the HK Catholic diocese) and the League of Social Democrats.

The warm welcome given by the local workers as a response to the migrant workers' demand "Statutory Minimum Wage for All" last May 1 hopefully presents a dawn of hope for the campaign.


A Show of Force

May 1 presents to us that migrant and local workers are no different from each other.

Both are entitled to equal rights and equal wages. They are not enemies in the workplace. In fact, albeit in varying degree and level, they experience exploitation and discrimination.

They become the first targets of wage cuts, denial of rights and services and other anti-worker measures especially now that all of us are confronted with this crisis.

This year's May 1 shows to us that migrant and local workers can unite and collectively struggle for issues they have in common. It provides us with the reality of the hardships that they go through everyday and the legitimate and just demands that they are presenting not only to the government but to us.

As a people who understand and believe not only in service but in justice, we express our solidarity, our support. 

Church of Sweden Visits Mission & BHMWR

A group of Priests, Deacons, Clergies and Seminarians from the Church of Sweden visited the MFMW and the Bethune House on April 29.

The group took an interest in knowing and learning the situation of Foreign Domestic Workers here in Hong Kong thru the former Board Member of the MFMW, Ms. Birgitta Larsson.

Cynthia Tellez, the Executive Director of MFMW facilitated the orientation of the works and programs of the Mission and how they provide services to Foreign Domestic Workers in Hong Kong.

The orientation gave much more information for



Members of the Church of Sweden share insights with members and staff of the Mission.

them to realized that the work of the MFMW takes a lot of commitment and perseverance, that as a sign of their appreciation, they presented a purple candle glass holder that symbolizes in keeping the fire burning.

Atty. Saladero's Sharing with the Migrants

On 22 April, human rights and labor lawyer Atty. Remegio "Ming" Saladero shared his stories and experiences with the overseas Filipino workers at the Bethune House Women Migrants Refuge.

First off, Ming asked how the OFWs are doing and what problems they encounter here.

OFWs began to relay the struggles of their daily lives as domestic workers, especially those with standing cases like illegal collection by recruitment agencies, illegal termination and other labor-related cases.

Ming then shared about the ordeal after he was abducted by elements of the Philippine National Police in 2008.

He shared on how he was being framed up by the PNP and was charged with trumped up charges of murder.

Ming is a lawyer of PRO-LABOR, a legal counsel for



Attorney Ming Saladero (in circle) shared a night of food, fun and meaningful sharing with Filipino and Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong.

trade unions in the Philippines. He is also a member of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers in the Philippines.

Ming has a long record of helping trade unions and other disadvantaged peoples in pursuing their cases against companies other "big fish".

With this background of his, he said that the ordeal he went through was politically-motivated. This is part of the

all-around plan of the Philippine government in frightening away critics of the government as well as those who are advocating human rights in the country.

Despite all these, Ming has maintained a happy and positive outlook in life. He even managed to crack jokes during his sharing.

It was indeed a meaningful and fruitful night with Ming, the people's lawyer. 📷

Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW)
St. John's Cathedral, 4 Garden Road,
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CHINA



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Editorial Team

Cynthia Ca. Abdon-Tellez,
 Norman Uy Carnay,
 Jun Tellez,
 Fr. Dwight dela Torre

Contributors

Dolores Dayao,
 Sol Pillas, Rey Asis,
 Kriswandar

Address

St. John's Cathedral,
 4 Garden Road,
 Central, Hong Kong SAR

Tel No. (852) 2522 8264

Fax No. (852) 2526 2894

E-mail

mission@migrants.net

Webpage

<http://www.migrants.net>

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