

Factory workers march against corruption as middle forces launch noise barrage

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The workers are adding their voice to the growing clamor in support of latest expose against corruption in the government of Gloria Arroyo with a “Workers March against Corruption.” Renato Magtubo, president of the Fortune Tobacco Labor Union [the trade union in the biggest cigarette manufacturer in the country] and chairperson of the Partido ng Manggagawa (PM) [Labor Party], said that “It is time that the working class raises its own social justice demands to amplify the middle class cry against corruption and for truth.”

“While the middle forces are holding a noise barrage at various points in Metro Manila, the factory workers of Marikina [an industrial city on the eastern part of the capital Metro Manila] are marching bearing labor’s issues and position. The workers unite with the people in the call for truth and accountability but we challenge the multisectoral movement to oust the evil president with the independent demands of the masses,” he explained.

Labeling it as “proletarian communal action,” more than two thousand workers participated in the “Workers March against Corruption” led by Alliance of Trade Unions in Marikina together with PM. The bulk of the participants came from big factories based in Marikina like Fortune Tobacco, Noritake, Armscor and Purefoods with delegations from other enterprises in the city.

Magtubo emphasized the workers position that should “the evil president” be ousted through people power, then the nation must not just settle for “the lesser evil.” He insisted that “The Gloria Arroyo regime must be replaced by a transition government. Constitutional succession plainly translates into a change in faces and a continuation of ‘business as usual’ for the oligarchs. However a transition government is obliged to undertake the ‘business of reform’ and heed the social justice demands of the masses.”

The workers march commenced at 2:30 pm from Concepcion Church [in Marikina] and then proceed to the Freedom Park of the Marikina City Hall. There the workers held a program that lasted from 3:30 pm to 6:00 pm. In his speech at the program, Magtubo decried the fact that the taxes paid by the workers and the poor are lost to corruption and not returned as public services. “We call on the workers and the poor for a tax revolt against corruption. The collection of withholding taxes from workers and value added tax from consumers came up to PhP 270 billion [USD 6.75 billion] in 2006 or 42% of total taxes and yet the World Bank estimates that up to 40% of government funds are lost to corruption. This means that the taxes that workers and poor pay are all stolen by thieves in government,” he asserted.

Magtubo clarified that “A transition government may be extra-constitutional but so long as it is the sovereign will of the people in uprising then it lies on solid ground. The next people power must be new not in form but in substance. It should again be a massive uprising of the people that this time should lead not just to a change in presidents but in a reform of the system.”

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