

Dictators and debts

# The legacy Ferdinand left to the Philippines

by Lynda Cassels

An island nation of little over 40 million inhabitants, the Republic of the Philippines is currently grappling with a foreign debt in excess of \$29 billion U.S. According to Martin Hilarion Tranchuling, Training and Education Co-ordinator for the Philippine Peasant Institute, 44 per cent of the country's annual gross domestic product goes to servicing that debt — while an estimated 70 per cent of Philipinos live in poverty.

"Last year the government spent \$4 billion on debt-servicing payments," Tranchuling said at a

public education workshop on global debt and the environment last week. "It is money that could have been spent on economic development and social services."

His stop in Halifax was part of a tour through the Maritimes, during which Tranchuling hopes to increase Canadians' understanding of the human and environmental implications of the current debt crisis.

The Philippines, like most developing countries, is struggling to increase the exports which provide cash needed to service its massive debt. One casualty of this policy is agriculture.

Land which had long been devoted to feeding the population now produces cash crops for export such as bananas, pineapple and cocoa.

Most of the debt was incurred by the previous government of Ferdinand Marcos says Tranchuling, and the Philippine people are now struggling to pay back a debt from which they derived no benefit.

"It is my perception that many Canadians think that aid money all those years actually went to development projects that would help the people," Tranchuling says, adding that most of the funds were squandered on mega-projects, or used to purchase estates and property abroad for the President and his wife. One such project was the construction of a \$2.5 billion nuclear power plant, which was later discovered to have been built on a seismic fault. It is no longer in use.

In a country like the Philippines, the human cost of debt is all too evident. Of the 70 per cent of the population who live in the countryside a further 70 per cent are landless. According to Tranchuling expropriation of peasant land is common practice, and few environmental or safety regulations are respected. In the countryside plantation owners frequently expect their employees to continue working while airplanes swoop above them, spraying the crops with pesticides.

"Some of these chemicals can severely irritate the skin, while others are known to cause cancer if a person is exposed to them for



Bruce Homer: Dal Photo

Martin Hilarion Tranchuling of the Philippines' Peasant Institute was in Halifax to explain how paying off Marcos' loans is crushing the people.

long periods," Tranchuling says. A worker who attempts to take precautions, however, may be risking his job. The people also have to struggle with the problems of deforestation brought on by over-exploitation of the lucrative timber industry.

Although President Corazon Aquino has been attempting to negotiate a rescheduling of the debt external debt payments remain the priority of the govern-

ment. A National Coalition on Debt in the Philippines is now proposing a 10 per cent upper ceiling on the percentage of export earnings that the country must put toward debt payments and is also demanding an investigation of all debts incurred under ex-President Marcos. But at the moment, little progress has been made, Tranchuling says.

"We continue taking out new loans to pay the old ones."

## Gov't funds 10 student 'leaders' Clark's initiative praised, criticized

by James Hamilton

Despite some bad sentiment and criticism from within the student body, the President's Leadership Class (PLC) is providing the community with invaluable service and helping Dalhousie to become more integrated with its community.

The aim of the PLC is to integrate students' academic studies with a program of community service and leadership development over a five-year program. Each year, ten students will be chosen based on their interest and commitment to serving others. In the first three years, students

the PLC program even if the government funding is not renewed which would further restrict Dalhousie financially.

Jim Neil, co-ordinator for the PLC, responds to this criticism, saying, "We're not taking money away from anyone. Funding for this program was provided by the government specifically for this program." Neil says that funding came from a government program called "Innovations" which funds innovative ideas that will generate employment.

Neil also notes that in a worst case scenario (funding stops after three years), Dalhousie is only committed to one more year of

Program director denies accusations of elitism, says sole criterion for entrance to course is student's interest

become involved with the community and the campus. The fourth year will involve community service in a third world country. In the fifth year, students help co-ordinate programs for the first year class.

Employment and Immigration funds the program with \$60,000 a year for the first three years and Dalhousie expects to receive more funding for the program as the class becomes more established.

Juanita Montalvo, president of the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU), says some DSU members felt that the government funding should go towards already established programs, for example, the Transitional Year Program for black and native students which is currently badly underfunded. Montalvo also points out that Dalhousie is still committed to

funding. Neil adds that the program will end up paying for itself. It will attract new students and add prestige to the university. And most importantly it will improve relations with the community — an important area of financial support by giving something back to the community.

Critics also say the PLC is involved with too few students. Shayna Watson, a student representative on the Board of Governors, said that she applauds the aims of the program but feels that it is too restricted and should be aimed at all students and not just a few. She also expressed apprehension about funding going towards a concentrated program when it could be going towards a more widespread program.

However, Neil says that as the



Raymond Mah: Dal Photo

President's Leaders relax at home

program grows, more and more students will become involved in the program. He says that the program is not just aimed at the students in the class but at the student body as a whole. Neil hopes that the PLC can become

an instrument that all students can use to get involved in community activity.

When questioned about the bad sentiment among the student

body and accusations of being elitist, Neil says, "It's up to us to demonstrate to others that this program is worthwhile. As for us being elitist, the only criteria for getting into the course is that the students have an interest and commitment to serving others. If that's elitist, I have no apologies."

PLC member Alex Burton says the group should talk more to other students. "We should

improve relations by working together instead of working as separate entities," says Burton.

Neil notes that there are bound to be problems in the program's first year. Students say the program is still being shaped.

"It's up to us to make our own program. . . It will take at least one or two years to fully develop the program", says one member.

So far the reactions toward the program from within the PLC have been positive. Ryan Stanley, a first year student in the PLC said "The program has given me the opportunity to do things within the community that were not otherwise possible." All PLC students interviewed liked the program and were glad that they were in it.

Last term the PLC helped co-ordinate the Terry Fox run, held a drive for the food bank, and helped children to decorate a Christmas tree on campus. The students were also involved in a larger project designed to help alleviate stress during exams, but it was cancelled due to the strike. As well all the students in the PLC are involved in many organizations around campus.