

# "Will Work for Food"

by Nancy Pearson Arcellana

Perhaps I'm a globalization by-product—I'm an American who's been living in the Philippines for six and a half years. Filipinos are often surprised to hear how long I've been living in their country and always tell me about their relatives living in mine. But as capital finds easy access and nonexistent borders to nations, workers face stricter rules, regulations and greater barriers to finding life-sustaining employment.

I recently had the opportunity to return to my country of birth—reconnecting with family, friends and catching up on current events and social topics. I was thrilled to eat home-grown tomatoes, sweet corn and raspberries sold at the local farmers' market. But I was shocked and saddened to hear accounts and read newspaper articles of hate, fear and regressive social policies toward workers, the poor and recent immigrants to the United States.

While I was in the U.S., the United Parcel Service (UPS) workers went on strike. UPS has a unique history and has generally treated its workers very well, with the help of a strong union. Initially, it was committed to hiring only part-time workers who could prove they were active students and in need of part-time jobs to further their studies. Over the years, however, this policy "lapsed" and the composition of employees changed from a majority of full-time regular employees to a majority of part-time workers. Today, 60 percent of UPS workers are part-time employees. Apparently, the union felt the time was "now or never" to confront management and make demands not only to retain but expand full-time jobs and regain benefits for both full-time and part-time workers. As the union flexed its muscle, President Clinton was getting a lot of pressure from the business sector to intervene in the matter. As the strike continued, even the striking workers were getting nervous, union benefits being far from adequate for their families. My sister's neighbor—her husband a UPS employee—found another part-time job, in addition to the one he had, in order to help the family make ends meet. In the end, UPS workers did attain most of their demands. As the business sector uses the excuse of "global competition" to cut full-time jobs, reduce wages and eliminate benefits of their workers, the struggle for work that pays living wages even in the United States is far from over.

Friends and newspapers were brimming with stories of people unable to find full-time employment anymore. I was surprised to realize that the phenomenon of part-time, subcontracting and casualization of labor is not confined to developing countries—it's another by-product of globalization. The national and state governments, under the guise of welfare reform, are also privatizing services to the poor. Churches, however, are overwhelmed with the number of people needing services from "meals on wheels" (a program that feeds elderly people confined to their homes) to soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless.

Too often I saw a "sign" of the times—"WILL WORK FOR FOOD"—held by people standing or sitting on corners of busy intersections. This by-product of globalization in what is regarded as the wealthiest country in the world should make us all beware!

farm operator households lose money on their farm on a cash basis in a typical year, but earn adequate income from off-farm employment (most likely earned by the woman of the household) to offset the losses."

Both Storey and O'Brien claim that the ongoing problems of farm debt and rural poverty have had alarming implications for rural communities especially for women and children: heightened rates of domestic violence (physical and emotional abuse); increased rates of accidental deaths met by over-worked family members; and increased number of suicides (this was especially true during the "farm crisis" but appears to have continued) which leave mostly women widows to support their families and farms.

Storey makes a strong case regarding the detrimental effects of the existing trade agreements on Canadian producers but on the society as a whole: "Despite denials by provincial and national governments, many socially progressive analysts believe that the acquiescence of those governments to the global trade agenda expressed in international agreements such as the Canadian-U.S. Trade Agreement (CUSTA), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have resulted in current reduction in public access to agriculture-related price and transportation supports, rural health and education services and other key aspects of Canada's long-established social safety nets. At the same time, as supports are being reduced, both levels of government [provincial and national] are providing no means of protection from rising costs for inputs and services." She goes on to note that "women in particular have suffered from cuts in the areas of health and education. [Com-