

YES, WE HAVE NO BANANAS TODAY

Remember when bananas were so abundant and so cheap that we took them for granted? We had bananas for frying, baking, and boiling; for salads, for snacks and for sweetening the *nilaga*. We had bananas to counter the oily taste of meat and desserts that were too sweet. And bananas were among the baby's first solid food. Bananas used to be common farm produce regularly brought to the towns and cities by enterprising *viajeros*. Today one can hardly get the good, fat, sweet kind and when available they are too dear for the poor man's table.

Similarly, pineapple no longer seems to be as good and as abundant as before. This despite thousands of hectares now being planted to bananas and pineapples. Because bananas and pineapples are no longer lowly farm produce. They have become big business, produced for export markets, part of global enterprise. Because they now carry an international price tag.

From banana exports to Japan alone, one large firm posts annual sales of \$100 million. Fresh and canned pineapple exports to Japan reach \$10 million every year. Add what goes to the US and other countries. That's a lot of bananas and pineapples gone beyond the reach of the natives, who, incidentally, do not make the dollar profits. Of Japan's total imports of bananas, 30% is exported by Dole, Phils., Inc. while 50% is by three other transnational companies — Del Monte, United Fruit and Sumimoto. So most of the profits derived from fertile lands and cheap labor are repatriated to mother companies.

Dole's Director for Industry Affairs recently announced plans "to produce other exportable crops such as papaya, asparagus, okra, ginger and onion." Clearly, no matter how such a move might adversely affect local consumer prices, Dole will continue to expand its operations. For growth is not only necessary to every transnational's "dream of empire" ("today bananas, tomorrow the agricultural world") it is also an established capitalist dictum that a business must keep growing or it will be gobbled up by yet bigger conglomerates. And as business

empires continue to expand and merge the market is concentrated in fewer and fewer corporate hands.

Dr. Frederick Clairmonte of the UNCTAD cites the emergence of three of the largest food and beverages conglomerates — Nestle, Unilever and RJ Reynolds — as the world's largest consumers of primary agricultural commodities from developing countries. They are also the biggest producers of consumer products sold to these same countries. As manufacturers they influence the international market price of finished products. As large importers of raw materials they also dictate the price of agricultural products.

These transnationals have so concentrated power over the world market that they have obtained the best agricultural lands in the Third World. They have reduced developing nations into food and raw material suppliers. Through aggressive advertising, they have "sucked" consumers of the Third World into a vortex of "international standard buying" (i.e. of transnational brand products.)

As the song goes, "Yes, we have no bananas today". Instead we have french fries from MacDonald's. Dole and Del Monte export our pineapples and mangoes and we get to drink Kool-Aid artificial fruit concentrates. Japan imports our prawns and sells us Oishi prawn crackers. Philippine cane sugar is shipped to the US by the ton and we buy bottles of Coke by the millions.

The situation is endemic in the whole of the Third World. Not because Third World peoples are stupid enough to sell their patrimony for junk but because the transnationals are just too big and too powerful to resist. Once upon a time it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. Today the sun never sets on Coca-Cola. And a few other conglomerates.

But aren't most of the transnational goods we buy manufactured in the Philippines? The PX buffs buying foreign products are, after all, a dwindling *burgis* minority. And aren't transnational industries providing Filipinos with much



needed jobs? So, aren't transnational corporations helping the economy?

Transnational subsidiaries, by being located in the Philippines do not become national industries. For like the bananas and pineapples, the profits derived from their operations do not directly accrue to the country (particularly since, to attract transnationals, taxes have been waived and full repatriation of profits allowed). Again, as with the bananas companies that require shipment in Japanese-made cartons, transnational industries (mostly repacking, processing and assembling) import a great part of the materials and technology they use. Sometimes they import their management as well, which accounts for our balance of trade deficit.

True, transnational companies provide jobs. But at rates that our own government, desperate for foreign investments and overseas jobs, so grossly advertises as "one of the lowest in the world." Transnationals have a direct hand in keeping these wages down.

Now, if transnationals had intended to help the economy, they have certainly failed. For all through the years they have been around, the country has become poorer, more deeply in debt; in fact the economy has sunk into crisis. However, it is unreasonable to ascribe such intentions to transnationals. They are not out to boost or undermine our economy. They are simply in business. Business to make profits. Lots of it when possible. Except that, as mentioned earlier, business gets better as it gets bigger and then it unavoidably runs into the problem of excess growth.

First World industries now are producing excess products. They need new markets for these. They have been accumulating excess money for which they need investment opportunities. That's why First World products and

capital have moved in on the rest of the world.

That's why like the business empires which export products and factories, transnational banks which export capital now have become powerful multinational monopolies too. These vast financial empires must, to persist, take direct control over the economies of whole nations.

Transnationals and their governments (whether American, Japanese, European or Soviet) promote and protect their interests. And it would be naive to think that their interests coincide with ours. For in their pursuit of profit and a higher return on investment, they cannot be concerned over the exploitation of our natural resources, our markets and our labor. It is after all, this exploitation that supports their continued growth and world market control.

This exploitation is the "imperialismo" those radical workers, students and other street demonstrators have been shouting "ibagsak" about. In between munching that one boiled banana for lunch.

