

AQUINO AND BEYOND:  
PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST STRATEGIES

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In early June, 1986, *Ang Bayan* ("Our Nation"), the clandestine, mimeographed journal of the 18 000-member Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and its guerilla force, the New People's Army (NPA), signalled an important shift in party policy. This shift took place even as reports began to proliferate in the Philippine capital at the same time that major changes also were occurring in the party's top leadership. *Ang Bayan*, in a statement issued by the party Politburo, said that the CPP had committed a "major political blunder" when it had decided to boycott the Philippine Presidential election of February 7, 1986. That poll, it will be recalled, had been marred by extensive voting fraud, resulting in a widening popular backlash against President Ferdinand Marcos who initially had been certified the election winner. In the ensuing turmoil, Marcos, on February 25, 1986, fled the country, and his opponent, Mrs. Corazon Aquino, with widespread, though by no means universal, popular backing, certainly in the larger Metro Manila area, had become the Philippines' ninth President<sup>1</sup>.

On February 1, 1986, General Fidel Ramos, then Chief of the Philippine Constabulary (and now by appointment of Mrs. Aquino Philippine Armed Forces Commander) had disclosed the contents of recently captured CPP documents. Those documents, Ramos said, not only confirmed the CPP's election boycott position which several party and front leaders already had disclosed earlier, but the documents also revealed that the party's underground organization was intensifying its agitation-propaganda effort "to show the people the futility of the elections" and to disrupt the elections by staging "mass actions"<sup>2</sup>.

If the CPP, in fact, did stage such mass actions to disrupt or demonstrate "the futility of the elections", then they did a poor job of it. For it is clear that the election generated much enthusiasm and participation, especially among a broad range of different anti-Marcos groups. According to the *Batasang Pambansa* (National Assembly), the Philippines' then national legislature, some 20 million votes were cast<sup>3</sup>. This represents about 70 % of all eligible Filipino voters at that time.

Thus the upsurge of what Aquino supporters have come to call "people power", resulting in the nearly bloodless overthrow of Marcos and the dramatic accession to the President's office of Mrs. Aquino, clearly caught the Communists off guard. On December 23, 1985, in calling for an election boycott, the CPC Central Committee had declared the forthcoming poll to be but "a sham" and a "meaningless but noisy electoral contest between local reactionaries"<sup>4</sup>. But the CPC's policy of urging an election boycott, which was based on the proposition that (1) neither Marcos nor Aquino would be able to bring about the fundamental changes the country's political economy needed, and (2) that Marcos and Aquino essentially represented the same, discredited, social elite and political leadership circles, evidently had had little persuasive appeal. Though fissures, inevitably, appeared in the ranks of her followers in the aftermath of Mrs. Aquino's accession to power, and though controversies soon began to swirl around her decisions and those of her cabinet ministers, it was obvious that her support and personal popularity, at least in pivotal Manila, were holding, and that the "people power revolution" was passing the Communists by.

#### CHANGE IN PARTY LEADERSHIP AND POLICY

As the above cited self-criticism of the CPP in Ang Bayan put it, the boycott policy demonstrated "a lack of appreciation" by the CPP "of the current level of mass participation in revolutionary struggles", as well as an "insufficient understanding" by party leaders of the CPP's tasks during this particular period in Philippine history. This lack of understanding, the CPP Politburo asserted in Ang Bayan, was demonstrated by the wide divergence between the masses and the CPP leadership as to the meaning of the February 7 election. The CPP executive committee, Ang Bayan declared, had viewed the election as only a "noisy and empty political battle" among different elements of the same Philippine ruling class. But the Filipino masses regarded the election as an opportunity to oust the Marcos regime, a perception which the party seemed unable to share or direct. As a result, at a time when "aroused and militant" Filipinos during the critical period of February 22-25, 1986, were moving "spontaneously but resolutely" to remove the despised Marcos government, the CPP and its fraternal organizations "were on the sidelines unable to lead or influence" the thousands in Manila who were moving "with amazing speed and decisively to overthrow the regime"<sup>5</sup>. Objectively considered, this CPP self-criticism is quite correct. In reviewing its election strategy, it must have been particularly galling to the party that one of its principal rivals for influence in the country, i.e. the Roman Catholic clergy, and the Catholic radio station "Veritas" in Manila, played the major role in mobilizing the mass of Filipinos during February 22-25, 1986, and

prevented Marcos' troops from quelling the uprising sparked by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Constabulary Chief General Fidel Ramos which proved to be Marcos' downfall.

Simultaneously with the publication of this party self-criticism there came news that the party's top leadership had undergone change. As we shall see, these changes involved bloody factional purges within the party, as well as a major doctrinal upheaval. First it should be noted that apparently after special meetings of the CPP Politburo and Central Committee during April and May, 1986, it was decided to remove as party chairman Rodolfo Salas, alias "Kumander (i.e. Commander) Bilog". Designated as interim party chairman was Benito Tiamzon, known variously as "Kumander Victoriano" and "Ka (short for Kasama or Comrade) Percy". A onetime University of the Philippines student activist in the later nineteen-sixties, who subsequently "went underground" when he began working for the party's National Trade Union Bureau, Tiamzon was arrested and imprisoned in 1973. After his release from the Ipil Rehabilitation Center in Manila's Fort Bonifacio, he joined the NPA organization on the island of Samar. There he rapidly rose through the CPP and NPA cadre hierarchy, becoming Eastern Visayas Regional CPP Secretary and Central Committee alternate member. He remained aloof, however, from major tactical and theoretical controversies, and today is considered a rather colorless senior party figure. As such he is ideal as a caretaker type of leader needed now while different factions settle on a new permanent party chairman to be chosen at a forthcoming "democratic congress" of the party to be held probably early in 1987<sup>6</sup>.

Ousted from major leadership position along with Salas was Rafael Baylosis, alias "Kumander Raul", who has been the party's chief liaison with the Muslim secessionist movement in the Southern Philippines known as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Both Salas and Baylosis, during the later nineteenth-seventies, had become the principal theoreticians of the CPP. As such they developed a hardline, unremittingly confrontational posture of total class warfare, that had led to the development of the NPA as a dynamic guerilla army, ceaselessly attacking military patrols, convoys and government offices, and through terror and intimidation gaining a hold on several hundred villages. This strategy also saw the development of the NPA's "sparrow" squads, a dreaded force of executioniers of all manner of alleged "people's enemies", ranging from small-town mayors and baranguay (lower district) captains, to members of the military, Constabulary and auxiliary Civilian Home Defense Force, as well as landlords, pro-Marcos businessmen, and "traitorous" peasants. The brutal violence of NPA tactics suggested to one observer a parallel with Cambodia's Khmer Rouge during the latter's 1975-79 heyday in Cambodia<sup>7</sup>.

The uncompromising dogmatism of the CPP unquestionably was a major factor in solidifying NPA strength and in demonstrating throughout the country the CPP's seemingly growing power precisely at a time (i.e. in the later seventies and early eighties) when there grew a deepening popular disaffection

with the corruption-ridden, "crony" dominated Marcos regime and with an inefficient Philippine army. The same dogmatic inflexibility and strategy of ceaseless, total confrontation also dictated the CPP's boycott of the February 7 Presidential election, however. Though the details are not altogether available, it is evident that the Salas-Baylosis boycott policy aroused opposition within the Central Committee as early as December, 1985. The leading dissidents were Saturnino Ocampo, a former business editor of the *Manila Times*, and today the party's principal delegate in peace discussions with the Aquino government, and Antonio Zumel, alias "Ka Tony". Zumel is the leader of the CPP's National Democratic Front, the main umbrella organization of the party's youth-, labor-, farmers-, and other "fraternal" and front groups, which is dedicated to winning sympathy for the Communist cause in the arena of public opinion. Both Ocampo and Zumel, backed by the Mindanao regional committees of the party, mobilized support for their anti-boycott position in the CPP Politburo, eventually forcing a disavowal of Salas' policy. Salas' followers in the party objected to having either Ocampo or Zumel assume the party chairmanship, however, and the selection of Tiamzon as interim party leader until the next party congress prevented a more serious sundering of the CPP at this point. It was stipulated that both Salas and Baylosis would remain members of the Politburo for the time being<sup>8</sup>. Baylosis nominally also continues as party Secretary-General.

#### VAGARIES OF PARTY HISTORY

What does the CPP Politburo's June, 1986 self-criticism and Salas' loss of the party chairmanship mean? The answer lies at least in part in the CPP's history. Founded on December 26, 1968 - Mao Tse-tung's seventy-fifth birthday - near the town of Capas, in southern Tarlac province, the CPP according to its Constitution differentiates itself when necessary from the older already existing, much smaller, and wholly ineffectual *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) "by appending the phrase Marxist-Leninist or Mao Tse-tung's thought in parenthesis"<sup>9</sup>. In its early years the new party often resorted to this parenthetical appendage, identifying itself most often as the "CPP-(ML)". But since the mid-seventies, and after Mao's death, the turbulence surrounding the activities of Mao's widow and the "Gang of Four", and the subsequent rise to power in China of vice-premier Deng Xiaoping, the CPP - in keeping with China's own relative "de-Maoization" - has tended to drop this Maoist label. More than ever the CPP today attempts to stress its nationalistic and Filipino character. Even so, the party has thus far not disavowed the exhortation in the preamble to its constitution: "Let us arm ourselves with the invincible thought of Mao Tse-tung."

After the 1977 capture by the Philippine government and incarceration of the CPP's chief founding cadre and first chairman, the former University of

the Philippines lecturer José Maria Sison, there came a renewed emphasis in CPP-NPA tactics on intense guerilla confrontation and selective assassination of government officials and other "anti-people elements"<sup>10</sup>. Ironically, even though there was a deemphasis of the Maoist identification of the CPP with the advent of Salas as party chairman, tactical emphasis in party activity seemed to fall particularly on Maoist-style "people's war", marked by a protracted guerilla struggle, widening consolidation of party power in strategic rural areas, and adoption of a conscious policy of moving from a "strategic defensive" to a stalemate, and thence to an eventually fatal (for the government) "strategic offensive" - all in accord with standard Maoist military directives<sup>11</sup>.

This post-1977 policy of intensified guerilla war confrontation did not mean an abandonment per se of united front policy. For the party's NDF continued efforts to proselytize in peasant and intellectual circles (including of secondary school and university students, and among the clergy), as well as in the large, mobile Filipino migrant community resident in the United States. But in the face of tightening controls over and influence within virtually all aspects of public organizational activity by the Marcos regime - especially organized labor, the civil services, some peasant groups, student organizations, the press and, not least, most of the military - cultivating support among different social strata and interest groups proved increasingly difficult for the CPP. This was in contrast to the years preceding and directly following the founding of the CPP, and before Marcos' proclamation of martial law in 1972. In that earlier period, development of left nationalist support groups such as the National Youth (Kabataang Makabayan-KM) and the Free Farmers Union (Malayang Samahang Magsasaka-Masaka), both founded in 1964, heightened a more radical political consciousness. These organizations, along with other such groups among workers and intellectuals, actually preceded the establishment of the CPP<sup>12</sup>.

By the later seventies, however, as closer, martial law imposed, controls impeded the further building of a united front, and as a more violent and total confrontation became characteristic of the post-Sison and Salas-dominated CPP, there emerged, in effect, only one principal tactical line for the party, namely support for the NPA. "Everyone to the hills!" or "everyone a people's soldier!" became the standard party slogans of this period. Such a tactical style paralleled the total confrontational line in the same period also apparent among the activists of the Communist parties in Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia.

## UNITED FRONT AND OPPOSITION

The heart of the Salas-Zumel internal conflict in the CPP today is the issue of the feasibility of a return to the more emphatic united front strategy of the party during the nineteen-sixties. But this does not mean reducing the issue to a mere imitation of radical strategies during the sixties. The new united front line recognizes the special circumstances of the present Aquino period, and seeks to prepare for the contingencies beyond it. For cadres like Ocampo and Zumel, the hallmark of the present era is not just the fall of Marcos or even what Filipinos now call "the miracle at EDSA", i.e. the revolutionary determination of the Manila masses demonstrated in the heady days of February 22-25, 1986, when along the Epifano de los Santos Avenue (commonly called "EDSA"), Marcos' tanks were stopped by a human wall of protest. Also, and equally important for the new Ocampo-Zumel line, have been the new Aquino regime's liberalization of political activity, the greater freedom of the press and of all manner of public demonstrations. It is these which are seen as providing a new opportunity to the CPP for united front rebuilding and expansion.

Within a week of formally assuming the Philippine Presidency on February 25, 1986, Mrs. Aquino ordered the release of 474 so-called political detainees, most of them held because of actual or suspected involvement in NPA activities. There was and is much disquiet among the Philippine military over these releases. The opposition of the Army and Philippine Constabulary delayed until March 5, 1986, the release of four top NPA leaders, among them the CPP's founding chairman, José Maria Sison, and onetime senior NPA commander Bernabe Buscayno ("Kumander Dante"). But Mrs. Aquino had her way, and upon his release Sison promptly declared that he now considered the CPP to be a legal organization, since Marcos had left the country. This is a view likely to be contested in Filipino legal circles<sup>13</sup>.

However, by mid-June, 1986, Mrs. Aquino, determined to keep her promise to bring an end to the Communist insurgency by means of a dialogue and peaceful settlement with the CPP-NPA, had appointed a delegation for confidential discussions with the Communists. Significantly, the CPP designated Satur Ocampo as the leader of the Communist delegation in these discussions. Ocampo, in a letter to President Aquino in early June, 1986, which outlined his readiness to hold discussions with the Aquino government, noted that both sides were embarked upon a difficult task, not least "because there are elements in and out of the government who would rather not see the negotiations proceed and succeed"<sup>14</sup>. The latter appeared to be a reference to the continuing opposition in the Philippine Defense Ministry and in the military establishment to any discussions with the NPA, and it suggests that in the CPP too there are no illusions about the party's present relationship with the Aquino government.

It is precisely with this understanding of possible, indeed probable failure of discussions that the essence of the new CPP strategy that triumphed with

the fall of Salas is perhaps most fully revealed. That strategy recognizes that the opportunity presented the party with the advent of the Aquino Presidency may well turn out to be brief and transitional, a mere prelude to a new and probably repressive regime vested in the Armed Forces establishment. The Aquino era, then, as CPP cadres of the Ocampo-Zumel persuasion put it, is but "a democratic space" that can and must be used by the party particularly to widen its urban base through united front work. But, in any case, Aquino liberalism is seen as unlikely to last.

Even before the February 7, 1986, Presidential election was held, such views were already being adumbrated in party circles. On February 2, for example, Luis Jalandoni, a former Roman Catholic priest and now spokesman for the party's National Democratic Front, declared that if Mrs. Aquino won the election, "a portion of the population would think that their basic problems have been solved". Eventually, however, Jalandoni said, it would be realized that it is necessary to wage an armed struggle, and the Aquino election victory would turn out to be but "a temporary setback" for the Communists<sup>15</sup>.

Such skepticism within the CPP about the future viability of an Aquino regime persisted. By early June, 1986, as the internal divisions within the Aquino government were becoming more apparent, an NPA spokesman in Bataan declared that while he and his followers were ready to support the Aquino regime "as long as it espouses genuine land reform and the uplifting of the masses", he also believed that the regime was "shaky and may crumble any time" because of the different political views of those holding key positions in it<sup>16</sup>. At the same time in Panay, "Ka Kris", spokesman for the CPP Panay Regional Party Committee, noted that "many unit leaders in Panay already are raring to launch a propaganda campaign on the rising 'US-Cory' dictatorship", but that these leaders were being restrained by senior party cadres because the CPP still was trying to undo its "tactical error" of having boycotted the election<sup>17</sup>.

## "LEGAL" AND "ILLEGAL" STRUGGLE?

Thus the strategy that has triumphed with the advent of the Ocampo-Zumel line in the CPP perhaps can be summarized as "talking while fighting, and getting ready for an even bigger fight". Already in March and April, 1986, party documents and publications, venting the CPP leadership's ongoing process of critical self-evaluation in the wake of Mrs. Aquino's surprising accession to office, had sounded this basic theme. One such CPP analysis, drawn up by various echelons of the party in mid-March, 1986, declares, for example, that "We must combine both the legal and illegal struggle for a bigger and stronger advantage of the masses and the revolutionary movement", and also predicts that "the struggle between the reactionaries and the liberals

in the government will grow more intense". Even so, the document asserts, the CPP faces a complicated situation in the aftermath of Marcos' downfall. For account must be taken of a heightened revolutionary consciousness among the masses and a resulting spontaneous mass movement that helped bring Marcos down, and, simultaneously, of the appearance of a strong "counter-revolutionary element" (a reference, presumably, to major segments of the military and business establishments and their eventual repudiation of Marcos). It is recognized in the same party document that because of its election boycott that the CPP faces problems in "positioning itself" in the sudden upsurge of the mass movement that overthrew Marcos, and that "other forces", for the moment, have acquired "a stronger hold" than the party on "the overall leadership" of the mass movement. The result was that these "other forces" reaped the rewards of the anti-Marcos revolution by acquiring positions of power in the new Aquino government. As well, the importance is recognized in these party documents of the need for "pulling the sympathy of the middle forces" towards the proletarian cause, presumably to broaden the base of future mass action<sup>18</sup>.

From the foregoing analysis, the Ocampo-Zumel faction of the CPP, now struggling for dominance in the party, seems to have concluded that there must be a more effective outreach to the different strata of Philippine society that currently are following the leadership of "other forces". The latter, presumably, is a reference to the Roman Catholic clergy, to the anti-Marcos non-Communist political parties and politicians, such as Mrs. Aquino's Vice President, Salvador Laurel of the Unido party, to the "reform group" within the officers corps of the Philippine Armed Forces, and others. In the condition of greater political and press freedom now prevailing under the Aquino government, all this means, typically, more effective united front building.

But reflecting the persisting factional conflict in the CPP, exemplified by the above-noted election of Benito Tiamzon ("Ka Percy") as caretaker party chairman, the united front building process during much of 1986 lacked coordination and tended to go off in different directions at the same time. For example, former party chairman Sison founded his own new front organization, named the "New Democratic Party", even as other party cadres, however, announced that Sison did not speak for the CPP and that they considered him to be but a "tool of the Aquino government"<sup>19</sup>. Other CPP leaders attempted to win appointments to government commissions and executive boards, including the Constitutional Commission charged with drafting a new fundamental law for the Philippines<sup>20</sup>. These attempts thus far have failed, as President Aquino clearly has no intention of acceding to the call still being heard in some CPP circles for formation of a "coalition government"<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, the CPP has been more successful in enlarging its influence in the 40 000-member, Manila-based, leftist trade union Kilusang Mayo Uno ("May First Organization"-KMU), and in reviving the already mentioned, pre-martial law youth and student organization Kabataang Makabayan. Meanwhile, the party's own designed united front umbrella organization, the



NDF, has focused on popular and broadly nationalist and leftist concerns, such as curbing the power and the "anti-people" operations of the Philippine military and Constabulary, and the elimination of US military bases in the Philippines<sup>22</sup>.

Thus far unresolved, however, is the current internal CPP leadership dispute, is the issue of whether or not the party should seek to become a legitimate, "above ground", political organization. Mrs. Aquino, when still one of several candidates seeking Presidential office, on December 26, 1984, had signed a "Declaration of Unity", along with other opposition party candidates. The Declaration, *inter alia*, pledged the signatories to a legalization of the CPP, as well as to meeting the lawful complaints of all who were then engaged in armed struggle against the government, including the NPA. Her signature to this document immediately had opened Aquino to charges that she was "soft" on Communism. During her Presidential campaign, and indeed since assuming office on February 25, 1986, Mrs. Aquino has had little to say of any CPP legitimization, asserting that the party first needed to renounce the ways of violence, and focusing instead on setting up a mechanism of dialogue with the CPP. Meanwhile, Ang Bayan, early in August, sharply criticized Aquino for failing to include "workers and peasants" in her 48 member Constitutional Commission. Hence, Ang Bayan urged Filipinos to continue to struggle for the overthrow of "the present system" in the "long term".

#### PREFERENCE FOR ARMED CONFRONTATION

Clearly, however, throughout the country today, local NPA commanders and party regional committees have little confidence in a dialogue, or even a ceasefire. The path of revolutionary violence remains their tactic of choice. In early April, 1986, for example, the NPA Command in the Bicol region issued a statement, which said that while the NPA was not closing itself to negotiations, it also wished to keep "our options open", adding that "we have to continue our armed struggle" in order to demolish the rest of the "Marcos fascist machinery", and to "exact retribution" for the crimes of "the fascists"<sup>23</sup>. Meanwhile, in the Cordillera mountains in northern Luzon, a press interview with NPA regulars there elicited their determination "not to surrender", not least because of the presence of what was termed "the die-hard imperialist boys" in the present Aquino cabinet, such as Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, and Finance Minister Jaime Ongpin. Another reason why there can be no let-up in the revolutionary movement is because - as the Cordillera NPA spokesman put it - there has been "no concrete change in the lives of the people" thus far<sup>24</sup>.

And, at about the same time as this Cordillera interview took place, local

radio stations in towns of the Eastern Central Visayas were playing tapes over the airwaves, supplied by the regional NPA command, in which any ceasefire with the government was rejected, and instead the Communists pledged to "continue the protracted armed struggle"<sup>25</sup>. Even before discussions between the CPP and Aquino government representatives got under way in early June, various local NPA commanders and party leaders already had issued statements specifying their demands to the government and emphasizing that the "people's war" would continue until these demands were met. There was a high degree of similarity in these statements as well as a degree of severity that, as the Communists must have known, precluded acceptance of the party's demands by the government and thus seemed to doom the "dialogue" from the start.

In a typical example, in mid-March, 1986, in an interview with an Agence France Presse correspondent, a top CPP official in the central provinces demanded a virtual withdrawal of all the Philippine military from the countryside. He also voiced unspecified demands for further land reform and the dismantling of US military bases in the Philippines<sup>26</sup>. Sometimes the CPP-NPA demand for a complete pullback of the military from the rural areas is accompanied by an insistence that the Philippine military also be purged of "criminal" and "fascist" elements. In mid-June, 1986, with the CPP-government dialogue already under way, party leader Antonio Zumel disclosed that the party's formal demands on the government include, as a precondition for a ceasefire, the "withdrawal of military encampments and outposts from our territories back to the military barracks"<sup>27</sup>.

Zumel's proprietary reference to "our territories" - meaning presumably areas of the country where the CPP/NPA is active - along with the "back to the barracks" requirement for the Philippine military, in effect seems to mean that the Communists insist on being given a free hand in most of the country. It is unnecessary to note that this would constitute an infringement on the Philippine government's sovereign rights in its own national territory, something which no regime, save one wholly compliant to the Communists, would be able to accept. And, indeed, early in June, a week before Zumel again reiterated the CPP's "back to the barracks" demand, President Aquino, followed shortly by Armed Forces Chief General Fidel Ramos, said that a withdrawal of the military from the countryside could not be agreed to. The government, said Aquino in an address in Davao, could not permit the dissidents to "freely roam the countryside" and threaten the peace of the people<sup>28</sup>.

It is difficult to imagine that the CPP leadership would be unaware that its present demands are impossible for any non-Communist Philippine government to accept. To continue voicing these demands seems, therefore, less designed to craft a compromise, let alone a ceasefire, and more to derive maximum benefit from a period in which the party is seen to be "talking" with the government. Also one may conclude that at this juncture, achieving "above ground" legitimacy is less important to the party than retention of its armed power along with its influence in, if not hold over, hundreds of villages

and barangays (local districts) in the rural areas. (Twelve percent of the Philippines' 41 400 barangays, as reported by one authoritative estimate, are controlled by the CPP<sup>29</sup>.) It must be stressed, however, that this does not mean that dialogue and even a quasi-legitimate CPP participation in the liberalized political environment of the Aquino era would be despised. On the contrary, an aura of compromise-seeking with the government, and involvement in national political life, aid the party's united front-building process. It also eases the party's outreach to "progressive" elements in society that are likely to be disappointed sooner or later by the Aquino government's conventional financial policies and its "business as usual" accommodation of foreign commercial and investment interests.

The ambiguities of a semi-legitimate position also would tend to facilitate the party's "talking while fighting" line - and next to holding dialogues and united front building the party surely intends to keep on fighting. Even with the current dialogue, the party technically still remains outlawed, and some party leaders would prefer it that way. The original Anti-Subversion Law (Republic Act 1700 of 1957) explicitly outlawed the Communist Party (i.e. the abovenamed PKP) and its fronts. But in 1976, that Law was replaced and modified by Marcos' Presidential Decree (PD) no. 885. The latter dropped explicit reference to the PKP and redefined subversion as the commission of a crime in complicity with any foreign power (not just a Socialist one), while at the same time it broadened the range of organizations and their leaders which could be charged as subversive<sup>30</sup>. The original RA 1700 had been directed against the then only existing Communist party in the Philippines, the earlier-named PKP, already disintegrating in 1957 as a result of the arrest of its major leaders and the government's effective counter-insurgency campaign. In 1974, the PKP, having become a small, ineffective and pro-Moscow group, made its peace with the government. It entered into a "national unity agreement" with the Marcos regime, in which the PKP acquired a marginal legitimacy. This meant, for example, that its leaders were no longer subject to instant arrest, though the two hundred or so PKP members were still sharply curtailed in all proselytizing and propaganda work. In return, the PKP pledged to support the government's land reform and other programs<sup>31</sup>.

PD no. 885 was, therefore, primarily directed against the then recently established, Maoist-oriented and much larger CPP and its growing NPA guerilla forces. As José Sison has pointed out, a legalization of the CPP under conditions like the kind of "unity agreement" that the PKP signed in 1974 with the Marcos government might similarly well emasculate the CPP and eventually turn it, like the PKP, into "a minor sect". This would be so, Sison has argued, because a legalized CPP, even as it sought to grow by democratic means, would still have to "run up against the reactionary monopoly of the military, the civil bureaucracy, the mass media, the Church, the electoral inspectors, and so on"<sup>32</sup>. From this perspective, the CPP must make the "fuzziness" of a quasi-legitimate status in the Aquino era, and of "talking while fighting", work for the party's own benefit, and for

that of its fronts, not for the benefit of the Aquino regime nor for the traditional, entrenched élite groups and institutions of Philippine society that continue to exercise power and which hope and believe that a legalized CPP would become an impotent CPP.

#### THE ANTI-COMMUNIST CHALLENGE

Meanwhile, CPP theoreticians can point to a developing and sharpening dialectic of confrontation between the party and the "reactionary monopoly" elements (to borrow Sison's terminology) within the Aquino government and in present national public life. Even as Mrs. Aquino herself was making strenuous efforts to promote a dialogue with the CPP and reach a ceasefire, her Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile was warning against a looming Communist threat. Enrile, it may be recalled, had long been a mainstay of the Marcos administration but had turned against his former chief in the tense post-election days of February 22-25, 1986. From the beginning, Enrile, reflecting the views of most senior Filipino military, has been dubious about Aquino's promised attempt to come to an amicable accord with the CPP-NPA. Again and again Enrile has emphasized that the prospect of peace discussions with the Aquino government has in no way altered CPP-NPA intentions to seize power. For example, in mid-May, 1986, he warned that the NPA was in the process of implementing a pre-established program of operational expansion, including the buildup of additional regular guerilla units, the broadening of guerilla-held zones, and the deployment of special operations teams to conduct armed and propaganda activities in order to take advantage of "prevailing instability in the political environment"<sup>33</sup>.

The Defense Minister's frequent anti-Communist warnings reached something of a climax in early June, when he charged that the CPP "has successfully infiltrated various national government offices" in an attempt to destabilize the government. The aim of the party, he said, was to "subvert the body politic, the state and the economic system from within". He asserted that among the party's primary infiltration targets are the country's energy-, communications-, transportation-, banking-, and finance facilities. He also revealed that Philippine military intelligence had discovered an alleged plot by the party's National Democratic Front to gain control of the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company. The Defense Minister also warned that the Communists were using mass actions and strikes to aggravate the Aquino administration's economic problems - a direct reference to the sharp upsurge in work stoppages, strikes and other trade union unrest since Aquino assumed office<sup>34</sup>.

Enrile's outspoken anti-Communism has been accompanied by other proclaimed policy positions - e.g. endorsement of the continued presence of US

military bases on Philippine soil, and criticism of the "sequestering" (i.e. government takeover) of property belonging to Marcos' friends pending an outcome of the legitimacy of their ownership - which all seem to put him at odds with Aquino. Sensing that they had found a potential ally, or at least a rallying point for systematic opposition to Aquino, Marcos' followers, who periodically have been demonstrating in the capital since their leader left the country, soon began voicing their support for the Defense Minister. Matters already had reached the point by June 21, 1986 that both Aquino and Enrile found it necessary to assure the nation in a joint press interview that there was no discord between them and that reports of an impending Enrile-led military coup were false.

Nevertheless, the position taken by Enrile encouraged other avowedly anti-Communist elements, many of them under the leadership of Marcos loyalists, to become more outspoken. For example, the "Pilipino Alliance Toward the Rule of Law" (PATROL), which claims nationwide support of 52 affiliated organizations (among them associations of provincial governors and mayors, former members of the dissolved National Assembly, and student, religious and professional groups) began assailing the planned dialogue for a ceasefire between the Aquino government and the CPP. PATROL claimed that by taking the initiative in seeking discussions with the CPP, the government had "practically dignified the CPP to the level of the Palestine Liberation Organization" and had given it status with access to international human rights forums like Amnesty International<sup>35</sup>.

Meanwhile, Philippine military commanders in the field also became emboldened to in effect denounce the idea of a CPP-government ceasefire dialogue, saying that the Communists have no interest in reaching a political compromise with the government. In early June, 1986, the chief of the Bicol regional military command, Colonel Jovenico Sales, charged that, from captured documents, it was evident that the NPA had no intention of heeding any ceasefire agreement, and in effect planned to sabotage any peace dialogue. A top Customs official charged in early July that the CPP was infiltrating his agency, the Bureau of Internal Revenue and other offices<sup>36</sup>.

## PROBLEMS OF PARTY ORGANIZATION

The differences of opinion within the Aquino government on the feasibility of achieving a settlement with the CPP are mirrored by the division within Communist ranks over the Ocampo-Zumel line. Future party strategies will be heavily influenced by this internal split which could not have come at a worse time for the CPP. Because also coming to a head are persistent problems of party organization. The CPP-NPA, it is well to recall, must operate in a country composed of more than 7 100 islands, with poor communication be-

tween them, and with distinctive ethnic identities and rivalries among its 55 million population. In the mid- and later-seventies, largely in order to meet the problems of geography, as well as the disarray caused by the arrest of national party leaders like Sison and Bernabe Biscayno, the CPP out of necessity decentralized its party command structure. Much autonomy was granted (or taken) by regional, island, and provincial party committees and organizations. On the one hand, this led to a closer integration of local party leaders and their rural environment, to more careful recruitment of and closer disciplinary control over new party members, and, above all, to more effective, small-unit NPA tactics and operations in a terrain that had become familiar to the party's local guerillas<sup>37</sup>.

This policy, mainly directed by Rodolfo Salas and Rafael Baylosis, made local NPA units into well informed and much feared groups of specialists in ambush attacks on the military, as well as "tax collectors" (i.e. extortionists) of intimidated local businessmen, and murderous terrorists of barangay (district) officials and villagers. But the policy also eventually made for an ethnic and regional centrifugalism, which, in the aftermath of the struggle between the Ocampo-Zumel line and its opponents, began to produce dangerous local splits within the party.

One spectacular example was the virtual secession from the CPP of the former priest, Conrado Balweg, NPA commander in the Cordillera mountain range of Luzon. In May, 1986, Balweg began calling for an autonomous Cordillera government, similar to the "Moro Republic" demanded by the Muslim secessionists of the "Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)" long active in Mindanao and adjacent Southern Philippine islands<sup>38</sup>. A member of the Tinggian hill tribe, the charismatic Balweg seemed to have turned his following into an ethnic nationalist secessionist movement among the long-neglected and abused Northern Luzon hill tribe societies. He also appears to have been an early advocate of President Aquino's call for ceasefire discussions with the NPA. NPA spokesmen quickly turned on their former comrade and his 100 (some accounts say more than 400) guerilla followers and their nascent "Cordillera People's Liberation Army" (CPLA). But, clearly, the CPP does not have the means to contain or discipline them<sup>39</sup>.

The party's problems with the CPLA, compounded by the CPP's long, uncertain, on-again, off-again alliance with the splintered MNLF factions (a relationship which Baylosis had sought to improve), all came at a time when opposition to the hardline policies of Salas as party chairman was building and producing bloody intra-party purges. How to deal with Aquino's offer of a ceasefire, and whether or not to exploit such an offer, or indeed a ceasefire itself, for more active united front-building in a quasi-legitimate condition, or whether to ignore Aquino's gestures of compromise, carry on intensified armed struggle, and thus provoke an Armed Forces' reaction that would engulf and neutralize Aquino's moderation and pull her supporters further to the Left - these are the strategic questions that now face the CPP. Though Central Committee members might accept a compromise, caretaker party

chairman, i.e. Benito Tiamzon, agreement on a general line of policy for the CPP will be more difficult to achieve. The intra-party crisis runs deep and violent. Already at the close of May, 1986, it was authoritatively reported that during the preceding three months there had been bloody CPP purges in which 200 NPA cadres had been killed by their fellow members as the power struggle between the Salas-Baylosis and Ocampo-Zumel factions intensified throughout the CPP organization<sup>40</sup>. Clearly, the CPP will be unable to take any advantage whatever of the fall of Marcos, until the bloody factional struggle stops.

### "IMMISERATION" AND THE CPP'S FUTURE

Notwithstanding the split over strategy and its organizational problems, the CPP has at least one powerful long-term dynamic working in its favor, and that is the steady deterioration in the quality of life of the mass of Filipinos. This is not the place to review the whole state of the Philippine economy; suffice it to say here that that economy is in dire straits<sup>41</sup>. The "most alarming, disturbing" statistic of the Philippines, Aquino's Finance Minister Jaime Ongpin declared in April, 1986, during a Washington visit, is that 70 % of Filipinos live below the official poverty line established at a family income of 2 800 Pesos (US \$ 136) a month; in 1965, when Marcos became President, it had been 28 %, and in 1975 46 %<sup>42</sup>. Polarization of wealth is severe: 2 % of all Filipino households not only have monthly incomes of 25 000 Pesos (US \$ 1 250) or more, but together they garner 16.5 % of the Philippines' total national income of nearly 52 billion Pesos<sup>43</sup>.

Authoritative analyses show 45 % of the country's total labor force to be underemployed, with a minimum of 15 % additionally being unemployed. Philippine economic growth clearly is not keeping pace with the nation's 2.4 % annual crude birth rate (one of Asia's highest) of its 55 million total population. Indeed, in 1970, the Philippine annual Gross National Product growth rate had stood at 6.6 %; by 1982 it had dropped to 2.8 %; and by 1984 and 1985 it was a negative 5.3 % and 4.0 %. Only 39 % of Filipino children enrolled in the first grade of primary school ever complete secondary school, because of what the Philippine Education Ministry calls "the economic crisis"<sup>44</sup>.

Meanwhile urban migration continues without letup. During the first half of the 1980s, at least 150 000 new inhabitants every year flocked into the nearly 7 million people already crowding the Metropolitan Manila area, swelling the ranks of the capital's malnourished, under- or unemployed. It is estimated that from 30 % to 40 % of all Metro Manilans "reside in slum or squatter areas" without adequate shelter, sanitation, educational or other facilities<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, land and employment shortages in the rural

areas have led to severe dependency of a growing rural proletariat on a few landlords and estate owners, e.g. particularly in such sugar producing regions as Negros.

There are few areas in Southeast Asia where the classical Marxist concept of *Verelendung* ("immiseration") can be as graphically illustrated as in the Philippines. Clearly the CPP, including both the Ocampo-Zumel and the Salas-Baylosis factional leaderships, are betting that neither the Aquino government, nor its successor, will be able to create a momentum of economic growth sufficient to overtake the deepening "immiseration". Whether this gamble is justified only time can tell. In the meantime, the party hopes to broaden its appeal through a renewed united front outreach in a condition of quasi-legitimacy and in an atmosphere of greater political tolerance.

The question remains, however, whether the CPP can effectively tap the reservoir of the impoverished. As a result of the Khmer Rouge-style severity of the party's Salas line (cf. again note 7 *supra*), the NPA has become deeply feared among the mass of Filipinos. But so are many of the more than 130 other "private armies" of business tycoons and local political power brokers and "warlords", often steeped in extortion and other crimes. During the nineteen-fifties, the aura of radical reform that surrounded the original Communist-led Huks (*Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* - People's Liberation Army), and its "Robin Hood" image of dispensing rough justice to landlords and corrupt officials, were overtaken by mere brigandage and criminal racketeering. Today, for many average Filipino peasants, businessmen and small officials, the NPA's enforced "taxation" and terrorism can be little else but a continuation of the Huks' depredations, making the Communists' "people's liberation army" indistinguishable from other armed gangs that plague the country.

There is one difference perhaps: the notoriously violent brutality of the "punishment" of the NPA meted out to its "anti-people" enemies. Indeed, NPA brutality has prompted Aquino's Armed Forces Chief General Fidel Ramos to compare the Communists today unfavorably with their Huk predecessors. The Huks, as Ramos has put it, in their way followed "gentleman's rule on warfare", only rarely if ever attacking civilians, municipal offices, or schools, or engaging in assassinating or kidnapping public officials as the NPA is wont to do<sup>46</sup>. Fear of and intimidation by the NPA may press the Filipino populace to compliance. But even as popular weariness with, if not revulsion for the inadequacies of democratic institutions and the established "old guard" of Filipino political élites grows, the brand of revolutionary violence that the NPA has been dispensing scarcely seems an attractive alternative to most Filipinos. This too lends importance to the current upheaval within the CPP. Perhaps not the least significant implication of the Ocampo-Zumel line and its emphasis that the CPP must make full use of the current interlude of relative political freedom under the Aquino regime, is that it gives the party an opportunity to compete for media attention and in the intellectual arena in



framing reforms and alternative public policies. It thus can confront the influential Roman Catholic Church, the "old line" Filipino establishment of oligarchies in business, the military, and the political parties, and the activists intelligentsia of the universities. If, as some observers in and out of the Philippines believe, the Aquino regime is but a transition to a more authoritarian, military-sanctioned government, this may well be the last opportunity for the CPP to build its unified front for some time.

#### Notes:

- 1) On the February 7, 1986 Philippine Presidential election and the fall of Marcos see Justus M. van der Kroef, "Die Philippinen unter Corazon Aquino", Europa-Archiv (Bonn), June 10, 1986, pp.327-338.
- 2) Philippines Daily Express (Manila), February 1, 1986, p.1.
- 3) Maharlika Broadcasting System news report, Quezon City, February 15, 1986 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service reports, hereafter FBIS, February 18, 1986, p.P2).
- 4) Agence France Presse despatch, Manila, January 6, 1986 (FBIS, January 6, 1986, p.P15).
- 5) As summarized in International Herald Tribune (Hongkong edition), June 7, 1986, p.1.
- 6) Ang Pahayangang Malaya (Manila), June 7, 1986, p.1.
- 7) H. Ross Munro, "The New Khmer Rouge", Commentary (New York), December 1985, pp.19-38.
- 8) The Sunday Times (Manila), June 8, 1986, pp.1, 8.
- 9) See article 1, section 1, of the CPP Constitution in: The Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Short Paper no.52, September, 1971, Bangkok), p.44. There is no comprehensive up-to-date history of Philippine Communism. Various useful insights are offered in: Renze L. Hoeksema, Communism in the Philippines (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge Mass., 1956); Alfredo B. Saulo, Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction (Manila, Ateneo de Manila Publications, 1969); Eduardo Lachica, Huk: Philippine Agrarian Society in Revolt (Solidaridad Publishing House, Manila, 1971); and David A. Rosenberg, "Communism in the Philippines=", Problems of Communism, September-October, 1984, pp.24-45. See also Justus M. van der Kroef, Communism in Southeast Asia (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980).
- 10) "Philippines - the NPA returns", Asiaweek (Hongkong), August 26, 1977, p.9.
- 11) Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1963); pp.210-215.

- 12) See by Justus M. van der Kroef, "The Philippine Maoists", Orbis (Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia), Winter, 1973, pp.892-926; and "Philippine Communist Theory and Strategy: A New Departure?" Pacific Affairs, Summer, 1975, pp.181-196.
- 13) Bulletin Today (Manila), March 3, 1986, p.1, and Agence France despatch, Manila, March 5, 1986 (both in FBIS, March 5, 1986, p.P17, and March 6, 1986, p.P2).
- 14) Ang Pahayagang Malaya, June 12, 1986, p.5.
- 15) Agence France Presse despatch, Manila, February 2, 1986 (FBIS, February 3, 1986), p.P30).
- 16) Ang Pahayagang Malaya, June 10, 1986, p.10.
- 17) Ibid., June 5, 1986, p.14.
- 18) For an analysis and citations of these party documents, see Veritas (Manila), April 9, 1986, p.13.
- 19) Business Day (Quezon City), April 3, 1986, p.2, and The Manila Evening Post, May 3, 1986, p.1 (FBIS, April 7, 1986, p.P13, and May 8, 1986, p.P8).
- 20) The Manila Evening Post, April 22, 1986, p.1 (FBIS, April 24, 1986, p.P9).
- 21) See, e.g. José Sison's demand that a ceasefire between the NPA and the Aquino regime requires a coalition government, Asiaweek (Hongkong), June 22, 1986, p.22.
- 22) See, e.g. the NDF policy statement in We Forum (Quezon City), May 6-12, 1986, pp.3, 15 (FBIS, May 13, p.P11).
- 23) We Forum, April 8-14, 1986, p.3 (FBIS, April 18, 1986, p.P8).
- 24) Business Day (Manila), April 16, 1986, p.23 (FBIS, April 18, 1986, p.P19).
- 25) Agence France Presse despatch, Iloilo, the Philippines, March 12, 1986 (FBIS, March 12, 1986, p.P19).
- 26) Agence France Presse despatch, Manila, March 18, 1986 (FBIS, March 18, 1986, p.P21).
- 27) Sunday Chronicle (Manila), June 15, 1986, p.1.
- 28) The Manila Times, June 7, 1986, p.1.
- 29) Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the Philippines. Prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate by the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1985), p.2.
- 30) José M. Sison, "Pitfalls of a Legal CPP", Ang Pahayagang Malaya, June 7, 1986, p.6.
- 31) See the PKP's "Open Letter" to President Aquino in Morning Star (London), May 9, 1986, p.4 (FBIS, May 13, 1986, p.P13).
- 32) José M. Sison, op. cit.
- 33) PNA despatch, Manila, May 14, 1986 (FBIS, May 14, 1986, p.P8).
- 34) Philippine Daily Inquirer, June 6, 1986, p.1.
- 35) Manila Bulletin, June 7, 1986, p.1.
- 36) Ang Pahayagang Malaya, June 11, 1986, p.14; The Manila Evening Post,

July 3, 1986, p.1.

- 37) Information supplied the author by Philippine military intelligence, Manila, June, 1986. On NPA and CPP tactics see also *Insurgency and Counter Insurgency in the Philippines*, op.cit., pp.14-49, and the "White Paper" on the Philippine Communist Insurgency written by the Staff, Ministry of National Defense and the Philippine President's Center for Special Studies and published in full in successive installments in *Bulletin Today* (Manila), May 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19, 1985 (FBIS, May 22, 1985, pp.P3-P27).
- 38) On the MNLF see esp. T.J.S.George, *Revolt in Mindanao. The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1980), and Leila G.Noble, "Muslim Separatism in the Philippines", *Asian Survey*, November, 1981, pp.1097-1111.
- 39) *Ang Pahayagang Malaya*, May 11, 1986, p.1 (FBIS, May 19, 1986, p.10).
- 40) *The Economist* (London), May 24, 1986, p.36.
- 41) For one recent survey of the economic "mess" (as U.S.Secretary of State George Shultz put it) which President Aquino inherited see, e.g. *Asiaweek* (Hongkong), June 29, 1986, pp.43-50.
- 42) *The New York Times*, April 3, 1986, p.A13, and *Agence France Presse* despatch, Manila, April 3, 1986 (FBIS, April 3, 1986, p.P17).
- 43) *Times Journal* (Manila), November 18, 1984, p.4 (FBIS, November 20, 1984, p.P5).
- 44) *The Straits Times* (Singapore), December 31, 1985, p.6.
- 45) *Philippines Dispatch* (Manila), 4th week of May, 1986, p.10. See also *The Manila Times*, June 6, 1986, p.7 on the malnourishment of Manilans.
- 46) *Business Day* (Manila), May 1, 1986, p.20 (FBIS, May 2, 1986, p.P12).