

A Long Autumn For The Filipino Left

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AS WE GO TO PRESS, A DELEGATION SENT OUT BY THE RAMOS government is in the Hague, Holland for exploratory talks with exiled leaders of the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF). A day before the delegation - headed by influential Congressman Jose Yap - left for The Hague, Malacañang ordered the release of several detained communist and putschist leaders. Among the leftist leaders ordered freed were former NDF chairman Satur Ocampo and New People's Army (NPA) chief Romulo Kintanar.

The release of the detained leaders was intended as a signal of magnanimity to the rank-and-file of a beleaguered insurgency. It was also a subtle maneuver that is not likely to be read well by the old-line Maoist leaders holed up in Utrecht Holland. Both Ocampo and Kintanar represent the various pragmatic and innovative schools of thought within the CPP that have challenged the Maoist ideological and strategic orthodoxy that Sison and his followers guard well.

Satur Ocampo, whether he deserves it or not, has become the acknowledged leader of a growing faction of opinion within the extreme left movement that has shown increasing openness to the possibility of a negotiated solution to the armed conflict that has taken a massive toll on Philippine society. Romulo Kintanar, on the other hand, has been identified with various efforts within the insurgent movement to explore alternative strategies, most of them centered around the idea of preparing for an insurrectionary rising at a moment of severe political crisis.

It is worthy to note that Horacio Morales, founding chairman of the NDF, and Bernabe Buscayno, founder of the NPA, serve as consultants to Congressman Yap. Morales has stood as leader of the "popular democrats" - former national democratic activists who have fallen out

of the movement because of disagreement with the Maoist orthodoxy. Biscayne, on the other hand, has devoted his time since his release from prison in 1986 towards building peasant cooperatives in Ws home district.

The exploratory talks in The Hague are part of a comprehensive political initiative by the Ramos government towards arriving at a political settlement of the armed conflict.

In his first State of the Nation Address, President Ramos called on the Congress to support a generous amnesty program that shall benefit participants of the leftist armed insurgency, those involved in the military-led coup attempts, and members of the Moro National liberation Front. Of the three groups, it is the CPP-NPA-NDF which has the most significant organizational structure, armed component, and mass base - although all three have deteriorated consistently since 1986.

Ramos also asked Congress to repeal the notorious Republic Act 1700, otherwise known as the Anti-Subversion Act. This legislation was framed during the height of anticommunist hysteria and, although it has become obviously anachronistic, stands as the main juridical hindrance to the legalization of communist parties committed to nonviolent means of struggle. The door to legalization is opened to the CPP.

The political resolution of the various armed conflicts remains high on Ramos's list of priorities. He has promised to create a National Unification Commission to institutionalize the political initiative towards political resolution of an internecine war. Recently, reports have it that Ramos is seriously considering Haydee Yorac to head this commission. Yorac enjoys wide respect for her independence of mind and her political integrity. She is currently serving with the Commission on Elections and was, many years ago, a progressive activist herself.

The Ramos governments initiative towards the left is expected to gain momentum in the next few weeks. The insurgency, on the other hand, appears to have little going in its favor in the near term. The progressive mass movements that have provided the radical left a fertile base for recruitment and logistical support through the seventies and

most of the eighties have been at an ebb since the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship. The guerilla army has buckled in the face of sustained counterinsurgency campaigns and the dissipation of external material support. The CPP is short on qualified cadre, its senior leadership having been decimated by successive arrests during the Aquino years.

The collapse of the Eastern European socialist experiments has thrown an ideological cloud over communist movements everywhere, the Philippines not excepting, even as the CPP consistently denies any adverse effect on it.

The recent turns of Filipino politics have not been kind to the broad range of left-wing movements either. Left-wing candidates who stood for elections in 1987 and 1988 were roundly routed. 'Me progressive mass movements failed to arrive at a unified strategy for the 1992 elections. In this exercise, the organized forces of the NDF and other left-of-center groups were hardly noticeable.

As Filipinos try hard to live down the last three decades, characterized by political polarization and economic stagnation, the leftwing movements have difficulty establishing their continued relevance. As Filipinos look forward to the next century, the leftwing movements appear as bearers of past anguish rather than future fulfillment.

The political sustainability of the leftist movements in the Philippines is now in great doubt. Revolutionary strategies borrowed from struggles during the forties cannot be practicable in the nineties. New social movements that defy the traditional left-to-right spectrum have emerged. Environmentalists, feminists, and other bearers of new radicalism appear to have crowded out the Marxists. In the emerging debates about the New Age, socialism hardly figures as an item for discussion, let alone a central point of reference.

In anticipation of dramatic changes in the Filipino Left during a moment of great political and ideological difficulty, we have decided to dedicate this issue to raging debates in the left community. We

hope this collection shall allow our readers some insight into the merging terms of debate as well as a sense of the new perspective that are only now evolving.

The first paper in this volume is a critical examination by P.N. Abinales of the theoretical position of Jose Ma. Sison, acknowledged founder of the CPP. Sison personifies the orthodox Maoist ideological position now under fire from within and without the party he established.

The second paper circulated in the national democratic underground early this year. It was written by "Armando Liwanag," believed to be the pseudonym of Sison and circulated under the imprimatur of the CPP Central Committee. It calls for a re-establishment of the old orthodoxy in the face of emerging factions of thought within the revolutionary organization.

The third paper was written as a reply to the Liwanag paper. It represents one of the dissident schools of thought within the national democratic movement "Ka Barry" is believed to be a leading CPP cadre associated with the "Davao experiment" of combining mass struggle with armed guerilla action during the early eighties.

Walden Bello, in the fourth piece, gives a poignant examination of the bloody internal purges of the CPP. He situates this in what he admits to be a crisis" of the progressive movement.

The fifth paper in this collection is based on the discussion made this year by Randolf S. David as outgoing chairman of the Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa (BISIG). It represents the soul-searching being done by Filipino socialists at a time of great changes in the former socialist countries and among socialist parties everywhere.

The papers collected here were written separately and for diverse purposes. Taken together, they give us a sense of the collective examination of left politics by left activists at a critical conjuncture.

At some future point it should be possible for the conversation now going on in the community of leftwing movements to more directly address this core question: Does the left still have a future? ❁