

THE POST-MARCOS REGIME, THE NON-BOURGEOIS OPPOSITION AND THE PROSPECTS OF A PHILIPPINE "OCTOBER"

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The ouster of Ferdinand Marcos through a rebellion that combined massive civilian support with a military revolt placed in the political agenda a new situation which is characterized by a reconstituted bourgeois liberal democratic State, the emergence of new political forces hitherto marginal to the anti-Marcos opposition and the relative isolation of the Philippine Left from the political mainstream. This new political situation develops amidst an economic crisis caused by a record-high external debt, the failure of export-oriented industrialization (EOI) and the waste of resources by the Marcos regime. Thus, while the unceremonious ouster of Marcos is enough reason for popular euphoria, the prospects for social recovery (especially in the area of class inequality) remain bleak. But neither is social revolution an immediate agenda. The "February Revolution" has only changed the mode of political governance but not necessarily the political economy of the country. Furthermore, the forces committed to social and class-based change remain disunited and the revolutionary vanguard immersed in a "crisis of imagination" and an inadequate strategy of resistance. The present is a mere interregnum which may either slide back to the Marcos era or create new conditions that will facilitate at a future date the occurrence of a Philippine "October".

The Prelude to the Downfall

The Last Days of Marcos

As the Philippines entered the decade of the '80s, Marcos faced increasing isolation in the country and abroad. The

mismanagement of the economy incensed former Marcos supporters among the bourgeoisie and U.S. imperialism. Imperialist concern over the stability of Marcos was two-fold. First was the regime's capacity to ensure a stable political environment that would allow the continued existence of the two largest U.S. military installations in Asia (Clark Air Force Base and the Subic Naval Base, home of the Seventh Fleet). Second was the concern of U.S. banks over the inability of the regime to pay for its huge \$26 billion debt. By 1985, secret documents of the American State Department were already advocating a steady shift towards a post-Marcos era.¹

The regime's failure to create the Philippine version of the Korean or Singaporean models of development and the massive looting of the country's resources (and the external credit provided by banks during the mid-'70s) drove thousands to penury and poverty. Together with the massive use of repression, the dictatorship created fresh conditions for heightened revolutionary organizing. The assassination of bourgeois oppositionist Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr., in August 1983 destroyed whatever semblance of authority and legitimacy the dictatorship had and exposed the brittleness of its hold even over its strongest instrument of support, the Philippine military. The notion of a monolithic and homogenous Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was broken with the resistance shown by elements in the military desiring a "reprofessionalization" of the armed forces through the neutralization of the pro-Marcos faction led by General Ver.²

But the most important political consequence was the rapid growth of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)

and its installation as the strongest political force in opposition to Marcos. The CPP expanded from a small force based mostly in the northern island of Luzon to a nationwide influential movement in two-thirds of the Philippine provinces. Its rural-based armed force was even acknowledged by American intelligence officials as having strong offensive potentials by the 1990s.³ The CPP was also growing in the urban areas and was in the process of testing its own version of mass strikes called *welgang bayan* (people's strikes) led by legal coalitions and alliances identified or sympathetic to the CPP like the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New People's Alliance or BAYAN.)⁴

Finally, while minor to some, Marcos's failing health was likewise an important factor. There were doubts about the ailing dictator's capacity to keep his huge state apparatus intact.⁵ His political control became questionable when factional conflicts began to show the fissures within the dictatorship.

The downfall of the dictatorship was only a matter of time. Already talks of a military coup led by Reformist officers in the AFP and supported by the US government were rife by the middle of the decade.⁶ The opposition movement also began to show signs of unity in 1985, although unification prospects, even on a tactical basis, proved elusive.

It was in this context of increasing political isolation and the failure to contain the crisis that Marcos called for a snap elections for the presidency of the Republic. The elections were a response to the increasing ineffectivity of the dictatorship to control the spiralling economic crisis and to regain some semblance of political legitimacy in the eyes of major international banks. Locally, it was also to undercut the unification of the moderate opposition and hopefully stem the tide of a strengthened Philippine Left organizationally led by the Communist Party of the Philippines and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA).

While agreeing to reforms in rhetoric, Marcos, always the supreme Filipino Machiavellian, initiated moves that ensured his electoral victory. An election code that favored Marcos's ruling party, the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (New Society Movement or KBL), was passed in the rubber stamp parlia-

ment while local pro-Marcos warlords and their private armies were mobilized in strategic provinces and regions for the elections. Military loyalists were also regrouped under Gen. Fabian Ver, the AFP Chief-of-Staff indicted in the Aquino killing but judged innocent by a kangaroo court and immediately reinstated to his position by Marcos. Marcos was confident that he could destroy any candidate the bourgeois opposition would put up against him. He saw as inferior Salvador Laurel, the presidential candidate of the leading bourgeois party United Nationalist and Democratic Opposition (UNIDO) whose political career was unstable and unpopular because of his earlier opportunism.

But Marcos did not expect that Aquino's widow, Corazon (Cory) would proclaim herself candidate in the running. It came as a surprise then when she announced her intentions to challenge the dictatorship. Marcos immediately admitted, and with all honesty, that he did not anticipate her as a likely opponent.

Cory Aquino: Re-defining Anti-Marcos Bourgeois Politics

The rise of Cory Aquino to political prominence forced a rethinking of popularly-accepted notions of initiating an effective opposition to the dictatorship and that all politicians of bourgeois origins are alike. Cory Aquino defied these commonly-accepted views. She did not embody the traits normally ascribed to bourgeois politicians. Her political experience was inadequate and in the first phase of her campaign her naivete was apparent. She lacked the political charisma generally identified with the politicians like Laurel and Marcos. Her challenge to Marcos was even devoid of any programmatic aspect and she relied mainly on a moral rectitude that Marcos definitely did not have. It was her moral posture (Aquino is a devout Catholic) that was her strongest asset.⁷

In spite of her obvious bourgeois class background, Cory Aquino's popularity transcended class lines. She personified the Filipinos' disgust and opposition to the 14-year Marcos dictatorship. Her being Ninoy's wife made her a national symbol. The aggrieved widow demanding justice for her slain husband captured the imagination of a populace whose



millenarian consciousness remained strong as a result of the lasting influence of the Catholic tradition. While radicals may argue that Filipino political awareness has immensely developed under the dictatorship, the radical currents in Filipino consciousness have yet to fully overcome an entrenched "feudal" or patronage (and depoliticizing) type of political culture.⁸ It is this culture that made it easily possible for the cult of personality to persist in Philippine politics. And it is this culture which facilitated the creation of a political symbol in Cory Aquino. This was even grudgingly recognized by the politicians of the anti-Marcos camp which led to the rapprochement between Aquino and UNIDO's Laurel who acquiesced to playing second fiddle to the widow.

While in her campaign, Aquino tended to lean towards anti-Marcos bourgeois economic and political forces, she showed considerable resilience and autonomy in preserving the populist and democratic demands she vowed to implement if elected to power. These demands included the release of all political prisoners (her husband's detention left a deep imprint in her), the abolition of Marcos' repressive decrees, the unilateral calling of a ceasefire with the NPA and the restoration of civil liberties in the country. She even advocated, early in the campaign, the withdrawal of the US bases but later "softened" it to adjust to the pro-US forces which supported her. Thus, her base of organizational support was considerably broad as she was able to unify divergent forces that ranged from businessmen desiring the restoration of a free market system in the economy and anti-Marcos bourgeois politicians whose political careers were in political purgatory because of Marcos, to mass-based organizations which adopted a critical participation position as a result of Aquino's anti-fascist posture.

The Non-Bourgeois Opposition and its Potentials

The Growth and Contradictions of the Revolutionary Opposition

The non-bourgeois movements referred to as the "cause-oriented groups" were founded on an anti-imperialist and anti-fascist program based on the mobilization of the working class, peasant groups (the so-called "basic masses"), students, and the religious. While mass-based, the majority of the leadership of these groups remained essentially petit-bourgeois.

The biggest group falls under the rubric of the national democratic program, a quasi-Maoist transitional program based on "anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and anti-fascist" perspective. National democrats (or nat-dems in popular political parlance) saw armed struggle in the countryside as the main and decisive form for the revolutionary transformation of a "semi-feudal, semi-colonial" Philippine society. This program was conceived by the CPP and adopted by its united front body, the National Democratic Front (NDF), allied groups and mass organizations. Years of painstaking organization amidst repressive conditions, which caused the CPP and the national democrats most of their original leaders, yielded results when the Left main tendency was able to project a nationwide presence seven years after Marcos declared martial law (by the start of the '80s, CPP cadres were already predicting a hastening of the revolutionary process into the stage of the "strate-

gic offensive").⁹ Party cadres were particularly well-situated among the students, workers and the peasantry and a good indicator of its confidence was its ability to introduce the idea and formation of a "legal Left" into Philippine politics, something which would easily invite repression in the previous decade.

The CPP's biggest problem was in the sphere of united front work. The NDF's original program was an exact replica of the Party's Program for a People's Democratic Revolution (complete with Maoist rhetoric) which failed to attract the other groups to a united front effort.¹⁰ The so-called organizations of the NDF were criticized as mere front groups of the CPP even if the Party continued to argue otherwise. The legacy of a bitter ideological conflict with the social democrats during the pre-martial law era affected the Party's relations with its main rival during martial law. Beginning the '80s, there were indications of a change in united front tactics (which included a radical proposal to minimize Party influence in the front organizations and allow the latter considerable political autonomy to move outside of the Party centralism) but the arrests of its leading exponents prevented its application.¹¹

Another problem pertains to the Party's Maoist foundations. The CPP is one of the few remaining Maoist-oriented parties in the world to have survived the crisis of Maoism in the '70s. While the political application of its revolutionary project deviated most of the time from the Maoist model (especially after the 1974 debacle in Isabela province), the Party still made heavy use of Maoist categories of analysis to assess any given political situation. The ideological crisis of Maoism and the Chinese repudiation of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution were not anticipated by the CPP, which could have, at the very least, participated in the worldwide debate among the Left over the relevance/irrelevance of Mao Tse Tung Thought. While the Party constantly affirmed the "application of Mao Tse Tung Thought on the concrete conditions of Philippine society", the inadequacy of Maoist categories were clearly observed in the Party's tendency to simplify and reduce the complexities of society.¹²

Concrete examples of the persistence of Maoist thought include the simplification of the Philippine class formation. With the exception of Filipino fishermen and tribal minorities, early Party theoreticians adopted (and continue to adopt) Maoist categories of class analysis which were questioned by other non-CPP left groups.¹³ In the mid-'70s, a debate emerged on the adequacy/inadequacy of Maoist political economy as applied in the Philippines and for the first time, the Party had to confront an ideological challenge from the more sophisticated independent Marxist groups. Maoism was likewise unable to provide the proper critical framework to understand the continuing resiliency of the liberal bourgeois tradition in Philippine society. This tradition accounted for the existence of a pervasive anti-Marcos sentiment at the same time as it hindered the advancement of class-based revolutionary consciousness.

In the level of political strategy, Maoist categories showed their inability to appreciate the equal importance of urban-based struggles in the revolution. For the Party, the protracted process of building a rural-based armed component determines the entire development of the revolutionary forces. This the Party continued to follow regardless of objective obstacles to

the further growth of the NPA (notably, the geographic problem) and the visible importance of the cities in the '80s as centers for insurrection.¹⁴

Party politics also became hindered by the refusal of activists and cadres to open the idea of socialism in Philippine politics. Perhaps for fear of imposing limits to its influence or because in the certain historical episodes ideological forefathers like Mao refused to immediately recognize the socialist continuity of a revolutionary process, Party activists and theoreticians constantly harp on the argument that "socialism is not yet in the political agenda".¹⁵ While this statement has political relevance if argued by the NDF, it would be insincere for a communist party *not* to assert its proletarian (i.e., socialist) position. The lack of a Party articulation in favor of socialism has opened it to the accusations of hiding its "real agenda for change" or being entrapped into a myth of the existence of a complete stage (national democracy) before socialist transformation.

State repression allowed such contradictions to remain subsumed within the larger demands of the resistance. This is not to say, however, that manifestations were non-existent. On the contrary, there were indications of tension and debates among Party cadres and sympathizers, notably in the universities where cadres had to develop a more sophisticated approach in order to convince students and professors to the revolutionary cause.

The Others: The End to Political Marginalization?

Outside the CPP, the second biggest non-bourgeois group were the social democrats (or the "soc-dems") whose political difference with the national democrats lay on the former's non-acceptance of a revolutionary vanguard, their insistence on the role of religion in politics and the importance given to non-violent mass actions and urban-based guerilla warfare in the Philippine revolution (this is not to say that the debate was between atheists and clerics; on the contrary, the martial law national democrats, searching for effective means at above-ground organizing, conveniently expropriated religious themes to suit their politico-organizational purposes). Moreover, the soc-dems' tainted history of collaboration with the right-wing elements of the Jesuit order in the Philippines, however, has precluded any meaningful debate and dialogue with the national democrats in spite of the objective demand for unity during the height of Marcos's authoritarian rule.

The soc-dems' ideology is eclectic. One political scientist refers to it as a "hodgepodge of Marxism and Christianity".¹⁶ It appropriated much of the nat-dem's political categories while appearing to have an original contribution in the concept "domestic capitalism" and its own version of "socialism". Much of this is due to the late development of the social democratic tradition and the struggle it had to undergo to shed off its reformist past. The eclecticism in ideology reflected an erratic political program, especially during the martial law years where the movement was split over revolutionary strategy.

Regime repression, the inability to articulate a program as systematic, if not superior to that of the nat-dems, and

organizational disunity consigned the soc-dems to a minor political role in the martial law years. Factional tensions were abetted by divergent views on how to relate to the dominant Left and which plane of struggle (above-ground or underground) should predominate the social democratic project. The social democratic movement experienced a split in the '70s as a result of these problems. A faction's honeymoon with urban terrorism yielded negative results and up to the '80s the soc-dems were unable to find the unity that could transform them into an effective force.¹⁷

The non-CPP Left groups outside these two main forces were marginal organizationally. These consist of breakaway factions from the CPP and its predecessor, the Soviet-pawn Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), which decided to form their own cells in the universities, factories and urban poor communities. Their importance in the ideological sphere, however, was unquestioned. The leaders of these groups were sophisticated Marxist-Leninists and socialists of different varieties.¹⁸ Some came from academe but there was significant proletarian presence. These groups acted as ideological irritants to both the nat-dems and the soc-dems. While recognizing the organizational leadership of the CPP, these groups could not reconcile themselves with the Party's Maoist ideology, its hesitance to assert the socialist perspective, and its dogmatism over a single "political line". The CPP, on the other hand, considered these groups as allies but abhorred their inability to transcend their organizational infancy. During the '70s, there were talks of unification between these groups and the main Left. But the insistence on organizational domination by the CPP and the inability to *ideologically* resolve certain questions on Philippine political economy undermined these talks.

Completing the spectrum of the non-bourgeois opposition were the sprinkling of liberal democratic organizations that lacked the organizational will characteristic of the Left but were capable of exerting political influence by virtue of the presence of intellectuals and nationalists among their ranks.¹⁹

The single problem that haunted these groups in the '70s was the failure to unite in spite of the conducive political condition brought about the martial law. Most of these groups agreed on the necessity of an anti-fascist and anti-imperialist basis of unity but held diverging views on what type of struggle would be primary, the organizational form of united front cooperation and type of transitional society after Marcos. The historical conjuncture immediately after the 1983 Aquino assassination, seen by many as the most opportune moment for unity even in a tactical sense, was squandered as a result of bickerings arising from the above-mentioned problems. In 1985 there was another effort to create a coalition in BAYAN but because of sectarianism and the lack of political sincerity to work together, the project was scuttled when non-CPP groups left the coalition, making it an entirely national democratic-dominated organization (the social democrats and some liberals later decided to form a smaller coalition called Bayang Nagkakaisa sa Diwa at Layunin or United People's Will and Aspirations, BANDILA).²⁰ The left-wing faction of the soc-dems, however, refused to join the alliance and promptly renamed themselves the democratic socialists as a distinguishing mark).

The Snap Polls and the Non-Bourgeois Opposition: Tactical Imperatives or Left-Wing Infantilism?

It was understandable that the CPP declared its intentions to boycott the polls. The Party remained true to its original revolutionary strategy of armed struggle and thus could not imagine itself participating in what it perceived as an American-inspired contest between factions of the Filipino ruling class.²¹ The Party, however, recognized the popularity of the electoral process and announced that it will not prevent the masses from voting. It also ordered the NPA to concentrate armed action on strictly military installations and desist from their normal intervention in previous elections which was ballot-snatching. It had some positive comments about the Aquino coalition but criticized its alleged political ignorance of the Marcos-controlled exercise, its coddling of US imperialism and the local bourgeoisie and its lack of a "national democratic perspective". The Party welcomed Mrs. Aquino's anti-fascist sentiments and her stand on the US bases but remained skeptical of her ability to implement these.

But when its allied forces, especially those in the legal Left, adopted the Party's line, the political wisdom of the decision was questioned even by the nat-dems themselves.

This was especially true with BAYAN. BAYAN boycotted on the grounds that the ouster of Marcos was impossible under an electoral contest. According to its spokesmen, the elections were a tool by which Marcos would legitimize himself and renew his "mandate for repression".²¹ The coalition and a smaller fraternal alliance the Nationalist Alliance for Freedom Justice and Democracy (NAJFD) also warned of the "US hand" in the elections. Both called on the people to conduct "militant struggles", a political concept which was difficult to concretize in a situation where the main center of political attention were the elections. These "arguments based on

principles" was supplemented by arguments along pragmatic lines. BAYAN was intent on preparing more for the planned local polls to be called by Marcos on the same year.²²

This posture of boycott did contain its own merits. There was an element of truth to BAYAN's assertion of the desire by the US government to chart a moderate course in the Philippines through the elections. It was also true that given the regime's political isolation, a Marcos victory would only be ensured via massive fraud and terrorism. But BAYAN's analysis was incomplete. It failed to consider two vital aspects of the coming polls: (a) that the regime's political isolation was qualitatively different compared to the past and, (b) the electoral tradition remained firmly embedded in the consciousness of most Filipinos. Marcos was still the dictator but his hold over the State was definitely precarious. The two main instruments of support and sustenance — the AFP and the US government — were not that consolidated anymore to provide him what they were able to provide in the past. In the case of the military, the open factional conflict and the birth of the AFP Reform Movement signified a growing disenchantment among the soldiers and officers corps.²³ On the other hand, the revelation of such documents as the US National Security directives was an eloquent proof that the factions advocating for a transition from dictatorship to liberal democracy within the US government were getting stronger.²⁴

Even if significant inroads in militant and non-electoral types of struggle have been made, the anti-fascist consciousness among the Filipinos continued to find an expression in the electoral process. What BAYAN failed to perceive was that while Cory indeed provided a symbol of resistance, Filipinos also cast their votes as a means of protest. The Left may regard this as "false consciousness", but it cannot be effectively negated without the people going through the actual process of realizing the futility of elections under a dictatorship.²⁵



Moreover, elections themselves could become the stepping stone by which political organizing could proceed under the Left's guidance or leadership. The experiences of other radical movements, notably that of the Russian Bolsheviks could have been illustrative of how elections as a "bad thing" could be turned into an advantage. BAYAN, however, chose to ignore these factors.

The boycott move came under heavy criticism from non-CPP left groups and even Left-leaning social democrats. BAYAN was warned of sectarianism and isolation from the majority of the Filipinos' desire to electorally challenge Marcos's power. Some criticized BAYAN's inadequate tactical politics while others regarded the alliance's electoral position as a sign of ideological retrogression on the part of what was presumably a radical organization.

The alliance itself became the very accessory to the growing isolation of the Left as it was plagued with errors in dealing with the campaign down the organizational level. The Left only saw the extent of its folly when some of its senior leaders resigned or took leaves-of-absence and there was mass apathy, if not outright hostility to boycott mass actions. The disarray in the urban areas, especially in Manila, found similar problems in the provinces as BAYAN regional and local chapters defied national directive and "followed the will of the masses". BAYAN chapters were temporarily dissolved in some areas as their leaders joined the Aquino bandwagon. NPA units also did likewise and "assisted" the people in voting by ensuring their security in the areas where the guerillas had a significant presence.²⁶

The boycott position saw the Left marginalized at that crucial historical conjuncture. It lost the political initiative to rival groups like the social democrats and even the bourgeois opposition. On the eve of the polls, it was conveniently ignored by both the dictatorship and the Cory Aquino coalition even as it tried to contain the negative effects of a political call which was not grounded on a concrete analysis of concrete conditions obtaining at that given historical specificity.

The non-CPP Left and the Left-wing social democrats (who now referred to themselves as "democratic socialists") agreed with the main arguments of the CPP but chose to support Aquino as a tactical move. These groups banded together to form a coalition that pursued the policy of "participation without illusion". They saw in the elections a chance to conduct political education and strengthen themselves as well. While sympathetic to the main tendency, the Marxist-Leninists among them criticized the un-Leninist character of the CPP's position in a paper they jointly published called *New Direction*.²⁷ The non-CPP groups gave their support to Mrs. Aquino but remained critical of what they saw were the inadequacies of her campaign. Because of their smaller organizational disposition the non-CPP Left groups forged a tactical alliance with the soc-dems who came out with a similar conclusion as the Left groups. The alliance became known as the "Nationalist Bloc".²⁸

It was the soc-dems that benefited much from the electoral campaign. They had links with Aquino through the Jesuit professional advisers of the presidential candidate to whom these soc-dem groups were quite closer. Aquino's Christian background easily fitted well into the soc-dems'



program. Cory's Christianity was their most important propaganda appeal to the Catholic-dominated electorate. The soc-dems were the first cause-oriented movement to openly support Mrs. Aquino (another was KAAKBAY, a nationalist organization headed by ex-Senator Jose Diokno) and thus captured the initiative in the propaganda campaign. Their inclusion in the Aquino campaign facilitated the unification of the splintered social democratic movement and BANDILA was transformed into a nationwide body.

The agreement between Aquino and Laurel, however, edged out the cause-oriented groups in the Aquino bandwagon to the advantage of UNIDO. Out of the leadership, the social democrats forged the "Nationalist Bloc" with the non-CPP left groups and together they conducted political education forays into areas covered by the Aquino machinery.

Post-"Revolutionary" Potentials and Problems

The Aquino Government: The Advent of an Interregnum

It is redundant to recount the events that passed from the day millions of Filipinos repudiated both Marcos and the boycott position to the "February Revolution" that ousted Marcos and installed Cory Aquino as the seventh president of the Republic. The new regime rose as a result of the spontaneous unity displayed by different power blocs and groups and the spontaneous display of mass resistance during the "February revolution". After the euphoria, the contradictions of the unified coalition began to re-emerge and up to this writing the new regime, in spite of its vast power potential arising from "people power" continues to try to balance itself between divergent forces that brought it to power.

In its organized form, the Aquino government is essentially bourgeois. The type of economic recovery its economic planners conceived of still falls under the ambit of a restoration of the market orientation advocated by businessmen hostile to Marcos's cronyism and the multilateral aid agencies like the IMF and the World Bank. There has not been any single policy statement, as of this writing, that addressed itself to equity and poverty issues. Moreover, the new government's efforts at a political reconstitution of the State apparatus sparked an intense jockeying over important state positions by the bourgeois parties to the chagrin of the cause-oriented groups and even Cory Aquino herself.²⁹

The new image of the AFP by virtue of the February putsch established the military as a potential power bloc in the new regime. Its immediate concern over internal cleansing and the problems of reprofessionalization have deterred the military from immediately exercising its political clout. But this may not be long in coming as human rights groups are agitating for an investigation and prosecution of military men involved in the wholesale use of coercion to maintain the Marcos dictatorship. The demilitarization process will definitely ignite a hostile reaction from the military. What every political actor in the new situation would fear most is the establishment of an alliance between the politicians and the military in an effort to contain populist and democratic currents in the government. The installation of a military dictatorship remains a strong potential in the period of the interregnum.¹⁰

Yet one cannot ignore the mass support for the new regime. One can dare say that as the Cory government is bourgeois, it is also populist. This massive self-activity of the people that has been labelled "people power" is the mass base of Cory Aquino and as of now, the effective deterrent to the efforts of the bourgeois parties in playing a major role in the government.

It would be worth mentioning that the marginalization of the cause-oriented groups by UNIDO was offset when the former regained the initiative during the February events. Unable to situate the rebellion within their limited frames of mind, the politicians were themselves taken by surprise at the capacity of the people for spontaneous self-organization. Only the cause-oriented groups were in a position to appreciate this spontaneous "uprising" and thus provide leadership to the millions that came to "defend" the rebels. Their presence in the Aquino coalition was once more re-established and their influence widened. An eloquent proof is the considerable presence of human rights advocates in the cabinet, some of whom wield immense power even if they have no line functions at all in the apparatus.

That the Aquino government is only an interregnum is a fact that one cannot deny. Its assumption to power may not necessarily change the structures of dictatorship and dependent capitalist character of the economy. What is unclear is where the interregnum will lead or whether it will last for a long period of time. The regime has, apart from its popularity, also gained the support of US imperialism and the anti-Marcos bourgeoisie and thus may "stabilize" the economic crisis it inherits from the dictatorship. These two power blocs will help ensure relative political peace among the ruling classes and can prevent any ambition by the military to seize political power.¹¹

The Cause-Oriented Coristas: Maintaining a Political Presence

The formation of a new coalition Lakas ng Sambayanan (People's Power or LAKAS)¹² reflects the intention of the cause-oriented groups to maintain the working relations they have established during the elections and the rebellion and to bring into an umbrella alliance the newly-politicized elements whose organizations were formed to support Corazon Aquino. The alliance intends to create the conditions to sustain the "self-organization of the masses" from neighborhood committees to national bodies.

The ex-BAYAN organizations composed of the social democrats, the liberals and the non-CPP Left are expected to assume the leading role in the coalition and determine its political course. LAKAS presents an interesting political experiment through which these groups could put to concrete practice the goals that they set in the aborted BAYAN project. It will also afford them that elusive chance to debate and dialogue their points of convergence and sources of contradictions while maintaining a solid unity as an Aquino government fiscalizer. In the coalition LAKAS, the Philippine version of the united front may just be conceived. But the most important *raison d'être* of the coalition is the need to unify



the organizations outside of the national democratic opposition into a single effective political force in society. The days of isolation and peripheral existence seem to be over for the soc-dems and the non-CPP Left and the success of the coalition will qualitatively transform the face of non-bourgeois politics in society. This will mean that these groups would be in a much stronger position to relate with the hitherto dominant Left tendency which in the long-run cannot be ignored for a real united front to exist.

Coalitions, however, are unstable bodies whose histories are mostly short-lived. LAKAS brings together organizations coming from different political traditions and divergent class interests. Some of the independent Marxist groups and social democratic factions were organizations which were borne out of conspiracy. The shift from conspiratorial politics to a more open one will demand radical readjustment by these groups. Class orientation will create tensions within the coalition whose basic principles can still be described as amorphous, generalized and vague. Much will depend in the manner in which an honest-to-goodness dialogue will be conducted and the extent in which the more progressive currents could resolve the debate to their favor by virtue of the superiority of their ideological frameworks.

The Dilemmas of the Revolutionary Opposition

The Communist Party of the Philippines now confronts an entirely different political scenario from which its experiences are limited.³³ Much of the Party's growth during the '70s was not merely due to its ideology; the Marcos dictatorship was an integral factor to its phenomenal rise to political prominence. There is truth to the statement of its leaders that Marcos was one of the best recruiters of the revolution. With the Cory Aquino government, the existence of a vastly-expanded democratic space can work both to the advantage and the disadvantage of the CPP.

On the one hand, the conditions are better for above-ground organizing. One can even dare to venture the proposition that the liberal democratic interregnum will allow the party to initiate some form of ideological revival and re-flowering of the radical tradition in the Philippines. Legal organizations of the Party will find a more open space to move about in their organizational efforts. On the other hand, the "democratic space" that emerges after an era of dictatorship may mean that the Party must be able to translate its organizational strength into political and ideological superiority in the light of the existence of other ideological currents in the political scene. This means that the Party — which had acknowledged in the past some ideological shortcomings³⁴ — must be able to provide the most systematic analysis of the present and provide the people with a theoretically-grounded perspective. The boycott folly does not appear to be a good indicator of the CPP's initiatives in the realm of ideological hegemony and political praxis.

The elections and the "February revolution" may not fundamentally affect the CPP's armed capability in the guerilla zones. There is little to believe that peasant recruits and Party cadres would just lay down their arms after Aquino released the CPP's original leaders. But these events and the new government's declaration of a unilateral ceasefire with the NPA and the release of top CPP leaders may definitely set



back the timetable set in the urban-based struggles. Aquino's popularity will also deny the Party a significant breakthrough in its political organizing, particularly in the middle class, a vacillating yet crucial political sector in any revolutionary project.

In the case of the legal Left, BAYAN and other national democratic forces operating above-ground will definitely face difficult prospects in the future. The alliance, because it opted out of the January-February struggle, must be able to devise the proper political strategy to re-insert itself into the mainstream.³⁵ It is indeed the biggest irony that the most militant of all popular coalitions and one whose track record opposition to the dictatorship gave it an important role in the struggle played no part in the fall of the Marcos dictatorship

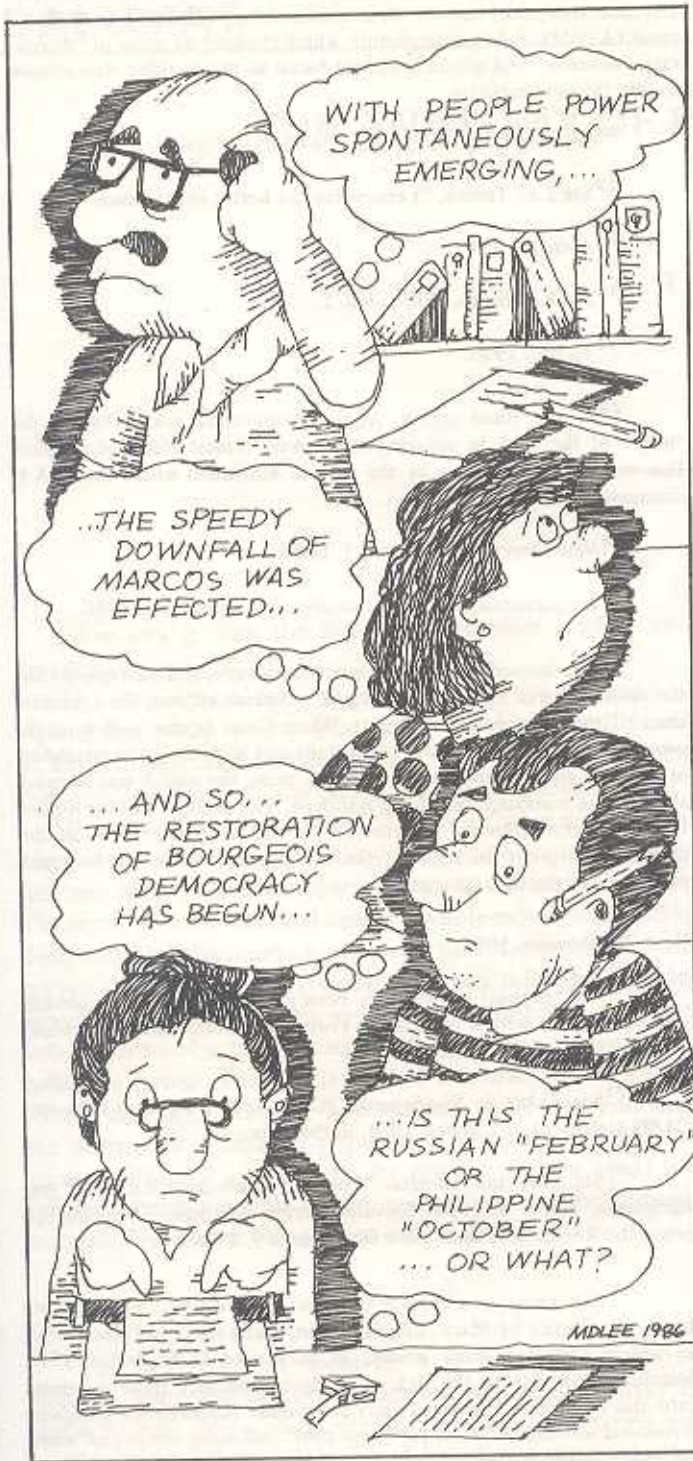
allowed history to dictate it. The worse consequence of this is a political passivity that relies on objective conditions to prove one's position right rather than to actively intervene in the changing of society.³⁶

Whence the Philippine "October"?

Nearly a month after the "February Revolution", radicals and activists of various political persuasions are still amiss as to the proper explanation of the downfall. Both the ideologues of the national democratic and social democratic Left see the events as merely the culmination of a decade-long struggle waged by the cause-oriented groups.³⁷ But the speed with which Marcos fell from the throne of power and the restoration of bourgeois democracy in Cory Aquino undermined the "protracted people's war" paradigm of ousting the dictatorship and the predictions of further polarization and the simplification of the political conflict into basically the revolutionary forces and the regime in power. These analyses do not also explain how such prominent forces as the Philippine Left can lose much of their influence overnight. An ex-detainee may have provided the starting point of any meaningful assessment of what transpired and the future when he proposed a "redefinition of categories" to overcome this "crisis of imagination".

The Russian "February" appears to be the most attractive "model" from which lessons can be derived by the Philippine Left. The swift end of the dictatorship and the birth of the new government do have similarities to the manner in which the downfall of Tsarism happened and the new Menshevik-bourgeois coalition was formed. The Kerensky government was also an interregnum to the seizure of power by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in October 1917. The seizure, however, was made possible by a "redefinition of categories" by the Bolshevik leadership and the discarding of accepted norms of revolutionary strategy which allowed Lenin and his revolutionaries to "turn Russia upside down" at the appropriate historical moment.

Much remains to be resolved to pave the way for a Philippine "October". Fundamental reassessments by the non-bourgeois opposition cannot but include ideological rethinking (are Maoist categories still adequate frameworks?) and the reconceptualization and recomposition of political strategy (especially in the arena of united front politics, the combination of above-ground and underground-armed guerilla struggles). Way back in 1982, political scientist Francisco Nemenzo predicted a cyclical pattern where dictatorships would be replaced by liberal democratic regimes and the latter in turn be overwhelmed by a far repressive military regime until a social revolution will put a break to this.³⁸ In 1986, Nemenzo's predictions still hold water, albeit the prospects of a socialist upheaval will depend much on the disposition of the non-bourgeois forces in society. In the coming days, the non-bourgeois forces face a formidable challenge from the bourgeois and militarist blocs inside the Cory administration. Only a revival of the "radical imagination" (and perhaps the unification of the Philippine Left which is becoming more and more urgent) will ensure that it can survive and break the political impasse in favor of a Philippine "October".



(except for certain acts of infantile radicalism, such as the "seizure" of certain city councils). Forced by events, its credibility tarnished, unable to recognize the debilitating effects of an unpopular stand and shackled by ideological blinders that prevented it from responding to the new situation, the alliance had no recourse but to recognize Mrs. Corazon Aquino as the new president. The recognition of Aquino was, in effect, an admission of the alliance's political miscalculation.

The alliance's ability to map out a consistent and well-developed strategy for social change within the milieu of above-ground politics is seriously in doubt. BAYAN appears to have retrogressed from being a major actor in the historical process. It has failed to intervene into history and thus has

Notes:

¹See reprint of the "National Security Study Directive: US Policy Towards the Philippines - Executive Summary" in *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of the Third World Studies*, Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1985, pp. 47-52.

²P.N. Abinales. "The Philippine Military and the Marcos Regime". Paper prepared for the Third Phase of the United Nations University Southeast Asian Perspectives Project (The Philippine Case), 1985, pp. 43-50.

³*Asiaweek*, March 29, 1985.

⁴BAYAN claims a membership of around 2 million.

⁵Marcos is believed to be suffering from systemic lupus erythematosus which attacks vital organs like the kidney leading to a decline in physical countenance.

⁶Abinales, 1985, pp. 50-53.

⁷An indication of her religiosity was Cory Aquino's request to the 2 million-strong crowd in her proclamation rally to sing the Lord's Prayer.

⁸*Transnationalization, the State and the People: The Philippine Case*, United Nations University Southeast Asian Perspectives Project, 1984, pp. 63-72.

⁹Armando Malay, "Random Reflections on Marxism and Maoism in the Philippines." *Marxism in the Philippines*, Third World Studies Center, 1984, p. 46.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Longer View*, Vol. II, No. 2, as reprinted in *The New Progressive Review: A Quarterly Journal on Theory and Current Affairs*, December 1985-January 1986, pp. 30-35.

¹²Malay, 1984, see Open Forum discussion.

¹³Temario Rivera et. al. *Feudalism and Capitalism in the Philippines: Trends and Implications*. Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1982. 106 pp. See also the debates in the *New Progressive Review* between Magno, Ferrer and De Guzman.

¹⁴The non-CPP Left is advocating for a Marxism with a clear Philippine identity.

¹⁵See Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, Pulang Tala Publications: Manila, 1971.

¹⁶Francisco Nemenzo, "Alternatives to Marcos", India, 1982. See also the social democratic program entitled "Pambansang Pagpapalaya: Tungkulin ng Bawa't Makabansang Pilipino", A compilation of documents of the social democratic movement: n.d.

¹⁷The April 6 Liberation Movement, the *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PDSP) and its military arm *Sandigan* and the Filipino Social Democratic Movement are the main social democratic factions. The former tends to lean towards urban-based guerilla warfare. See "Spectrum of Political Forces and Current Issues in the Philippines". Lingap-Bayan, Center for Philippine Concerns, Spain, November 1984.

¹⁸See for example, the articles in *Longer View*.

¹⁹The *Kilusang Para sa Kapangyarihan at Kasarinlan ng Sambayanan*, KAAKBAY is illustrative. The organization is composed of nationalists and radical academics and its influence is mainly ideological.

²⁰BANDILA's leading organizations are the Filipino Social Democratic Movement and the Butz Aquino wing of the August 21 Movement (ATOM). A left-wing faction which changed its name to "democratic socialists" and which is mainly based in the working class refused to join the new coalition.

²¹See *Ang Katipunan*, January-February 1986, p. 4.

²²See E.C. Tadem, "Lessons for the Left", in this issue.

²³Abinales, 1985.

²⁴See *Kasarinlan*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

²⁵Tadem, 1986.

²⁶In the Bicol region, Aquino supporters acknowledged the "help" of the NPA in ensuring a relatively honest electoral turnout. This was also believed to be the case in Mindanao where the NPA is strongest.

²⁷*New Direction*, January 17, 1986.

²⁸See statement of the Nationalist Bloc, January 6, 1986.

²⁹The immediate commentaries from reputable newspapers like the *Manila Times* on the jockeying of positions express the apprehensions of the cause-oriented groups. When Cory Aquino called on the people to set up their own organizations and actively act as watchdogs of the new government during a victory mass, the speech was intended also for the consumption of the *politicos*. The popular call for Aquino to call a "revolutionary government" is the latest expression of this demand to prevent the regime from being controlled by the bourgeois politicians in the new government.

³⁰Abinales, 1985.

³¹US support has recently been given by the Reagan administration together with a promise to assist the government in recovering the wealth stashed by Marcos abroad.

³²See *Lakas ng Sambayanan (Cory Aquino's People's Power - CAPP)* statement of 2 March 1986, in this issue.

³³See Christine Araneta. "The Left Reels from a Fiasco." *Ang Katipunan*, March 5, 1986. See also Abrino Aydinan. "Uprising Surprises the Revolutionaries." *New Day*, March 9, 1986.

³⁴According to a Central Committee statement, "On the other hand, the classics by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin (sic!) and Mao are not as widely and intensively studied as they used to be before 1972. Mainly, this is due to the lack of readings, specially those translated into the Philippine language. Thus *empiricism has been the dominant erroneous ideological trend for some time, following the period when, on the contrary, dogmatism was the predominant erroneous trend*" (underscoring supplied). "Our Party has Completed 15 Years of Leadership", *Ang Bayan*, December 1983.

³⁵Tadem, 1986.

³⁶There is a precedent to this possibility, the pro-Moscow *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* which up to now still awaits the ripening of "objective conditions" in order for it to launch its now "revolution".

³⁷Baltazar Pinguel of BAYAN and Marianito Canonigo of BANDILA shared the same analysis in a forum at the University of the Philippines College of Law on "The People's Agenda for the Cory Government", sponsored by the UP Law Liberation Force, March 11, 1986.

³⁸Nemenzo, 1982.