

Counterveiling Fascism

A strong right-wing upsurge now threatens the democratic space won by the people's February uprising. The extent to which neo-fascist political tendencies have succeeded in checking the progressive wing of the new governing coalition attests to the urgency of expanding and consolidating the political bases of a new democracy.

At the formal governmental level, the Aquino-led coalition is faced with an imminent split that shall put to a severe test the popular basis of support it presumes to command.

High profile dissension and maneuvering allowed long-time Marcos ally Juan Ponce Enrile to project himself as the rallying point for conservative forces in Philippine society. Among those gravitating towards Enrile are traditional elite politicians, especially those grouped around Laurel's Unido, who are threatened with extinction by the emergence of more ideologically defined political parties.

A *de facto* alliance has been formed between followers of Enrile and opportunist politicians congregating around Laurel. This alliance, driven by the uncontainable ambitions of both Laurel and Enrile, has sought to establish a constituency by whipping up an anti-communist hysteria. By playing on the unfounded fears of the politically naive, the political Right expects to gather enough conservative political forces to roll back the progressives.

Anti-communist agitation is not to be underestimated. An apparently well-orchestrated campaign has been launched to mobilize and convince a large number of people that those who seek social reform are also out to destroy society. Rabid anti-communists present the people with caricatures of social reformists and wage a campaign of intimidation through red-baiting and witch hunting.

Although the demagogues of the Right are able to politically activate only a minority, they are able to wield disproportionate influence because of the continued centrality of the military bureaucracy in the present political arrangement. The simmering tension in the government between the Aquino-led mainstream and the Enrile-Laurel faction has served to further underscore the political importance of the Philippine military.

Rearing in rigid ideological conservatism, the officer corps of the Philippine military is instinctively drawn to the sloganeering of rightist politicians. Should the polarization between conservatives and progressives deepen, there is danger that the Philippine military be drawn to the side of conservative agitators in spite of all the usual rhetoric about military sub-

ordination to the duly-constituted civilian authority.

Made conscious of their political potential by their participation in the February uprising, the Philippine military might eventually be tempted to re-enter the political arena as a third force intending to establish what they might imagine to be a more viable governmental form. The longer the stalemate persists between contending factions in government, the greater the temptation on the military to seize governmental power under their own terms.

The resurgence of the political Right and the continued importance of the military establishment in the policy-making process confront popular democrats with great challenges in the present conjuncture.

For progressive militants and activists, these challenges translate into definite political tasks.

In the sphere of ideological struggle, mass campaigns need to be waged to counter right-wing agitation. Inasmuch as conservative propaganda leans heavily on existing prejudices, myths and political superstition, progressive campaigns shall require much more conscious effort, closer study, greater sophistication and intellectual creativity.

In the political sphere, the mechanisms for mass politicalization and popular empowerment must be strengthened. The involvement of existing popular organizations in pressure politics must be sustained in order to countervail the initiatives of the neo-fascists. The extra-parliamentary institutions for popular democracy must be rapidly built. The people's organizations stand as the last line of defense against a strategic effort to restore dictatorship.

At the present conjuncture, the ratification of the proposed charter is important for consolidating the apparatuses of formal democracy in the governmental sphere. The establishment of a legislature shall effectively contain the political impact of factional in-fighting in the executive branch -- an arena where the right-wing enjoy a distinct vantage point by virtue of having ideological spokesmen occupying ministerial posts.

Over the medium term, progressives should seek not merely to countervail neo-fascist resurgence but to develop the forces of social reform into an irresistible mainstream. Unless this medium-term objective is consciously pursued there is danger that progressive activists and militants retreat to a purely defensive position and reduce their impact on the turn of political events merely to the role of passive supporters instead of active determinants. **K**