

The Philippine Student Movement: Prospects for a Dynamic Student Politics

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Introduction

The student movement is one radical movement that has perhaps captured the imagination of most youth activists. Of all the social movements, it is perhaps the one most characterized by the highest degree of commitment, idealism, and identification with the less privileged classes. And these traits are not without any historical significance. History is rich with examples where youth and students had played a significant role in effecting social transformation. Nikolai Bukharin of the Russian Bolshevik Party, Le Duan and Le Duc Tho of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and Fidel Castro of Cuba were student and youth leaders at the time when they got involved in the great social upheavals that changed the course of history of their respective countries.

Lewis S. Feuer defines a student movement as "a combination of students inspired by aims which they try to explicate in a political ideology, and moved by an emotional rebellion in which there is always present a disillusionment with and a rejection of the values of the older generation."¹ It usually arises out of conditions where mass apathy has devolved the political initiative to the intellectual elite.

Unlike a labor movement, a student movement has at its inception only a vague sense of its immediate goals; even its "ultimate aims" are sometimes equally rudimentary. Whereas trade unions come into existence because of specific grievances regarding wages, hours, and conditions of work, etc., student movements, on the other hand, arise from a diffused feeling of opposition to the state of things. What moves them at the onset is less an idea than emotion – vague, restless, and ill-defined.

Thus any student movement assumes the role of the conscience of society – concerned more with inanimate issues,

(e.g. freedom, justice, etc.), not so much with the material bread-and-butter ones. However, its populist element, i.e. the "serve the people" spirit (at once the most distinctive and noblest trait of the student movement) enables it to transcend immediate sectional interests.

Students As Political Actors

The emergence of militant student movements as an international phenomenon in the 1960s provoked a series of literature aiming to study its nature and answer the following questions. What is it that has made the students act? What is it that gives revolutionary potentials to their actions?

For a time, a number of Western writers have asserted that the students had become the "surrogate proletarians" that would wage the socialist revolution in advanced countries. This was because the workers in capitalist societies have lost their revolutionary aspirations,² and student activists have taken upon themselves the task of questioning the whole accepted framework of advanced industrial society.³

However, this conception of students as "surrogate proletarians" is still an assertion subject to debate. According to T.B. Bottomore, students cannot be the "inheritors" of the revolutionary movement.⁴ This is because,

- a) students are not an oppressed and exploited group in society;
- b) students have no real-life experience of the struggle, that is why alliances with other sectors cannot be fully successful; and
- c) there is no stable membership in the student movement (student life being transient).



However seemingly subversive students may be, they cannot by themselves bring the whole social process of exploitation to a halt, as can the actions of the working class. As a small minority, they cannot expect to do more than provide radical diagnoses of the state of society; in other words, to carry on the traditional function of the radical intellectuals, or to become allied with other social groups in a broader movement.⁵

An opposing but equally extreme view of the nature and role of students is that they are a traditional elite group, petty bourgeois by origin and outlook. Hence, they are in the last analysis a reactionary force. Due to the traditional revolutionaries' non-appreciation of the students' potential for revolutionary actions, student militancy was seen a diversion from the real struggle presumably located in the factories or in the countryside. Thus, it was deemed that the best that can be hoped for is that a minority of radical students might provide manpower for industrial picket lines (or for a budding revolutionary army). Moreover, any separate student movement would merely reflect its petty bourgeois aspirations; revolutionary students therefore should forget their student status.⁶

Students by and large comprise the most volatile section of the middle class. Since they are not part of the forces of production and because of their unique position in the university, they have every opportunity to study all the experiences of society with a sense of detachment. This in turn makes them receptive to diverse ideas and perspectives. Among all progressive sectors, the students are the most ideologically committed, borne out of their experiences in the struggle and their capacity to systematically study society. Because of this, they are in the best position to carry out *political education*,

criticism, and *propaganda* for or against the ruling class(es), the State, and the existing social order.

Yet, their middle class origin also renders them vulnerable to the aspiration for upward social mobility, a weakness that characterizes most members of the middle class. Thus, unpoliticized students are frequently confronted with vacillations and contradictions. On the one hand, there exists a view of education as one's ticket to reach the top of the social ladder. On the other hand, exposure to ideas that challenge the dominant social thought leads them to question the existing order. Hence student political involvement is usually marked by such duality: unconsciously supportive of the status quo due to the "upward mobility" aspiration, yet critical of the accepted norms and receptive to alternative visions.

The Rise of the International Student Movement

The student movement became recognized as a new and independent social force in the 1960s, though student protests were already quite noticeable as early as the 1920s due to the breakdown of disarmament and the approach of World War II. At the University of California at Berkeley, student protests against the impending war lasted throughout the decade until 1941, when America finally entered the war. Annual strikes for peace were the major feature of the period.⁷ But there came afterwards an interregnum of sorts when the proliferation of war veterans in the studentry and then the advent of the Korean War in 1950 strangely dampened student political activity.

But the students' tragic experiences in the wars caused them to be concerned with issues related to international peace, civil rights and civil liberties. By the late 50s, student

protests took the form of simple demonstration, sit-ins, and mass picketing. Being issue-oriented, Berkeley activists campaigned against compulsory ROTC, capital punishment, the House Committee on Un-American Activities, the Red-baiting of state legislators, etc.⁸

The wave of sit-ins in 1960 by black students to protest racial discrimination tremendously affected the Northern white students. Civil rights rapidly became the dominant issue in the new student unrest. It brought back a "serve the people" identification in a way that no campaign for the abolition of capital punishment or any pacifist campaign against bomb-testing could. This was the one issue where moral right and wrong stood out clearly. The ethic of racial justice had a simplicity which was absent from the complex considerations of such issues as capital punishment or war. The black and white students thus merged to spearhead the civil rights movement.

At the same time, America's attempt to sabotage the Cuban revolution and her involvement in the Vietnam War fired up the students' anti-war sentiments, thereby providing a strong motivation for massive student political involvement. This in turn added a new dimension to the American student movement's character, that of international solidarity especially with the national liberation movements in the Third World.

The Berkeley Student Uprising: 1964-1966

No other student uprising in the United States has impressed the American public as much as the one which took place at UC-Berkeley in the fall of 1964. Probably the freest campus in the Union, the student were expectedly strict adherents of academic freedom. Moreover, Berkeley and its environs during the years had become the last sanctuary for the defeated activists of the 30s.⁹ Here they found spirit of liberality which fired up their flagging revolutionary fervor. The hundreds or so activists who attended the school heard lectures on the value of revolutionary experience. Trotskyists, socialists, and Communists were drawn to Berkeley as a "new political fountain of youth."¹⁰

At Berkeley in 1964, the students defended their right to participate in politics, and in particular to protest against the Vietnam War, unhampered by internal rules and regulations. It started with the administration's decision to ban all fund-raising and propaganda for any political or social ideas of which they disapproved. Students made their point known by launching the Free Speech Movement, which attracted thousands of supporters from both the studentry and the faculty.

It was only incidental that the conflict at Berkeley involved university regulations. The central issue however was the challenge to the American nation's traditional precept of

respect for law inevitably posed by the civil disobedience demonstrations. Under what circumstances is civil disobedience a morally acceptable method of expressing grievances in a society where democratic principles prevail? A logical answer is that as long as the person is willing to face the legal consequences of his actions, then this is a moral right that should be respected.

But this is directly conflicting the traditional view that in a democratic society, it is the moral and social obligation of responsible citizens to support and obey a law regardless of their personal feelings, as a manifestation of respect for the rights of others as defined by majority opinion.

The emphasis of Berkeley administrators on the "rule of law", and the students' response of sit-ins, demonstrations and campus takeover exemplified the moral crisis buried in the convergence of student rights and political issues articulated by the activists.

Germany: Birth of Student Revolutionaries

The Berkeley model was copied at Berlin University a few years later, with France following suit soon afterwards. In Germany, the call for university reform became a rallying cry for students. Leading them was the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS) formed in 1960 when the German Social Democratic Party expelled its student organization following its adoption of capitalism as the ideal form of



society. The SDS was thereafter virtually the sole political organization on the Left in a seemingly monolithic reactionary society. It was only some 2,000-strong but hardworking and dynamic. It demanded a high level of political knowledge and commitment from its members. In order to become one, an aspirant had both to pass through a series of reading and discussion seminars on Marxism and to participate in concrete struggles.¹¹ The unity and universality of repression was clear to the West German militants: American aggression in Vietnam, imperialist control of Persia, police brutality in West Berlin, the systematic lies of the Springer Press, manipulation in the universities – all these were different aspects of one unified exploitative phenomenon – capitalism.

Why did the SDS achieve such a rapid and deep radicalization of the student body? In the first place, the Germans were theoretically and ideologically prepared for taking the revolutionary road.¹² Lessons from the American student movement and other revolutionary experiences had been studied. The West Germans were also more receptive to political theory, owing to the influence of the Frankfurt School of sociologists (Marcuse, Benjamin, Habermas, etc.). This meant that the students were conversant with Marxism, and were not victims of primitive empiricism or hostility to “jargons”.

A second factor that facilitated the growth of the student movement is the length and conditions of study in West Germany. Students were free to choose when to take their exams and can start their theses before taking them, provided they have attended a small number of seminars. Thus students could take time off to organize and be politically active in a way that would be impossible with a shorter course and more frequent exams.

Thirdly, the formation of the Grand Coalition at Bonn, uniting the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in a governmental alliance, had extinguished all pretense of parliamentary opposition to the status quo. The Communist Party, moreover, was banned. Hence, the SDS emerged as *the* national opposition.

The French Revolution of 1968

While the German students were challenging the system, their French comrades were becoming increasingly restive over their worsening conditions. The massive upsurge of student militance which culminated in barricades in Paris and street-fighting throughout the university cities of France in May 1968 was triggered off by sectoral grievances. French students waged a constant struggle against the discipline in their residence halls. Political meetings and propaganda were forbidden and men were not allowed into the women’s lodgings. Students were not permitted to decorate their rooms or affix things to the walls.¹³



Militant

Dissatisfaction with student conditions — overcrowding, inadequate grants, lack of cultural and other facilities — was widely echoed in criticisms of French higher education among many social groups.

In May 1968 the French student movement made its most historical effort to shed its tradition of elitism and achieve a unity with the working class. It accomplished certain things: it occupied the *Sorbonne* for 34 days; it brought the General Confederation of Labor to call a general strike (despite some resistance from union leaders) which turned into factory occupations by nearly 10 million workers; it compelled the dissolution of the National Assembly, the dismissal of two ministers, and the holding of new elections. But the student activists failed in their supreme goal: they could not unite the students' and workers' movements into one powerful revolutionary force.

De Gaulle's ascendance to power was a vote of confidence in him and his vague project of social and university reforms. The workers slowly returned to their jobs. When the student activists again erected barricades and embattled the police on the night of June 11, public opinion decisively shifted against them. The national elections were two weeks away; the political parties were busy campaigning. The students were seen as repudiating representative democracy. Hence on June 12, with little public protest, the government declared the students' leftist organizations illegal. When the elections for the National Assembly took place at the end of June 1968, the party of President De Gaulle won an overwhelming victory; the Communists lost more than half their seats, while the non-Communist Left lost even more.

Japan: Precursor of the Revolutionary Tide

The Japanese student movement actually pioneered mass revolutionary action in an industrialized country, years before it was achieved in Europe and America. The expansion of higher education since 1945 had led to a big increase in the number of students, but it was not without problems. With students cramming for university entrance exams, a situation made worse by the stiff competition in university admission and the concentration on qualifications, it was not surprising that intellectual spontaneity was minimized. Rote learning and slavish pursuit of examination qualifications have been common elements in Japanese higher education. Another problem associated with this rapid expansion was that the quality of universities varied enormously. The academic standards of Waseda, Keio and Tokyo National University were very high, but there were some very traditional private universities where students studied little except traditional Japanese subjects like karate and Shintoism.

It was at the national universities that student politics was most radical. For two decades, the focus of radical student

politics in Japan had been the *Zengakuren* movement (abbreviation for *Zen Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sorengo* or *All-Japan Federation of Student Self-government Association*).¹⁴ After World War II students from 145 universities joined together to set up the original *Zengakuren Federation*. Originally connected with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the Federation moved sharply to the left of the JCP in the period of 1955-56. In 1958 two new organizations were set up which exercised a great influence over the students — the *Kakukyodo* (which was a political organization) and the *Shagakudo* (which was a purely student body). These competed with the original Federation for control of the various university associations.

The two main advantages of the Japanese student movement as a whole had been the strong tradition of local organizing and the close ties the various student forces had been able to forge with other political organizations. Different sectors of the student movement were active in all the major political struggles of the post-war period: against the MacArthur purge in 1950, against special police power in 1958, and above all against the renewal of the Japan-US Security Pact in 1959-60.¹⁵

In 1968, violent conflicts erupted over foreign and domestic issues. Mass student demonstrations against the Vietnam War clashed continually with the police and were able to sustain their momentum because of unprecedentedly solid technical preparation. Students armed with helmets, shields and javelins engaged the security forces in hand to hand combat from time to time. The forging of a worker-peasant-student alliance against the Sato regime and against the American aggression in Vietnam made clear among the students the importance of solidarity with the basic sectors of society.

Decline of the International Student Movement

Other countries such as Spain, Portugal, the Latin American states and Italy were all hounded by massive student uprisings in the late 60s and early 70s. But what looked like a promising social force capable of triggering revolutionary transformation eventually saw its demise on the global scale.

Various reasons particular to each country could be accountable for the decline of the international student movement, but there are general premises that can enlighten one on the fate of the Western student revolt.

What kept the student movement going in the 60s was its ability to raise critical questions and come up with a new social outlook, make a radical analysis of society, and educate and train the studentry to become active agents of change.¹⁶ Another plus factor was the existence of certain issues that became the central focus of international protests, i.e., Vietnam War.

However, for most countries, it was a movement without precedence, and its inexperience and transience told on its activities. The rapid circulation of members rendered difficult the maintenance of a consistent political style and organization. Then there was the connection of the student movement especially in the US with some aspects of a wider youth culture which had very little radical significance, i.e., folk and pop music, drugs, etc. At the same time, the Western student movement became active at a time when radical social thought was passing through an unresolved crisis resulting from the criticism and revision of Marxist thought. It was thus unable to develop a cohesive social theory that would guide its actions.¹⁷

In France, the student turmoil of the 60s was followed by a "period of retreat." With the exception of relatively minor episodes, no collective demonstration occurred which could be compared even remotely in intensity, creativity, mobilization and duration to the events of 1968-69. The political struggles which characterized the movement of the 60s were replaced by much more traditional types of conflicts, i.e., corporatist conflicts where students struggled to defend "their interests" as a body. Several factors contributed to this shift.¹⁸

Firstly, the institutionalization of university politics (through campus elections) had the effect of depoliticizing the majority of students as only political parties participated in the student electoral arena. Hence the university was no longer perceived by a large majority of students as a field where political aspirations can be expressed. The rapid decline of student union membership especially in the mid-70s was a dismal testimony to the increasing disinterest in student involvement.

Secondly, whereas in 1968 a number of students did not find in the services offered by the university system a well adapted answer to their type of socialization nor to their needs and wants, the increasing diversity and specialization of French universities led to the introduction of new types of disciplines or research suited to the students' diverse wants and interests. Further, the creation of other institutions of higher education widened the choices available to students.

Thirdly, the general economic status of the student was such that it was more difficult for him to find a job in the mid-70s than in the mid- and late-60s. But — and this is an essential complementary aspect of the situation — unemployment was also much lower among those who had achieved a higher education degree than among those who had only obtained a high school degree. Thus, a higher education degree was a more effective protection against unemployment than lower level degrees.

The effects of the above mentioned changes had produced a system of orienting students toward individualism and corporatism. Worse, whatever dissatisfaction with society as well as with political institutions that existed never found an ideolo-

gical expression. The neo-Marxist thinkers who dominated French intellectual life in the late 60s and early 70s had lost much of their prestige and had not been replaced by younger ideologues.

As regards the American student movement, former activists and the New Left see as "one of its chief failures the tendency to substitute moralizing for theoretically grounded politics."¹⁹ This moralizing took the form of appealing to the middle class conscience, of trying to mobilize students on behalf of the struggles for others, since the students had no battles of their own to fight other than the repudiation of their privileges.²⁰

Today, the American student movement has somewhat picked up the pieces of its fragmented but colorful history. After the decline in 1974, student political activity revived in the campaign against nuclear weapons. Student leaders were even able to organize a big mass action in 1981, but dissipated when they started to focus on America's intervention in El Salvador. In 1985 it picked up again with the renewed campaign for divestment of university franchises in South Africa, the anti-Contra War in Nicaragua, and the concomitant issues of racism, freedom, and democracy.

Clearly the dynamism of the American student movement rests on divestment, but it is still broadly ineffective in the political spectrum. A Cornell University student active in the divestment campaign admits that the movement has mainly waged symbolic struggles such as that against apartheid, but it has been unable to organize protests against massive budgetary cuts in social welfare and the war in El Salvador. Even the protest against American involvement in Nicaragua can be interpreted as an offshoot of the Vietnam syndrome rather than a recognition of the dynamism of US imperialism.

The pervasiveness of political moralism (conscience-appeal) has become a double-edged sword for American activists. On the one hand, they are left with no choice if they were to attract the student masses. On the other hand, there is difficulty for their constituency to transcend moral issues and pay attention to basic social problems. Further, the lack of comprehension on the part of the student activists of *what is right* and *what is effective* tactically has resulted in a lot of ill-will against the "divestors", what with their resort to sloganeering and "noisy agitation".

Whether the divestment movement in the US will trigger off a broader campaign against capitalist exploitation is yet to be seen. Clearly it still has a long way to go.

The Philippine Student Movement

In the Philippines, it was the national democrats (NDs) that determined the development of the student movement: it was the student-members of the old Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas which comprised the breakaway group that gave birth to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in

December 1968; the First Quarter Storm of 1970 was student-based and student-led; and the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) became a launching pad for ideological and armed struggles.

It should be stressed that the University of the Philippines (UP) became a breeding ground of many intellectuals and radical activists even as far back as the 1950s. What started as a battle for academic freedom spilled over into a struggle against a "decadent social order". The 1960s saw the resurgence of nationalism and the rise of a mass movement that "questioned the basic roots of Philippine underdevelopment, challenged the established institutions of power and confron-

such as those belonging to the "moderate faction" ambiguous about their objectives and programs, it is not surprising that the national democratic student movement set the pace in an era of massive political actions culminating in the legendary First Quarter Storm (FQS) of 1970.

For KM and its fraternal organizations, the FQS marked the end of the student movement had fully transcended the confines of the academe and had merged itself with a broader movement for national liberation and social change. The CPP for its part lauded the activists' efforts to link up with the oppressed masses. Seeing in the ND student movement a



ted the people with an alternative that could spell the transformation of Philippine society."²¹ The Filipino student was the major actor in this historical event.

Initially, it was the Vietnam War that drew massive student protests. The United States' involvement in Vietnam compelled the Filipino students to pay attention to the realities of American intervention in Philippine society. For them, the concrete manifestations of such intervention were the parity rights issue (the right given to US citizens to exploit the resources of the country) and the RP-US Military Bases Agreement. At the same time, the US' control of Philippine economy and its grave consequences resulting in underdevelopment was not lost on the activists. The collusion of American capitalist interests with that of domestic exploiters (landlords and political leaders) was thus enshrined in the classic formula of "imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism" as the basic ills of Philippine society.²²

With the KM, Filipinos saw the birth of a new breed of activists who chose to reject the status quo and instead brought forward a radical alternative. With student groups

vehicle to advance its revolutionary project, it encouraged the students to launch more militant actions and more importantly, to join the New People's Army.²³ This was in keeping with the Party's view that the urban struggle is secondary to that in the countryside.

Unfortunately, such exhortations by the CPP paved the way for the rise of extremist positions among many ND activists. One manifestation was the mouthing of slogans such as "Long Live The People's Army!", "People's War is the Answer!" and "Real Constitution After Revolution!" Worse, other mass organizations outside the national democratic tendency were attacked as "revisionist renegades" (as in the case of PKP-identified youth groups) and "clerico-fascists" (for sectarian or moderate student groups). Confident that they possessed "the correct line", ND activists bothered little about possible repercussions on united front building.

Further, the blurring of distinctions between Party propaganda (underground and illegal) and that of its mass organizations narrowed the political flexibility of the latter and rendered them vulnerable to the Red-baiting tactics of the

Marcos regime. In the heightened political confrontations with the State, calls for sobriety were easily dismissed as “conservatism” and “tailism”.²⁴ Consequently, the role of the student movement was restricted to that of agitation and propaganda. Worse, the over-emphasis on integration with the masses led to a rejection of radical theorizing and the reliance on actions as the means for ideological deepening and strengthening of political commitment.

Martial Law and the Advent of Sectoral Struggles

Martial Law practically crushed the legal mass movement and drove many activists underground. But the ND movement proved its resilience by recognizing the need to develop actions and organizations in the “open and legal” arena. The advocacy of “legal struggle” was essential in ensuring political survival and continued resistance, and in rebuilding a more solid base of popular support.²⁵ This legal struggle was to articulate basic sectoral problems such as the restoration of student councils, press freedom for student organs, the student right to form organizations, and the improvement of teaching and educational facilities. Eventually, these sectoral struggles were carefully linked to issues of national concern such as the Vietnam War, the problems of the Third World, and later, the boycott of referendum and opposition to Presidential Decree 823 banning all strikes.

The arbitrary imposition of tuition fee hikes in 1977 provoked a spontaneous reaction and protest from the students. The boycott of classes and mass actions drawing 200,000 students led to the formation of the *Alyansa Laban sa Pagtaas ng Tuition Fee*, which laid down the foundation for the *League of Filipino Students* (LFS) currently the largest organized student group in Philippine politics.

Massive student involvement made the *Alyansa* leadership think that the students were ripe for “higher struggles”. They pushed the tuition fee campaign further and raised the issues of human rights and anti-dictatorship which resulted in the dissipation of mass support. The new activists failed to appreciate the need for more creative forms of consciousness-raising strategies that could suit the students’ mindset which had been attained under martial law. Hence it was not surprising that student involvement fizzled out once national issues they could not identify with were articulated.

Nevertheless, the different student groups that took part in the tuition fee struggle recognized the need for concerted actions to advance not only the students’ but also the masses’ rights and welfare. Thus on September 11, 1977 they formally established the LFS. It aimed to “organize the broad masses of students to collectively defend their rights and to support the struggles of other sectors.”²⁶

The decision of the LFS, the first martial law national student alliance, to openly and militantly confront the Marcos



regime occurred against a backdrop of Marcos pronouncements that “political normalization” in the country had begun. LFS took the chance to launch its “Democratic Reform Movement” on January 20, 1980 by advocating for a boycott of the local elections. It formed the *Komite Kontra-Eleksyon* which tried to spearhead the boycott movement in the school level. Though the *Komite* had a high propaganda profile, it hardly mustered student participation against the elections, primarily because the issue was alien to the studentry. Sweeping propaganda actions without rigorous grassroots educational campaign proved to be the undoing of the boycott campaign.

Decline in Influence

What promised to be a dynamic resurgence of the student Left despite the authoritarian order proved to be a flash in the pan. At the UP, for instance, the picture of politicized forces remains pathetic. Even the leading anti-imperialist organizations have conceded that there is a decline in influence and support to the progressive student organizations since the start of the 1980s.

A number of factors are principally responsible for this decline in the political awareness and mobility of students. The foremost is the increasing inability of the militant mass movement to generate mass awareness, understanding, and participation in the many issues the studentry confronts, raises and even tackles.

In an article “Towards A More Dynamic Student Movement”, the *Young Socialist Circle* (a clandestine Marxist youth organization) criticized the ND organizations’ excessive reliance on hackneyed propaganda style (sloganeering, graf-fiteering, flagwaving, etc.) which not only failed to arouse an



enthusiastic response but even alienated the student radicals from the student masses. This inability to “tickle the fancy” of the students was traced to the absence of ideological ferment in the campuses. This absence in turn was due “to the lack of emphasis on dynamic learning that highlights the dialectical relationship between theory and an ever-changing reality”.²⁷

Another reason cited by the article was the “obvious academic incompetence” of the activists. This can be traced to the very shallow ideological and political appreciation of the university as an arena of struggle, or, at its most extreme, the development of the attitude of “abandoning the university” for the “greater struggle”. Worse, the current generation of student activists have failed to come out with a comprehensive summation and assessment of student politics since the 60s and have yet to fully assess what happened during Martial Law.

Compounding this crisis are other factors, namely: (a) the nature of students today; (b) the trends and direction of university education; (c) the emergence of other student forces; and (d) the ouster of Marcos and the new political dispensation under Cory Aquino.

Changes Under Martial Law

The commercialization of university education, especially in UP, has led to a shift of student enrollment towards courses which would ensure their entry into the State bureaucracy or private firms. Thus, the attitude of looking at education as a source of upward social mobility had become all the more pervasive among today’s students.

Martial Law also ushered in the phenomenon of the “Martial Law babies”. These are students who grew up under the political framework of authoritarian rule, who were never exposed to the liberal democratic atmosphere of the pre-Martial Law era, and who were unable to reflect on alternatives to Marcos. Theirs was the “culture of powerlessness, the mentality of the silenced.”²⁸

Although it cannot be denied that there remained a strong anti-Marcos sentiment, this lacked the deepening insight necessary for any meaningful opposition to develop. The tuition fee controversies and the Aquino assassination led to student protests, but these could also be seen as merely an emotional and personal response by a vast majority of students towards the trampling of their rights and welfare, and the brutal assassination of a leading oppositionist.

Rise of Others Forces: The Social Democrats

The Aquino assassination gave birth to so-called moderate student groups under the social democratic (SD) sphere and which were composed of middle class students. But as one former SD said, “There is really no SD student movement to speak of.” The two most known SD student groups are *KAMAG-ARAL* and *AKMA*. Belonging to the *KASAPI* factions, *KAMAG-ARAL* is the more militant group.²⁹ On the other hand, *AKMA* favors non-violent extra-parliamentary politics, similar to the *Pandayan* group (SD leftwing that addresses itself to grassroots organizing and extralegal struggles, although open to the parliamentary option), and pursues a program based on authentic humanism.

The SD student groups have linkages in private and some non-sectarian schools, usually with student councils, but without a solid mass base to speak of. Student-cadres were trained to balance organizing and academics, but upon graduation very few activists in some schools remained to organize in basic sectors and non-government organizations; many left the movement altogether.

Former activists agree that one major weakness of the SD “student movement” pertains to its cadre-formation: the inability to transcend personal and family problems that hamper their effectivity in the political struggle. Corollary to this is the weakness of political guidance and skills-formation. Further, there were very few cadres who were left in the student sector since the others concentrated more in organizing among the basic sectors.

In 1981, the *Youth for the Advancement of Faith and Justice* (YAFJ) was formed, primarily to tell then visiting Pope John Paul II about the realities of Philippine society. Manila-based, YAFJ was an alliance of youth from urban poor communities and 8 colleges and universities. It was launched on February 17, 1981, on the occasion of the Pope’s mass at



the University of Sto. Tomas (UST), and it mobilized some 1,000 students and urban poor residents (mostly from Tatalon). On January 26, 1984 (FQS anniversary), YAFJ called for what would be the first non-ND, anti-imperialist mobilization of 200 students in front of the US Embassy.

What appeared to be a promising SD student group was unable to fully realize its potentials. In 1981, with the Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas ceasing to give it political guidance, YAFJ collapsed. It was revived in 1982 by SD students under the *Kristiyanong Katipunan*; some disgruntled NDs were included in this effort. Finally, the organization left

the social democratic mainstream by not joining the *Bansang Nagkakaisa sa Diwa at Layunin* and the *Filipino Social Democratic Movement*.³⁰

SD-led student councils initially tried to balance sectoral and national campaigns. However, the challenge posed by the bigger ND organizations in terms of mobilizing efforts led the SDs to "compete" with their counterparts by trying to articulate even more national issues. In this effort, however, they were unable to gain substantial student participation.

Campaigns for student rights and welfare were supported by many students in private sectarian and non-sectarian schools, but this was not necessarily a gauge of the students' appreciation of the struggle. In UST for instance, the call for the restoration of the student council in 1979 attracted the students mainly due to the "novelty of the issue".³¹ The student leaders unfortunately failed to organize these students due to the absence of organizing skills. Consequently, student involvement faded.

Occasionally, national issues become flashpoints in student unrest, i.e., Aquino assassination, but these become buried under the more sectarian concerns. Added to this is the different university administrations' suppression of student political activities, ranging from suspension, alteration of rules and regulations, and court cases to outright repression (manhandling, etc.). Outside of the UP, student struggle has mainly focused on the campaign for democratic rights, especially in private non-sectarian school (where security guards use sophisticated gadgets and dogs against the students) and those in the secondary urban and rural areas where repression is even worse. Private sectarian schools are relatively liberal, though some use more sophisticated methods such as non-recognition of organizations or imposition of strict limitations on students' political activities.

The Independent Socialists

December 1985 saw the formation of the *Student Union for the Realization of Genuine Emancipation* (SURGE) in UP, which brought together former NDs and unorganized Marxists. Critical of the degeneration of the radical student movement into agitation-propaganda on the one hand, and the purely electoral politicking of the SD student group on the other, the core members agree that there is a need to revive intellectual ferment and radical theorizing in the University. They also hit the sectarianism of leading ND organizations (i.e., the propensity to brand as bourgeois reformist, reactionary or 'soc-dem' those who did not agree with them). In its concept paper, SURGE took note that,³²

We see . . . the establishment of a new student mass organization as complementary rather than antagonistic to the efforts of (the NDs) in reviving student

activism in campus. At the same time, we see that a new brand of politics has to be injected in the student movement if it is to be sustained . . . Student commitment must be fired up by the concrete understanding of reality rather than by simply appealing to emotions. *Student radicals must be capable of analyzing instead of merely mouthing slogans.* (Underscoring supplied)

The members emphasize the need to cultivate student activists who are not only politically competent but also academically credible, hence the stress on the University as an arena for ideological contestation. Fidel Nemenzo, one of the founding members, explains, "University education should be seen as an occasion for genuine learning and for the critical examination of social values . . . the student movement being ideological in character."

Openly socialist, SURGE hopes to popularize progressive ideas on campus via creative methods. However, it has encountered not a few headaches in trying to set up a considerable organizational machinery, partly due to its lack of competent and experienced cadres. As one student movement expert said, "SURGE is ideologically exceptional but organizationally weak. Its older cadres are busy theorizing while the younger ones are busy trying to catch up."³³

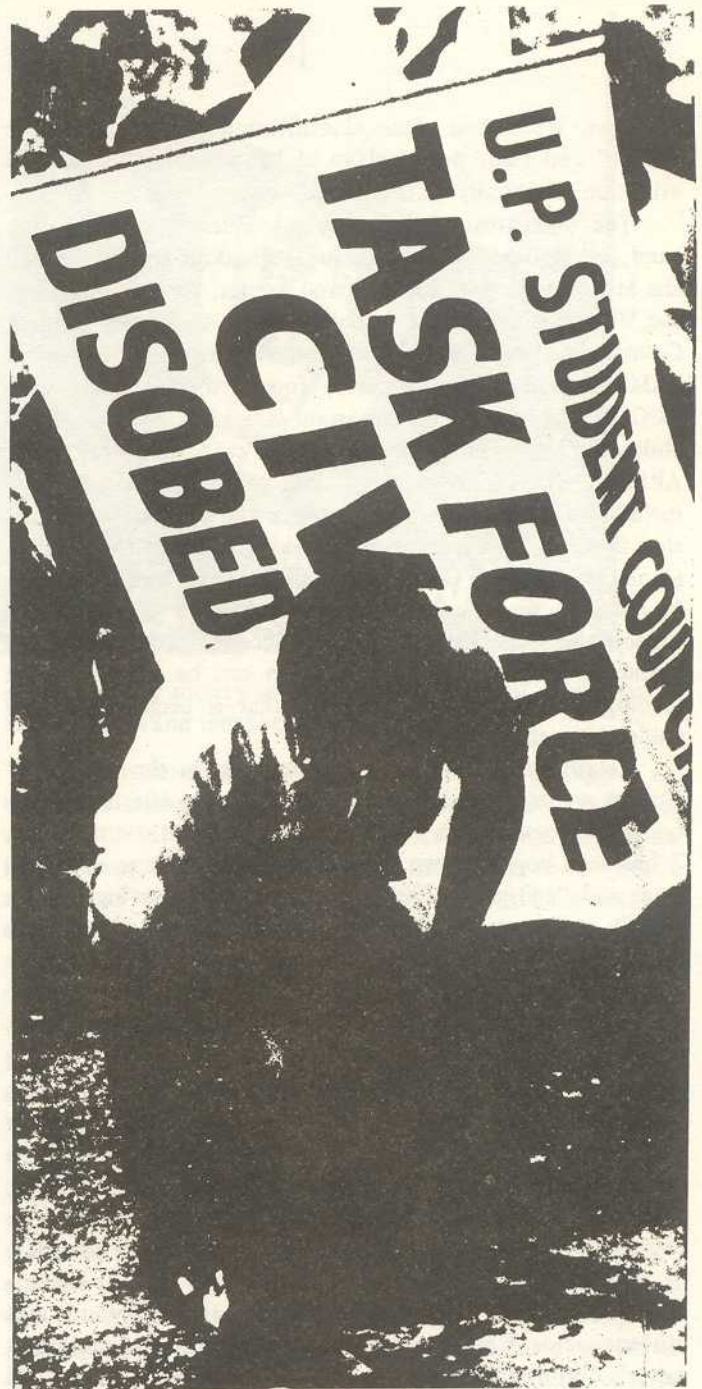
The core members though were able to forge links with some schools, and one such product was the *Movement of Concerned Students of PUP* (MCS-PUP). Formed in 1986, its core group is likewise composed of ex-NDs and Marxists. The organization itself virtually adopted SURGE's Declaration of Principles, and it has been quite successful in its organizing efforts.

Then there is also the *Movement for the Advancement of Student Power* (MASP) at the UST. This time, the core group comes from the old YAFJ which left the social democrats and called themselves the Socialist Democrats. With radical Christian ethics as its main foundation, MASP has been able to draw considerable student support aside from building contacts in other schools and even urban poor communities.

All three student groups belong to the *Bukluran sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang isip at Gawa* (BISIG). Although small compared to their ND and SD counterparts, each organization has been able to draw the students' attention. With their strong emphasis on non-sectarianism and united front efforts, they have been able to maintain cordial though sometimes volatile relations with both NDs and SDs (especially with MCS-PUP and MASP).

Current Trends in the Philippine Student Movement

The ascendance of Cory Aquino presents any organization with encouraging prospects. For one, the crucial participation



of the middle class vindicated the position (a minority view on the Left) that *the middle sectors of society are important forces in any struggle for change*. Secondly, because of the students' participation in Cory's electoral campaign and in the uprising, there are indicators that (a) students have transcended their status as "Martial Law babies" and are capable of political opposition; (b) a new generation of students is being born (for lack of a better term we can dub it the Cory Aquino generation); and (c) there is a democratic space whereby all ideas can find their expressions unhampered by state power.

The social democratic student groups especially in UP initially benefitted from their all-out participation in the snap

elections. With their close identification with the "Yellow Forces" and their proud claim of being moderates, student attention is naturally on their side.

The Mainstream Left's boycott blunder, on the other hand, jolted some ND stalwarts into rethinking and re-assessing the Movement's political calls and tactics. As exemplified in the UP though, their bid to recapture the University Student Council in the 1986 elections took an extreme turn when SAMASA (their student party) fought tooth-and-nail with TUGON (SD-led) not on important issues but on each party's ability to look more beautiful and cute than the other. Although SAMASA captured half of the Council seats including the chairmanship, observers and sympathizers agree that it did so on the basis of personalities and without much ideological content. Given the machinery and logistics poured in the last campaign, its failure to obtain a clear majority reflects the general studentry's non-acceptance of SAMASA's brand of militance. Such a problem can be rooted to the ideological and historical baggage that is plaguing the ND student movement in general.

Rectification work has been strongest in the youth and student sector of the ND movement. Since the 60s, it has been one of the basic pillars of the national democratic struggle but it has been bogged down by over-emphasis on mass mobilizations and "agit-prop" (90% campaign work), leaving out the equally important task of coming out with fresh analysis and radical ideas. This turned out to be a crucial setback resulting in the present status of the movement.

A former member of KM's National Executive Board admitted that there still exists the lack of appreciation for the so-called "petty bourgeois" venues of struggle, hence the tendency to abandon both formal and political education work and to simply rely on ideas and methods of analysis dating as the back as 1964. According to this ex-NEB officer, "The best that the cadres have done is to breeze through some explanations but not to refine the issues or engage in debates."

In 1984, the CPP's National Youth and Student Department formulated a new orientation for the ND youth and student sector, whereby it recognized the need to balance the latter's duties, namely: (a) to unite the middle forces and still integrate with the masses; and (b) to advance sectoral demands and simultaneously conduct propaganda on the ND line.

Still, the conduct of propaganda is a "gray area" in terms of methodology. Though the "abandon the University" mentality is not so pervasive now (but not without intensive debate on the matter), there is still a "lack of capacity and sophistication to create intellectual ferment in the academe, especially in terms of enriching and popularizing the ND program."³⁴

Then there is the problem of how to feel the pulse of the masses, or what to do with it. This KM 'dark lord' agrees that there has been a distortion of the "mass line", whereby the

masses are seen as mere receptacles of the political line, with the concomitant self-righteous attitude that "History will vindicate us in the end!"

She traces the student movement's political blunders to the "higher organ's" (HO) tendency to "over-read" the situation. She asks, "How come that in the Organization, especially in the leadership, there is much flexibility in effectivity (of tactics) so as not to sacrifice righteousness?"

Rigid bureaucratization has denied the HOs access to the grassroots, which has resulted in the empirical bases for mass actions. Frequently, there is no unity of correctness and effectivity of political calls at a particular conjuncture (i.e., the tendency to exalt revolutionary principles regardless of political costs); such dichotomy is traced to the Party's organizational and ideological weaknesses. As this KM activist asserts,

We must learn how to make parallel campaigns.

There are certain issues that the masses can identify with and therefore should be sustained. It is the obligation of the mass organization to see these (sectoral) campaigns to the finish, and not simply shift to a 'higher' issue . . . Every propaganda move should be seen as having a logical political consequence, instead of dichotomizing propaganda work and political task.³⁵

On the level of ideological battles, ND mass organizations are very vulnerable to the anti-communist hysteria. To combat this, the leadership for a time considered forming an openly socialist organization. Another was that the KM would come out and articulate socialism. However, this is still questionable given its mass members' vague perception of socialism. This is due to the fact that the socialist vision has not yet been put on their agenda for discussion. At any rate, no policy has yet been formulated. The NDs have not even been able to put up an educational institution that would cater to and develop student intellectuals. To worsen matters, the HO tends to pre-determine the nature and direction of would-be education groups.³⁶

Prospects: What Is To Be Done?

The international scene was recently punctured with massive student unrest in France (against a State policy that would have restricted student admission in the universities) and in Red China (calling for "democracy" and acceleration of reforms). Whether this would snowball and repeat the phenomenal global student activism of the 1960s is yet to be seen. A potential flashpoint is the escalating international campaign against apartheid. But unless the divestment movement in American universities really picks up, triggers parallel



campaigns in Western countries and exposes the different facets of imperialism, South Africa will remain an isolated battlefield between oppressors and oppressed.

A perceptible shortcoming of the Philippine student movement is its lack of an *internationalist perspective*, or a concrete link and identification with other anti-imperialist (anti-war, peace movement, anti-apartheid, etc.) student movements abroad. It should be remembered that *the anti-imperialist struggle is not merely a national struggle. Precisely because of the essentially global character of imperialism, the struggle to cripple it is likewise international.* We are not talking about conflicts between nation-states, but rather about *the struggle of the Third World and its allies in the First World (students, intellectuals, and the working class) against the imperialism of the latter.*

The strength of the anti-imperialist struggle would greatly rely not only on the capability of national student movements to learn from each other's experiences, but also in the forging of an internationalist perspective and the network of linkages that would coordinate and fuse national efforts in delivering solid and telling blows on imperialism on the global scale.

Admittedly, when one speaks of a Philippine student movement, it generally means the ND student movement. Yet the problems it now faces reflect the dilemma of other student forces. The principal problem afflicting any student organization today is the absence of an intellectual presence, a very ironic situation given the academic milieu. The main perspective then is in *how to revive, sustain, and develop critical thinking among students.* In more concrete terms, how to revive the traditional role of the student as a critic of society. The effort toward training people along the line of becoming critical thinkers and experts of their fields is not only an ideological struggle but is also a perfection of one's future profession. We need to recognize the fact that while the students are important in the struggle, they are equally important in the task of

rebuilding our society as they join the ranks of professionals, academicians and technocrats.

Though sectoral concerns remain to be the biggest stimulus for student involvement, efforts must be exhausted in striking the balance between sectoral and national campaigns. In this sense, the student movement *must cease to be reactive and instead take upon itself to create the issues.* Undoubtedly, the viability of the student movement depended in some measure upon its ability to express national discontents which find no other outlet. Thus it is not surprising that for some radical activists, the ouster of Marcos dampened the anti-fascist element of the protest movement. However, this only gives us the cue to explore other terrains that will tap student interest. Legal struggle must be carried to the hilt as long as there exists the democratic space. Through an adept handling of issues, organized groups can bring about a qualitative and quantitative growth in the student movement. Another crucial factor is the need to win over faculty support. A teacher-student alliance will help us reach out to a broader section of the studentry, strengthen the campaign for university and education reforms, and obtain credibility as a force in campus. At the same time, genuine effort must be exerted toward forging the broadest unity among all progressive student forces. This is not the time to quibble over political and ideological differences. *Sectarianism has never won a revolution.*

Thus it is not only our task to continue educating the students on the importance of nationalist and democratic principles, but it is also imperative that we provide them with the necessary organizational framework by which they can organize, mobilize, and act on issues confronting us. We must be open-minded enough to recognize that part of the organizing process of the past years must give way to new forms which will embody our creativity at this particular stage of the

struggle for national sovereignty, popular democracy and economic justice.

The Philippine student movement has persisted for over twenty years now despite the death of its contemporaries in the international scene. For unlike the Western student movement which is more symbolic and sectoral in character, the Philippine student movement's being armed with a vision of an alternative society and its perspective of linking arms with other sectors such as the workers and the peasants enabled it to transcend its narrow sectional interest and transform itself into a political force within a broader social movement.

There is little doubt that student activism in the Philippines will endure for another decade, but whether it can still approximate the dynamism of its pre-Martial Law existence is another question. Much will depend on the student organizations' capability to draw in the broadest number of students possible, and their flexibility vis-a-vis fluid political situations. How the student groups will be able to adapt to the rapid unfolding of events in the national scene will partly spell their success or failure to maintain a profound presence in the Filipino people's struggle for social liberation. *Unless the student movement exerts a genuine effort to correct its mistakes and learn from experience, it will occasionally find itself at the zenith of the protest movement during crisis period, but nearly on the edge of the dustbin of history when mass political involvement recedes.* **K**

Notes:

¹Lewis S. Feuer. *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc.), 1969.

²Herbert Marcuse. *One-Dimensional Man*. (Great Britain: Sphere Books Ltd.), 1964.

³Alain Touraine, cited in Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn, eds. *Student Power*. (Middlesex; Penguin Books Ltd.), 1969.

⁴T. B. Bottomore. *Sociology as Social Criticism*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc.), 1968.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Cockburn and Blackburn, *op. cit.*

⁷Seymour Martin Lipset and Sheldon S. Wolin, eds. *The Berkeley Student Revolt: Facts and Interpretation*. (New York; Anchor Books), 1965.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Feuer, *op. cit.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Cockburn and Blackburn, *op. cit.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Bottomore, *op. cit.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Raymond Boudon. "The 1970s in France: A Period of Student Retreat." *Higher Education* 8. (Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company), 1979.

¹⁹Marc Linder. *The Anti-Samuelson*. Vol. 1 (New York: Urizen Books), 1977.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹P.N. Abinales. *The Philippine Student Movement: Creating the Parliament of the Streets*. (Hongkong: Plough Publications), 1985 (forthcoming).

²²Amado Guerrero. *Philippine Society and Revolution*. (Manila: Pulang Talang Publications), 1970.

²³For a more detailed discussion, see P.N. Abinales, "The Left and the Philippine Student Movement; Random Historical Notes On Party Politics and Sectoral Struggles", *Kasarinlan*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 4th Quarter 1985.

²⁴Abinales. *The Philippine Student Movement: Creating . . .*, *op. cit.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶"The Philippine Student Movement: Going Beyond the Classroom Walls." *Imperialism - NO! Democracy - YES! Student Movements in the Asean Region*. (Malaysia: Institute for Social Analysis), 1984.

²⁷*The Young Socialist*. Vol. 1, No. 2, June 17, 1985.

²⁸Concept paper of the (UP) *Independent Student Bloc (ISB)*, composed of BUKLOD-ISIP, SAPUL and SURGE, May 1986.

²⁹Interview with a former social democrat.

³⁰*Op. cit.*

³¹Interview with Ronald Llamas, first president of the restored UST student council and currently secretary-general of BISIG.

³²See "On The Need to Establish a New Student Mass Organization" (SURGE concept paper), 1985.

³³P.N. Abinales.

³⁴Interview with the former KM-NEB member.

³⁵*Op. cit.*

³⁶*Op. cit.*