

Crisis on the Left

By taking a rejectionist position during the last plebiscite campaign, the National Democratic Front stood squarely against the main current of popular sentiment on a clearly defined political issue. It allowed a situation where the poll count could be interpreted as popular repudiation of the Left programme.

The impressive landslide vote for ratification has been interpreted as a rejection of both the neo-fascists on the Right and the progressive movements on the Left. The small percentage of negative votes has been read as *real* indicators of the political bases of both the reactionaries and the revolutionaries. Although this is not necessarily an accurate count of strategic support, the voting being on a specific question, the number lend great credence to the exaggerated claims of the "centrists." The Left now finds itself in an inferior position before a propaganda offensive launched in the aftermath of the plebiscite count.

By taking an unpopular position on a limited political issue, the NDF clearly committed a major error. This compounds the earlier setback caused by the NDF's decision to boycott the decisive electoral contest of 1986. The adoption of an unpopular stand on a limited political exercise exposed the NDF to repudiation. More, the unpopular stance heightened divisive tendencies within the mass forces of the NDF and underscored differences in approach with other progressive groups. It provided conservatives with political ammunition to attack the entire progressive bloc, using the plebiscite results as political mandate.

Although the general programme of social reform espoused by the NDF is shared by other groups and movements, the tactical errors it committed caused a widening of the political distance with other progressives. The NDF has put itself in danger of isolation where the possibility for a future effective united front with other progressive popular movements is largely diminished by its erroneous tactical preferences.

While it is true that the New Constitution was not, in the main, ratified on its intrinsic merits, this magnifies rather than diminishes the gravity of the *political* error of the Left's

rejectionist position. Most of the progressive groups that adopted a "critical yes" position considered the dialectics between *text* and *context*. Contrasted with this consideration, the NDF's rejectionist position appears to have been derived from a subjectivist analysis of the political question at hand. The *context* — the immediacy and potency of the fascist threat that may be blunted by the installation of constitutional mechanisms — was the decisive popular consideration producing the final outcome of the ratification process.

Even if it is argued that the "principled no" campaign was intended to deliver a protest vote, the fact that the right-wing politicians were similarly campaigning for rejection ought to have signalled the bankruptcy of the tactic from the onset. The parallel campaign run by the right-wing politicians inevitably meant that whatever statement the negative vote was intended to make would be diffused by competing claims. On the other side of the equation, the Left rejectionist campaign cultivated the hostility of the middle forces towards the revolutionary movement. There is no point in unnecessarily inviting the hostility of possible allies.

In the same manner as the boycott campaign did last year, the "principled no" campaign this year diminished rather than enhanced the over-all popularity of the main segment of the progressive bloc. This served to weaken the political influence not only of the main segment but of the progressive bloc as a whole. The political costs of this erroneous campaign accrue not only to the forces of the NDF but to all groups within the progressive movement.

Many feel that the drift of political developments in the present conjuncture threatens to push the progressives towards the margins. The trajectory of marginalization is abetted by the constant failure over the last few years of the main sections of the progressive bloc to engage in workable united front politics.

Unless a fundamental redefinition of the arena of struggle and a basic reassessment of strategy is done, the progressive bloc shall cease to be a decisive factor in Philippine politics in the immediate and medium term.