

An Alternative Approach to the Peace Negotiations

A Letter to Our Friends in the NDF
(Bisig Manifesto, January 17, 1987)

Our people want peace. They want peace so urgently that they demand an immediate moratorium on all conflicts just to have political stability. Yet it is clear that what our people need is *not* just any kind of peace, but a peace that will endure because it is based on justice and reason.

The Aquino Government fervently believes that the cause of a just, honorable and lasting peace could be achieved if only it is given a chance to reconstruct a democratic republic which would represent the interests of all classes equally, and accommodate contending visions of social progress within the framework of national reconciliation and political pluralism.

On this premise, its peace proposals boil down to a challenge to the revolutionary Left to set aside its arms and peacefully pursue its vision for Philippine society. Failure to take up this challenge is, from the Aquino Government's point of view, synonymous to being the enemy of peace and democracy.

The new government is confident that it has nothing to lose and everything to gain with this proposal. Its belief in the essential superiority of bourgeois democracy as an ideology and political form is such that it does not fear the impact of the integration of a revolutionary challenge on its own processes. But it may also be that this stance is nothing but a well-calculated counter-revolutionary move designed to lay the basis for a final assault against all progressive forces.

Be that as it may, it is undeniable that the Aquino Government occupies a high moral ground in the eyes of our people when it demands that it be given a chance to prove its sincerity, and when it accordingly enjoins the revolutionary forces to submit themselves to a peaceful process of settling differences in the approach to social change.

If it is to seize the political initiative and regain moral ascendancy over all other class forces in Philippine society, the revolutionary movement must now recognize that a *sudden shift* in the political situation has indeed occurred with the replacement of the fascist Marcos regime by a popularly-installed liberal democratic government.

The movement has no choice, if it wishes to be understood by the masses, but to now indicate a readiness to shift abruptly to the peaceful form of political struggle, without however giving up the option of resorting to the non-peaceful form when dictated by dramatic changes in the political situation.

In short, the revolutionary Left must boldly take up the liberal democratic regime's challenge and accept its offer of integration within a pluralistic political framework. It should reach a compromise with the Aquino government on this basis, such compromise constituting the essential content of a political settlement.

Concretely, the essential content of a reasonable position which the NDF might consider should stress the following points:

1. A just and lasting peace is possible only with the resolution of the Filipino people's fundamental problems. These problems have to do with the basic poverty and powerlessness of the masses, and the enslavement of the whole nation by imperialism. The NDF believes that a revolutionary program is still the most adequate response to these problems.

2. But, in the interest of consolidating our people's victory over fascism and dictatorship, and in the interest of peace and national reconciliation, the revolutionary Left is prepared to pursue the struggle for authentic justice and freedom in a peaceful manner, and within a pluralistic political arena where it can articulate its own vision for our society. The NDF is prepared to cooperate with the Aquino Government on any aspect of its program that is consistent with the government's own promises to our people. Foremost among these are: land reform and the development of a progressive and self-reliant economy.

3. However, the NDF must remind both the Aquino Government and our people that our own

history is replete with instances when the revolutionary forces became the victims of treachery and brutal suppression by the ruling groups. Landlords and other propertied elements have consistently raised private armies to launch their own violent assaults against revolutionary forces. At the same time, the record of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, with its own blind anti-communist orientation, has been one of unremitting hostility against Communists and other revolutionaries. Thus, the option to go underground has been basically imposed upon the revolutionary Left by the brutality of the State and the dominant classes.

4. Therefore, if the NDF and its member organizations are willing to cease the practice of armed struggle, the Aquino Government must also give concrete guarantees that all efforts by any arm of the State to harass, suppress or illegalize the revolutionary movement shall be stopped; that all revolutionaries shall be given equal protection under the law to propagate their views and programs or to expand the constituency of their political platform; that they shall not be denied their electoral victories, and that no extra-legal efforts shall be employed to prevent them from lawfully implementing their programs while occupying legitimately acquired positions in government.

5. The government must likewise allow the NDF and its member organizations to keep their arms, provided that these shall be used only for self-

defense and not for political purposes, until all the private armies and the paramilitary units of the CHDF are dismantled and disarmed, and until the military is finally purged of bandit elements and re-oriented towards a constitutionalist and pluralistic outlook.

6. The laying down of arms must be part of a comprehensive process to rectify the ruling classes' accustomed aversion to real pluralism, and as an integral element of a genuine concern to assure the physical survival of the marginalized, oppressed and aggrieved sectors of our society.

If the NDF adopts this approach to the ongoing political negotiations, instead of jolting the nation with vague allusions to power-sharing within the framework of a coalition government, we believe that the ruling liberal democrats would no longer have the monopoly of the high moral and political ground on which they presently stand.

Finally, when everybody is virtually preparing for war, the call for authentic peace can be very disorienting to the ruling groups. It will set the ground for the final exposure of US imperialist intervention, as the Reaganites may now be moving to strengthen the local fascists, or preparing to sabotage the current efforts for peace and pluralism. The approach outlined here will also test the limits of the current military leaders' avowed commitment to professionalism and constitutionalism. Most importantly, it will compel the liberal democratic government of Mrs. Aquino to stand firmly by its promise of pluralism in the face of right-wing threats and opposition, or else be exposed as hypocritical and undeserving of our people's support.

A Reply

Dear Friends,

I would like to reply to the letter you sent to the NDF concerning your observations and suggestions on the ongoing ceasefire negotiations and the implications you believe this has on both the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary struggle. I got a copy of the letter and felt it merited an appropriate reply.

First of all, let me point out that I believe your suggestions and your concern should be taken as a constructive proposal in the light of your own analyses of current events, particularly regarding the real threats posed by the enemies of the broad Left.

However, I feel that a number of clarifications are in order, insofar as certain premises you have made which I believe led to the particular line of analysis in your letter.

In particular, the following questions need to be raised in the light of the conclusions you arrived at:

a) what precisely is the nature of the Aquino government and where do we estimate it is going, especially in relation to the broad masses and US imperialism?

b) what precisely are the conditions that have given rise to the armed struggle, and have these conditions substantially changed with the assumption to power of the new government? Given the direction in which we estimate the Aquino government to be moving, should there be any illusion that it is capable, let alone willing, to effect such changes?

c) what role do we assign to "public perception" in defining our tactics and strategy?