

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?

While it may be conceded that Corazon Aquino herself along with a few members of the current coalition of liberally-oriented comprador-landlords and militarists in government, may be sincere in their beliefs about the superiority of their "form of struggle", it is perhaps important to place them within the context of US imperialism that supports the existence of her government, and to what purposes this particular form of rule is being used.

The strategic intent of the US and the pervasive domination it exerts over Philippine society and politics have to be clearly realized, before one is able to appreciate the limits that even a "sincere" leadership contends with in its effort for genuine self-determination. But this may already be conceding too much to "sincerity", given the actual political and economic record of the Aquino government. Its adherence alone to the very economic philosophy that has been at the root of the present crisis is already a clear indication of the direction it has decided to take. Or shall we dismiss this also as simply a matter of ignorance?

Given the actual policy record of the past eleven months, could one not surmise that this particular combination of rule — a liberal form with a strongly militarist element, serving traditional elite interests — is a "soft" US alternative to the discredited, ineffective, outright fascist approach to resolving what is at the top of their political agenda — the liquidation of the insurgency? Further, is it not meant to serve the interest of the traditional elites as they react to the phenomenal growth of the popular and revolutionary movement, given the severe crisis of the entire ruling system?

Indeed, the past eleven months under the Aquino coalition is replete with unfulfilled promises, amidst substantial concessions to US and comprador-landlord demands. Especially after Enrile's official ouster, one notices a definitive swing to the Right, a needed direction, given the objective requirements for immediate consolidation and political stabilization. In short, the Aquino government, despite its "liberal democratic" facade, has gradually been selling out the people's interests. Instead of building on the popular support it banked on during the early months of the term, even if only to eliminate the vestiges of dictatorial rule, it has instead turned on the revolutionary and progressive movement at the behest of the US and pro-US advisers. For this reason, I would rather categorize the Aquino government "reactionary liberal", rather than "liberal democratic" as you seem to prefer.

One argument you pose in the letter is the failure of the broad Left to exert pressure on the Aquino government to either move left-ward or at least to remain in the political center. I think you fail to accurately assess the material basis of this rule and the thousand and one strings a neocolonial state has with its sovereign. On this basis, you deem it mandatory for us to support its "liberal democratic" bent if only to

decisively weaken if not to liquidate the fascist forces that you feel threaten it. I think, you and I would be giving the people a false choice. You very well know, I'm sure, that "liberalism" can become the brittle shield for actual fascist rule. By posing the choice between "liberal democracy" and "fascism", you fall into the very trap US imperialism wishes the unconscientized sections of the people to get mired in.

At any rate, one cannot brush aside the Left's many efforts to provide support to, at least, the anti-fascist initiatives of the present government. These have unfortunately been regarded as "unsolicited advice" or accorded dubious motives by the powers-that-be. In fact, while refusing to prosecute actual "coup plotters" within the military and defense establishments, the Aquino government with its military arm has already embarked on an integrated crusade to politically disarm and militarily liquidate the revolutionary forces.

All this gives one reason to think that the anti-fascist revolution of February has been co-opted by the dominant interests in society, not merely to provide them with breathing space, but more importantly to retool their efforts against the people's movement. Hence, one should not be surprised at current efforts to retain the government's "moral high ground", in the latter's attitude towards the peace process and even its desire to attain an overwhelming ratification of the draft Charter.

I would not wish to underestimate the strength of the forces of fascism, inside and outside government. I would, however, wish to put the conflict between anti-fascist reactionaries in government and militarist elements therein, in proper perspective. These are mainly conflicts within the ruling class, conflicts we make use of tactically. This is a far cry from saying that we should strengthen one against the other at the people's expense.

You argue that the sudden shift in the political situation as a result of the February events requires changes not only in our tactics as revolutionaries, but even in our strategy. I believe this "sudden shift", while an advance over the tyranny of the past and a real product of people's struggles, does not automatically mean the substantial change in the social conditions that have necessitated the strategy of people's war, with the armed struggle at the fore. The power structure's actual directions, if anything, underline the co-optation of the anti-fascist momentum into a consolidation of comprador-landlord rule disguised in liberal clothing.

Philippine politics today may, at least, be said to have returned — in form — to the pre-martial law era, where conflicts among the ruling classes are abated and managed within elite processes. In essence, however, the form of rule supports comprador and landlord dictatorship — a rule imposed through various forms of oppression. Deception is but another face of fascism under reactionary rule.

While recognizing the virtues of "democratic space" especially for waging open mass struggles and advancing the people's interests through parliamentary, even electoral means, let us not delude ourselves into mistaking form for substance. Let us not underestimate either, the people's role in having first created this "democratic space", or their commitment to defending and even expanding it.

In this connection, I am afraid you entertain a false conception of the armed struggle. It is implied in your letter that the armed struggle is mainly a "struggle of arms". The armed struggle is actually a political concept and, in the practice of the Philippine revolution thus far, is integrated with the establishment of people's governments at the various levels (the highest form of people's power, I wish to add), with the conduct of the agrarian revolution, with the establishment and expansion of mass organizations in city and countryside. It is a necessary prerequisite for defending the gains of the revolution, at the very least, especially when one considers the continued operations of the military, their desire to reverse the people's revolutionary gains, and when, instead of recognizing this, the "liberal democratic" government is actually conducting a political crusade against it.

Would the people gamble all these achievements in exchange for guarantees on paper? I would rather look at the actual record of this government. Do you seriously think that it can implement under Congress, what it could not or would not under a Freedom (i.e. "revolutionary") Constitution, particularly the people's basic demands for land, jobs, an end to militarization and for true sovereignty? Hence, I find it extremely illusory on your part to contend that the proposed approach of putting weapons aside "will compel the liberal democratic government of Aquino to stand firmly by its promise of pluralism in the face of right-wing threats and opposi-

tion, or else be exposed as wavering and hypocritical". I think it is already exposing itself by the day. I do not think the people have to let down their guard, especially those who have already acquired arms and are in the armed struggle, merely to allow the government to reveal its true colors.

I admit that the Aquino government, and Mrs. Aquino in particular, enjoys a degree of popularity unprecedented in any leadership during the postwar period. But perhaps we should be able to analyze the content of that popularity and among whom it is relevant, before we make conclusions on how we should build upon it. Our efforts may end up weakly grounded, to say the least.

Let me conclude by saying that I agree on the need for flexibility in dealing with changes in current politics. But I would like to point out that flexibility is based on an appraisal of actual conditions, specifically with respect to the question of who are our friends and who are our enemies. Given the situation where the main enemy, US imperialism, which is definitely not a disinterested observer, is manipulating both reactionary liberals and the outright fascists to wield their efforts against the forces for basic change, our response should be to utilize the proper combination of armed and non-armed struggles, efforts in the open as well as in the underground, legal and non-legal forms. Giving up one or the other makes the Left extremely vulnerable to the enemies' dual tactics.

I trust that my opinions can contribute to the current debate on this subject. I wish to apologize for not being systematic enough or penetrating enough in my arguments. The fact is, I have only recently been deeply involved in the struggle for genuine national independence and democracy.

EDILBERTO ZAMORA
18 January 1987

BULLETIN

OF CONCERNED ASIAN SCHOLARS

ASIA!

INTRODUCTORY OFFER!
One year for \$15

Articles and reviews on topics that matter—social and economic change, imperialism and revolution from China to Indonesia, from India to Japan.

Subscriptions: \$20
Free index of back issues.
BCAS, Box R, Berthoud, CO 80513

