

A New Polarization

When Col. Honasan's forces mounted their bloody adventure in the first hours of August 28, the beginning of a new phase of a turbulent political transition was signaled. A fundamental malaise afflicting the political order seems to have been revealed. A new wave of political polarization threatens to make the liberal democratic experiment a short-lived one.

Those who identify with the armed revolutionary Left were surprised but not distressed. The CPP had maintained that the political arrangement represented by the Aquino presidency was a "reactionary-liberal" regime preserving the same bankrupt social order under a new mantle.

Through the first semester of this year, the CPP thought the "US-Aquino" regime to be in a process of rapid consolidation. The "main blow" of the revolutionary movement was to be directed at preventing that consolidation through tactics that would "expose and oppose" that regime's "real nature."

The Honasan affair showed the CPP assessment of rapid consolidation to be flawed. But the realization pleased rather than dismayed those scanning the horizon for brighter prospects for revolutionary armed struggle.

Recent developments demonstrate that the "Aquino regime", far from achieving consolidation, is in fact quickly unravelling. The coup attempt put great doubt on the integrity of the AFP. Further, it put the military establishment, as a whole, on a line of collision with the civilian leadership. Military pressure forced the Aquino presidency to the defensive. The President had to dispense with some of her closest allies in the Cabinet in order to appease purveyors of discontent within the military.

On crucial policy issues such as land reform, not only the governing bloc but the entire ruling class appears headed for a decisive split. Opportunist politicians such as Laurel have compounded an already difficult situation by right-wing demagoguery. The "centrist" political parties in the President's coalition seem ill-prepared to counter growing ideological polarization and serve as effective instruments for crystallizing popular support for a beleaguered government. There was little to show for the much-vaunted "people power" during the most delicate moments.

On top of all of these, President Aquino's popularity took a nose-dive. Declining investor confidence shall make it less likely for the recovery program to deliver perceptible results at the grassroots.

The CPP quickly adjusted its disposition on a more optimistic scenario for armed struggle. It immediately called

for more intensive tactical offensives and concentrated units of the NPA in larger numbers. Anticipating a more defined civil war situation, it announced the formation of a Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Elsewhere, militarist rebels continued to make their presence felt and talk of another coup attempt in the offing has continued to circulate. The propensity of the various military factions for political adventures have made the AFP itself a main source of public anxiety. The counter-insurgency strategy adopted by the military, following the lines of low intensity conflict favored by US advisers, has bogged down in a morass of unwieldy and fanatical anti-communist armed gangs. The civilian militias organized and armed by the AFP have proven to be a main source of random and unbridled violence.

Always an accurate indicator of popular confidence in the political order, the prices of handguns in the blackmarket have shot up astronomically.

It is handy to say that the neofascists and the armed revolutionary Left oblige each other in eroding the effectiveness of the government presumed established by the February Uprising. What is being presumed, in a large sense, is that a definite mode of governance has been *effectively* established. Given the awry currents of the present situation, the presumption might prove too presumptuous.

The Uprising might have, in fact, arrived at merely a transitional arrangement, a *disposable* regime doomed to unravel by its intrinsic limitations. Its mode of accession was superficial, its historical vision myopic, its basis of support probably volatile.

This possibility is a spectre haunting the minds of those who prefer to believe that the Aquino government represents a definite historical phase, an irreversible and desirable transition from the dark age of dictatorship. It taxes the hopefulness of those social sectors the Aquino government counts on most for support.

Within the Filipino Left community, there are those who see the liberal democratic arrangement as the crucial outer perimeter of a political condition favorable to the consolidation of popular democracy and conducive to experiments with popular empowerment. They have, in the past, thrown their support behind the Aquino government and vowed to defend it against attacks from the ultra-right.

Now they are desperately searching for evidence to show that this political arrangement is worth defending — or even that this political arrangement indeed exists. **K**