

livelihood or decent housing, and starving because of lack of funds for their welfare?... It has been proven by our historical experience that unless genuine land reform is implemented, the countryside will never progress and... there will never be a basis and a complement for the development of national industries and a transportation industry which will ensure the well-being and prosperity of the laboring masses...»

ELITE DEMOCRACY

The government's failure to enact other than surface reforms is due to pressure from the extreme right and the US, combined with its own class nature. Originally, the government was composed of bourgeois reformers (representing the big bourgeoisie who opposed Marcos' monopoly, wanting political, but not basic economic reform), extreme rightists (who deserted Marcos only because he proved incapable of ruling), and progressive liberals (representing the national bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie, who took the initiative in the first phase).

The extreme right's pressure, punctuated by several coup attempts, has essentially aimed at increasing US aid to the army's counterinsurgency, rather than actually toppling the Aquino government. Consequently, the coupists were treated with kid gloves by the army command, in stark contrast to the violence directed against protesting peasants and workers. The government's net response to this pressure was a trade-off: Defense Minister Enrile, who profiled the extreme right, was

removed in November, followed by the ouster of the democratic Labor Minister. While Enrile's replacement, General Rafael Ileto, is just as pro-US as his predecessor, the new labor minister is a corporate lawyer! Army Chief of Staff Ramos, who emerged as a strongman after the November coup attempt, is an old hand at close cooperation with the US. Educated at West Point military academy, he served alongside US troops in Korea in the fifties, and in Vietnam in the sixties.

With the liberal progressive wing clearly weakened over the past year, the government has shifted to the right under the guise of centrist stabilization. It has come closer to the elite democracy model cultivated by the US to replace outmoded dictatorships and stave off real popular revolution. The new constitution is also indicative of this trend. Though filled with beautiful phrases, it contains no provisions for drastically reducing feudal or foreign oppression and exploitation. Still, the constitution was given overwhelming support by the electorate, which is quite understandable since the referendum was presented as a choice between the Aquino government or a return to the fascism of Marcos.

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NDF

The crucial issues at stake, whether concerning social justice or relations to the US, converged in the talks between the government and the NDF for one simple reason: The NDF with its backbone, the Communist Party of the Philippines; its military wing, the New People's Army; and its component

mass federations, is unquestionably the largest organized force in the country, that has consistently fought for the people's national and social liberation. Due to sustained guerrilla warfare and mass mobilization, the NPA has substantial popular influence, especially in the countryside; in some areas, this amounts to liberated zones where elements of the NDF's national democratic program are put into practice. The NDF is active in the mass struggle throughout the country. Thus, how the government approached the NDF tells a lot about its real direction.

The NDF boycotted the elections won by Aquino in February 1986, judging that such a process was woefully inadequate for reversing the fascist dictatorship built up by Marcos, with US support. However, it soon became evident that the masses were rallying around the democratic process which Aquino symbolized, especially in the urban areas. This reality elicited broad discussions and self-criticism in the component organizations of the NDF, leading to policy adjustments to meet the challenge of the new stage -working to broaden the democratic process and push for socioeconomic reforms, while protecting the positions won in years of revolutionary armed struggle.

On this background, the NDF accepted the government's offer of peace talks, accompanied by a ceasefire, and these began in August/September of 1986. The NDF saw the ceasefire as a political issue, enabling discussions aimed at a comprehensive solution, based on agreement as to the economic and social causes of the insurgency - a point verbally ascribed to by Aquino.

The government negotiators, however, avoided a comprehensive discussion of causes, much less solutions, insisting in the end that the NDF simply agree to the new constitution. Meanwhile, the army continued its offensive against the NPA and the people in a number of rural areas. Fears increased that the government's real intention was to split the revolutionary forces, and impose their surrender. Such fear gained credence from Aquino's statement, made while she was visiting the US in the autumn, that she had called for the peace talks to «lay the moral foundation for setting aside the olive branch of peace and drawing the sword of war.» Facts show that these words were indicative of

Demonstrators hoist red flags, February 1986.

